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COMMUNITY

Iron Triangle residents will have a safe place to go during emergencies

Pogo Park’s Harbour Hall will be equipped for emergencies such as toxic air, power outages, and floods. The Community Resilience Center is expected to open this summer.



By Kleigh Carroll

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Pogo Park’s Harbour Hall is expected to have a soft opening this summer. Thanks to an extra \$10 million grant, they upgraded the building’s design to include features that make it a safe place to go during emergencies. Credit: Maurice Tierney for Richmondside

About **10,000** Richmonders live in the Iron Triangle in the shadow of the Chevron refinery, where their flatlands neighborhood is vulnerable to **poor air quality**, summer power outages and flooding from **sea level rise**.

Now there will be a place they can find safety and resources during such emergencies: Pogo Park's Harbour Hall, a new Community Resiliency Center (CRC), is expected to have a soft opening this summer, with other finishing touches due to be completed later.

Harbour Hall, at Harbour-8 Park between Harbour Way and Eighth Street, will primarily be a programming and recreational space, but it was designed and outfitted to double as a place of refuge during crises such as earthquakes, fires, flooding, power outages and extreme weather.

The project is the result of a partnership between the **city of Richmond and Pogo Park**, a nonprofit with a long history in the area.

“We've been partnering with the city for 20 years to transform underperforming city parks and bring them back to life,” said Toody Maher, executive director of Pogo Park. “One of our visions has been that, if there is a disaster, this is where people would come to get services and support.”



Toody Maher (fourth from left), executive director of Pogo Park, gave some city of Richmond officials and others a tour of the Harbour Hall community center in April. The center will serve as a place of refuge for neighborhood residents during emergencies. Credit: Kleigh Carroll for Richmondside

The Pogo Park team, which includes neighborhood residents, began building the Harbour-8 site in 2019 after securing an \$8.5 million Prop. 68 grant from the California State Parks and Recreation Department. Their vision was to transform the once-blighted two-block city park into a community gathering space not unlike a town square — complete with a barbecue and picnic area, in-ground trampolines, zip line, tot lot and mini playing fields.

“This area needs community space,” said Angel Juarez, communications manager at Pogo Park. “MLK [Jr. park] has been out of commission for some time.”

According to Maher, the Iron Triangle neighborhood needs a CRC. Many residents have impaired mobility and rely on oxygen that requires power. In case of residential power outages, Harbour Hall is equipped with about 40 accessible charging outlets.

“So many people here have medication that they need, they have to have power,” she said. “And they’re disconnected from civic life. You know, it’s very small.”

Extra grant money will make Harbour Hall a true resilience center

To qualify as a CRC, Harbour Hall must be able to both support people during emergencies and provide programs that bring people together.

For example, staff member Kia Walton is taking [CERT](#) (emergency first responder) training, to be able to provide essential support, while Juarez is training as a community interpreter.

“We’re trying to train the community because we know our first line of defense is each other and our neighbors,” Walton said. “The more the community is aware, the less we’re relying on our deputies, our fire personnel who are busy. Imagine a wide scale emergency — we have to know how to do this.”

In 2024, Pogo Park partnered with the city and got a grant from California’s Strategic Growth Council. They were one of nine selected from a pool of nearly 200 applicants to receive the \$10 million award. “We were so happy to get it,” Maher said. “It’s always a hustle, securing funding.”

Construction of Harbour Hall was in progress when they received the grant, and now the additional funding has allowed them to make upgrades that bring the space up to CRC standards outlined by the [California Strategic Growth Council](#). These include amenities such as a modern kitchen to offer cooking classes, water filtration technology, an advanced HVAC air filtration system and an information station equipped with ham radios. The HVAC will be upgraded to filter out particulates from wildfire smoke and emissions from the nearby Chevron refinery, using HEPA filtration that can block up to 99% of toxic air particles.



The new Harbour Hall community center in the Iron Triangle will be outfitted with simultaneous language interpretation devices, given that a large portion of the residents primarily speak Spanish. Credit: Kleigh Carroll for Richmondside



Ham radios, pictured here at Harbour Hall, allow people to communicate without the internet or cellular networks, making them useful during emergencies that disable those technologies. Credit: Kleigh Carroll for Richmondside

If the power goes out, Harbour Hall is equipped to serve as an emergency communications hub. Because much of the community is Spanish-speaking, the site must be equipped with simultaneous interpretation tools, including transmitters, receivers and a PA system.

“We’re going to be able to communicate with people in the park, make announcements, send alerts — all of that good stuff,” Juarez said.

Maher recalled a 2015 fire at the nearby Chevron refinery, when residents took refuge at the nearby Elm playlot, the first park designed and transformed by the Pogo Park team.

“When the fire happened, we had 350 people come to the park,” Maher said. “They knew the staff knew the community, and that we would know what to do ... So when we were building the second park, our whole team was like, ‘We’ve got to be ready for this. Now they’re going to come here.’”

Harbour Hall was designed to accommodate hundreds of residents at a time, providing power, clean air, food and water, clear communications, and regulated temperatures during a climate emergency or incidents such as a refinery fire.



Emergencies at Chevron's Richmond refinery, such as this fire in 2012, have the potential to send toxic smoke across Richmond neighborhoods. The new Iron Triangle community resilience center will have heavy duty air purifiers to help protect residents, many of whom already have chronic health conditions like asthma. Credit: Associated Press/file

“We have to use this as a place to be ready,” Maher said. “People trust our team because we’re here all the time. We’re from the neighborhood ... A big part of climate resiliency is neighbors knowing neighbors.”

City leaders tour near-complete Harbour Hall

Last month, Pogo Park held a preliminary tour of Harbour Hall with city leaders. Organized by District 4 city council member Soheila Bana, the tour gave stakeholders an opportunity to ask questions and offer suggestions for improvements. City council members hope to identify other venues in Richmond that could serve as CRCs during a public emergency.

In 2022, RYSE, a nonprofit center in downtown Richmond that offers activities and programming for Richmond youths, made upgrades to become a community resilience hub similar to the one being established in Pogo Park. Equipped with air conditioning, air filtration, and a large solar storage battery, the space is designed to provide electricity and shelter to residents during climate emergencies. However, [RYSE faced delays in gaining access to its](#)

[solar energy because of issues with PG&E](#). Richmondside reached out to RYSE for an update but hadn't received a response as of publication time.

Other possible locations for CRCs include high schools, churches, temples, and libraries.

Attendees of the Harbour Hall tour included fire marshals and Public Works officials, a library representative, Iron Triangle residents, nearby nonprofits like the Bay Area Rescue Mission and Richmond City Council member Claudia Jimenez.

Attendees were encouraged to think critically about how they might work together in an emergency, pooling existing resources to support the community.

“The hope is that we will all be communicating like a web,” Maher said.

Bana emphasized the need to integrate Harbour Hall into existing city services.

“Other centers in the city could become potential CRCs,” she said. “I’m bringing an item to the city council ... so we can have an ad hoc committee and add all of it to the needs assessment,” Bana said.



Members of the Pogo Park team, many of which are neighborhood residents who've been trained in construction and other building skills, are seen assembling the framing for Harbour Hall's distinct arched windows. Courtesy of Pogo Park

The tour highlighted the hall's HVAC system, restrooms, communications center, and solar panels. They also explained how the surrounding landscape has been designed to mitigate flooding and increase water absorption, using plants from the Richmond watershed nursery.

Various aspects of the CRC were identified for improvement. While the site can filter water, it needs greater water storage capacity, and officials suggested securing a backup generator to provide power overnight.





A row of exterior power outlets at Harbour Hall could be used during power outages by people who rely on electrical medical devices. The community resilience center will be solar-powered. Credit: Kleigh Carroll for Richmondside

“We have a real chance to take all the lessons learned so far with CRCs and bring them here, creating a model of enrichment,” Maher said. “Disadvantaged communities are the most at risk, and communities like this are the ones that need the most support.”

Harbour Hall is expected to have a soft opening this summer, although full completion may take longer. According to Maher, it will take another 18 months to finish the kitchen design and to collect the necessary permits and another 18 to finish building it. Until then, the hall will host classes, meetings, performances, and celebrations — from quinceaneras to memorial services — that bring the community together.

“Our collective efforts to prepare for emergencies — through information sharing, networking, strategic planning, and critical partnerships — are what help move the needle toward greater Richmond readiness,” the Pogo Park team said.

This story was updated to clarify which staff members are undergoing resilience center trainings and to correct a staff member’s title.

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