

TL's park set to open

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group: "There will be no membership fees for anything. We're going on a different path."

Central Y spokesman Chip Rich, YMCA SF vice president for operations, told The Extra he expects its programs for youth and seniors to be up and running at Boeddeker before December. That's when the Y's five-year lease on Golden Gate Avenue ends.

The Y notified its landlord, Hastings law school, that it wouldn't renew its lease for 5,500 square feet of indoor space on the ground floor of Hastings' garage plus the 12,000-square-foot outdoor lot next door, a far cry from the eight-story Central Y at 220 Golden Gate that occupied for 102 years until it closed in 2009.

And now, with the move to Boeddeker, the Central Y may be downsizing once again.

"We're hoping to continue the culinary arts and recording activities for youth, and meals, social gatherings, tai chi and other wellness activities for seniors at Boeddeker," Rich says.

"We'll have a contract with Boys & Girls Club for one to three years — we're making a major commitment, and I expect we may serve even more people [than at 387 Golden Gate] be-

cause there won't be any membership fees." With YMCA SF's rent lower at Boeddeker, it will be able to put more money into services, Rich said, but didn't specify the amount.

Chan says Rec and Park's partnership with nonprofit programmers at Boeddeker is "a work in progress" and wouldn't confirm that it is the most extensive among the 220 parks, playgrounds and open spaces the agency oversees.

In 2006, Rec and Park launched the Rec Connect Initiative, a public-private partnership with the city's Department of Children, Youth and Their Families and "community based organizations."

The YMCA, Chan says, is operating programs through Rec Connect at Margaret Hayward Playground in Hayes Valley and at the Excelsior Playground, Hunters Point Families programs at Gilman Playground and the Sunset Beacon Center at the West Sunset Playground.

Boeddeker has never enjoyed such extensive relationships with nonprofits, according to Traynor.

"As long as I've been here," she says, "the non-Rec and Park activities were limited to a Friends-sponsored tai chi class that cost us \$40, paid out of our account." ■

New park not enough — activists want rec center

"Boeddeker is going to be a beautiful place, but the community still needs a full-service recreation facility," says Kasey Asberry, once a Central Y employee, now a volunteer who heads Friends of the Central Y and directs its Demonstration Garden project at the Y's temporary location at 387 Golden Gate Ave.

The Extra asked Chip Rich, YMCA SF vice president for operations, whether its new partnership with the Boys & Girls Club affects the years-old dream of building a free-standing Tenderloin Y. Not at all, he said. That idea "is not at an end."

Asberry doubts that: It hasn't happened yet, so she and other Tenderloin stakeholders are launching a campaign for such a facility unconnected to YMCA SF.

After the old Y at 220 Golden Gate Ave. closed five years ago (TNDC bought the building for its new Kelly Cullen Community housing), Hastings law school offered to partner with the Y to build a new facility on the lot next to its garage.

Years passed and finances and expectations changed on both sides, leaving in their wake mistrust and accusations that a promise was broken (see "Why There's No Y," The Extra, October 2012).

As Asberry continues to work for a new neighborhood rec center, she'll be the point person for Boeddeker's Celebration Garden volunteers and will expand the lush

Demonstration Garden at Hastings when the Y's lease ends in December.

But she's staying on there as a Hastings, not a Central Y, volunteer, covered under its liability insurance and offering multiple programs: teaching kindergartners how to plant, tend and hopefully eat from a garden, kitchen gardening for seniors (small plots for herbs and vegetables), helping teens understand sustainable food practices and advocate for food security, and more.

David Seward, Hastings financial officer, confirmed that the Board of Directors has approved Asberry's work there for two to four years, until the school decides what to do with the site. He couldn't say what options are being considered, though one he mentioned previously, building housing for Hastings students, may no longer be viable.

Besides giving the go-ahead to the garden, he says, Hastings will encourage its own students to use the space for basketball and soccer and will ask nearby schools to get a site-license agreement with Hastings to cover liability so they can bring students for outdoor activities during and after school.

"Open space is so valuable and precious, we want it used as much as possible," Seward says. "The worst thing would be to leave the lot empty with paper blowing around." ■

— Marjorie Beggs



PHOTOS 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 MARJORIE BEGGS; 5 KASEY ASBERRY; 6 ALEJANDRA CHIESA

New park features 1) Stationary tables, chairs and benches surround the 85-foot by 45-foot lawn. 2) The clubhouse will be filled with light from tall windows and doors in sleek aluminum frames. 3) Anthony Smith's globe celebrating neighborhood diversity features the face of Father Alfred Boeddeker in the center. 4) The children's playground equipment is brightly colored and sturdy. 5) Bruce Hassan's bronze "Ark," a symbol of the park as a safe haven, is back at Boeddeker, flanked by two recycled eucalyptus benches. 6) Kasey Asberry (center), Celebration Garden volunteer organizer, plants colorful, drought-tolerant kalanchoes with Sam Dennison, Faithful Fools CFO, and neighborhood teenager Mynyuiori Jones. 7) Neighbors "jumped at the idea" of adult outdoor exercise equipment, says Betty Traynor.

Boeddeker's backstory

How \$8 million makeover came to be

Named for Father Alfred Boeddeker, founder of St. Anthony's Foundation and Franciscan pastor of St. Boniface Church from 1949 until his death in 1994, the one-acre park opened with a flourish in 1985.

The Examiner reported that it was "created to provide green space and recreation" for Tenderloin residents but was "designed to survive in a neighborhood notorious for its sub population of drug dealers, drunks and vagrants (with) ... a six-foot fence with spiked tips, low-lying shrubbery, brickwalled terraces, and wrought iron benches whose seats with metal dividers were impossible to sleep on."

Renovations over the next decade sought, and failed, to make Boeddeker a neighborhood asset and a friendlier place for Tenderloin residents, who shunned it. Rec and Park staff were cut, and operating hours eventually shrank to 15 a week. Open, it was little more than a green place to deal drugs, closed, a fenced-in neighborhood shame.

Seven years ago, a group of young architects presented a pro bono redesign for Boeddeker Park to a grateful but skeptical community. Real changes began in 2009, when Trust for Public Land chose Boeddeker as one of three parks for makeovers through its Parks for People San Francisco initiative. The estimated cost of the work, originally pegged at \$8 million, dropped to \$5 million as the recession slogged on, then bounded back up to its final \$8 million when the Trust pieced together funding from foundation grants, city and state sources and private donations.

The renovation at Boeddeker was expected to start in fall 2010 and finish by the end of 2011 but groundbreaking wasn't until November 2012. When it reopens, it will have taken almost two years, due to typical fundraising and construction delays, says Jake Gilchrist, former Trust for Public Land project manager who in 2010 was hired by Rec and Park as project manager for Boeddeker's renovation.



PHOTO TOM CARTER

At Friends of Boeddeker Park
Aug. 21 meeting, TL Boys & Girls Club Director Esan Looper and Friends Coordinator Betty Traynor.

The community skepticism, Gilchrist says, was less about the park design and more about general neighborhood ills, "all the previous quick fixes attempted in the Tenderloin, many of which had failed."

He recalls going to a Friends of Boeddeker Park meeting before the Trust got involved: "People were talking about how they wanted a brighter fence for the park. They didn't believe we were in it for the long haul, and it was hard to convince them that the original park design was inappropriate for their neighborhood."

He ticks off a few reasons the old Boeddeker didn't work: The change in elevation from the clubhouse to the park entrance at Eddy and Jones combined with five fences in that sightline made it impossible for park staff to see who was entering and leaving Boeddeker. The main promenade was angled, chopping up the space into triangles, all too small for most sports and recreation activities.

Boeddeker's new mid-block entrance next to the clubhouse opens into the center, not the edge, of the park, so comings and goings will be more observable. Activity areas flow into each other, undivided by fencing, allowing those areas to be bigger than before and promoting the idea of the park as a common gathering place. ■

— Marjorie Beggs

A walk in the brand-new park

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

ENTERING BOEDDEKER Park will be mid-block on Eddy Street, alongside the new clubhouse, instead of kitty-corner from the police station.

People who come to stroll can walk the perimeter on concrete that is permeable, letting rainwater percolate into the soil, keeping plants from drying out.

They'll see — among the many climate-adapted shrubs and perennials in shades of green and gray-green, some with delicate flowers — emerald carpet manzanita, sandhill sagebrush, bush anemone, California lilac, creeping barberry, deer grass, California fuchsia, blue fescue and evergreen huckleberry.

In several places, plants are in bioswales, depressed areas often angled slightly downward that naturally hold and clean storm water. Trees include ginkgo, fruitless olive, Catalina cherry, flame and columnar hornbeam. The tall Lombardy poplars from the original park still grace the north side.

Alejandra Chiesa, Trust for Public Land's project manager for Boeddeker since Jake Gilchrist left at the end of 2010,

estimates that the park will seat 60 comfortably on 21 benches, about half standard seating with backs and arm rests, the others artfully hewn from local recycled eucalyptus, and at eight stationary metal tables with 18 fixed chairs.

For musical performances or other events, people might choose the 3,825-square-foot central grass area that faces a concrete stage, fitted out with permanent electrical connections on one side for mikes, lights and other amenities.

The park is wheelchair-accessible throughout with handsome railings wherever the paths slope.

For the kids, there's modern green and royal blue play equipment in the 2,800-square-foot children's playground, its colorful surface made of 100% recycled rubber.

Just outside the clubhouse are several apple-green outdoor fitness machines for adults, and at the northwest corner is the renovated basketball court, close to high school regulation size at 75-foot by 50-foot. (A high school court is 84 feet long. The pros play 90 feet, goal to goal.)

"The court is also big enough for volleyball — it's one of the things the commu-

nity asked for," says Betty Traynor, Friends of Boeddeker Park coordinator. "The children's play area is bigger than before, and the grass that was part of the kid's play area is central, accessible to all now."

"We knew that there wouldn't be enough room in the clubhouse for an exercise room, so when the Trust for Public Land showed us pictures of the outdoor equipment at other parks, everyone jumped at that idea."

In August, the polished concrete floors and the zinc roof of new clubhouse weren't installed yet, but the floor's radiant heating and the sleek, floor-to-ceiling windows and doors in anodized aluminum frames were.

The 4,000-square-foot building, insulated with material made from recycled jeans, has an office, bathrooms, one large general purpose room with a soaring 30-foot ceiling plus a smaller meeting room.

"I also love the new community garden," a mixture of edible and ornamental plants, Traynor says. "Most community gardens have individual plots, but this is open to all." Located in the park's northeast corner, it looks expansive and inviting and includes a flat area for tai chi and a

bougainvillea arch that joins the two main planting areas. Volunteers of all ages will tend the garden.

July 31 was planting day for this "Celebration Garden." Almost three dozen neighborhood people showed up to help get it started, their efforts coordinated by volunteer Kasey Asberry, who directs the Central Y's Demonstration Garden. She says the plants celebrate the Tenderloin's diversity — canna, hibiscus, birds of paradise, loquats, Meyer lemon, mint, raspberries, kalanchoe and more — and she hopes that clubhouse celebrations will include lemonade from fruit grown here.

The grandest celebration, of course, will be when the park reopens.

Trust for Public Land has renovated 10 San Francisco parks, many in low-income neighborhoods, including Balboa Park in the Excelsior and Hilltop Park in Bayview.

"What has made Boeddeker different," says Chiesa, the Trust's project manager, "isn't the big challenges and the skepticism but the huge transformative possibility."

When Boeddeker reopens, it will feel simultaneously familiar and all-new, a source of neighborhood pride. ■