

Boeddeker makeover meeting stresses safety

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of income and open space. Within a half-mile radius of Boeddeker Park, according to a California State Parks report, are more than 11,000 families who live below the poverty line. The report puts the area's average income (based on 49,000 population) at \$30,800, half the city average. Total park acreage in the area averages only 0.16 of an acre per 1,000 population; the ideal ratio is 3 acres per 1,000 population.

"This qualifies perfectly for that money, and now Rec and Park says Boeddeker has its highest priority," said Gilchrist, accompanied by Meghan Pecaut and project architect Brian Allman. Gilchrist recalled attending his first Friends of Boeddeker Park meetings three years ago, when the trust was scouting for urban areas to improve. Hayes Valley and Balboa parks are also getting trust renovation money.

"We know that the park is not being used to its fullest potential now," Gilchrist said in his introduction, "and it's a tough facility to manage and run programs in."

The awkwardly designed building of less than 4,000 square feet is mostly an open floor with few rooms and is acoustically awful. It has an uninviting ground floor entrance door on Eddy Street and, rising 12 feet higher at its north end, another door opening to inside the park.

"You can't run a program and see what's going on outside," Gilchrist said, "And you can't have two conversations going on in the building at the same time."

The trust staff, referring to easels displaying dozens of interior and exterior park photos and diagrams, pointed out many of the park's shortcomings. Among them: the thick, dark fencing impairing visibility into the park, the staff's lack of sight lines out of the clubhouse, inefficient use of outside space that's divided into many special use sections, and the building's tall west-facing windows that allow in a harsh afternoon sun.

Visibility and safety were key issues.

"I spend 20% of my time on paperwork and I can't see anything outside of my office," said park Director Rob McDaniels, recently reassigned to his beloved Boeddeker after a year at nearby Tenderloin Rec Center. Boeddeker Director Al Wimberly was recently assigned to the Richmond area.

One man who said he has lived near the park for nine years said its north gate on

Ellis Street was permanently closed a few years ago because unruly crowds there scare people away.

"It's a certain element not necessarily in the park but on the perimeter," he said. "People feel like the park is a fortress. They won't walk down the middle because it's a gantlet they go through where there's drug dealing and they don't want to deal with it. Outside, young and old people won't walk on the sidewalk around the fence because they're scared of people who hang out there."

"I see safety as the No. 1 issue."

Some said the nice aspects of the park should be retained. For example, the garden space at the park's high north end was touted as the most tranquil spot in the park. It has been kept spiffy over the years by Rec and Park gardeners and dozens of elderly volunteers from the adjacent Presentation Senior Community who recently were hon-

ored at the Presidio. (See Good News.)

Residents and staff agreed that diversity and flexibility are essential. Residents said they want space for tai chi, hip-hop, ballroom dancing and dominoes, now banned inside the park because the game attracted drug dealers. Some wanted lots of trees, water fountains, a big kitchen, a stage, a track, a full basketball court that would draw youth and seniors in the stands to watch them.

"This park will not meet all your needs," warned Rec and Park's Steve Cismowski, who oversees several parks, including Boeddeker. "And maybe it should be able to operate without a staff, be self-policing, self-regulating."

"Not have a building," said Gilchrist.

"Right."

The meeting adjourned, with particulars of the next meeting on the makeover to be announced later. ■

Boeddeker Park, shown at the Eddy and Jones entrance, is expected to get an \$8 million makeover with all aspects up for grabs, including the clubhouse, hidden by trees at right.



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Boeddeker opens with supervision weekday mornings

BUDGET uncertainties that closed Boeddeker Park for two weeks and made a mystery of its operating hours for the neighborhood have been resolved, and a new schedule effective May 26 opens the park to adults for 15 hours a week.

The park and clubhouse are open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday with a director on duty, Boeddeker's Rec and Park Manager Steve Cismowski announced. Director Rob McDaniels, reassigned in May to Boeddeker, told The Extra he will be creating programs for seniors. In the afternoons, he heads to Tenderloin Recreation Center two blocks away to work there.

Kids fare a little better at Boeddeker.

The children's play area — but not the clubhouse — will be open 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., also Monday through Friday. Children must be accompanied by an adult and access is through the playground's Eddy Street gate near the clubhouse. Domino players, banned from the park because their gatherings caused problems inside, sometimes set up on the sidewalk. No director will be present, as is the case with the TL's two other small children's playgrounds.

"It's an experiment and new territory for us," Friends of Boeddeker Chair Betty Traynor said. She sent an email to her contacts asking residents help to monitor the play area during afternoons.

The day after the kids' area opened, though, TL Capt. Gary Jimenez reported the police arrested three "young gang-type

adults" and cited them for being in the posted area requiring that adults be accompanied by children.

In May, during city budget deliberations and negotiations with the Service Employees International Union, Boeddeker was locked for two weeks. Rec and Park made several adjustments to the working hours and confused and irritated people who regularly use the park.

Of prime concern is park supervision when no director is on duty. At the neighborhood's request, police have made regular park checks. Capt. Jimenez holds the park dear.

"It's important we don't have a vacant storefront here," Jimenez said at the May 14 Friends meeting, having arrived late because he confronted four beer drinkers outside and persuaded them to empty their containers. "Boeddeker has always been a priority and we'll make that commitment. But we're looking for volunteers to help out, too. We've had a serious problem with the toilet — it's a shooting gallery and a sex shop."

Paul Blaney, head of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church volunteers, said Glide is ready to help supervise.

Boeddeker on the weekends is another animal because the park is closed. But it's open the last Saturday morning of each month for food giveaways. Rec and Park opens the gate but doesn't staff the park, though police patrol.

This leaves the park available to be rented for special events. About \$200 buys four hours, a day permit and a Rec and Park custodian. Cismowski said Rec and Park is laying off 78 directors and some would be happy to work weekends.

The park opened May 19 because the clubhouse was a polling place. McDaniels, pulling overtime, opened at 5:30 a.m. and stayed until 9 p.m., cleaning up after the polls closed.

That noon, maybe 50 men and half a dozen women sat in the sun in the park, some listening to evangelist Barney Wiget at his mid-park microphone. Afterward, they lined up for a free hot dog and small food bag distributed by Liz Wong of Calvary Street Ministries.

For about 18 years, CS Ministries has been at the park each Tuesday to feed people and the last Saturday of the month, when they also give away sleeping bags, blankets and clothes. Wong is the widow of Rev. Edmond Wong, who started the program. Wong once was a junkie who shot heroin in the park, but kicked the habit to become "a flaming evangelist," Wiget said.

Boeddeker has been open since on weekdays but not holidays or weekends.

To reserve the park, or any part of it, call 831-5500. To report illegal activities, call the police at 553-0123 or Park Rangers 242-6390. To report park issues, call 311 or Cismowski at 831-6358. ■

—TOM CARTER