

# People's Park Workshop A Success, Says UC

**The Berkeley Daily Planet – July 10, 2007**

*By Riya Bhattacharjee*

Sunday was a day of envisioning the future of People's Park. While some park regulars basked in the sun or played a round of basketball, there were those who gathered inside the First Church of the Christ Scientist on Dwight Way to attend the first community workshop on the future programs and designs of this historic piece of land.

Mark Miller, principal planner of San Francisco-based MKThink—the firm hired by UC Berkeley to plan improvements for People's Park — brainstormed ideas with a group of 30 people who had turned up to share their thoughts.

"The idea was to use role-playing to make people think from a different perspective," said UC Berkeley Community Relations Director Irene Hegarty. "We had a good discussion and we will be able to get a better idea of what people want when the consultant's report is out. We will probably have additional workshops to talk about concepts, especially in the fall when students are back from summer break."

Workshop attendees were split up into three groups with each person playing the role of a community member. Neighborhood residents became homeless, students turned into cops and People's Park Committee Boardmember Lydia Gans took on the role of a local church worker.

"This really helped a lot," she said. "It engaged us to look at things from another point of view. I for one feel fine walking in the park. I am sad most people don't feel that way."

Miller drew comparisons between People's Park and other famous parks across the country.

"We want to reference parks with similar issues," he explained, showing the group clips from Manhattan's Bryant Park. "The idea is to facilitate a conversation without undermining what works. To get people to meet each other."

Located behind the New York Public Library, Bryant Park is an urban oasis near the ever-bustling Times Square, which draws people of different age-groups with activities such as outdoor movies, festivals and even a free WiFi service.

"Morningside Park near Columbia University also had issues between the local constituents and the university for a long time," Miller said.

"Lafayette Square (Old Man's Park) in Oakland has a very active food service and

engages with its homeless through the park itself. The neighborhood is in transition right now. Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco also has a very active performing arts and its proximity to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) attracts people from all over the world. Union Square in New York is a good example of a park trying to balance landscape with softscape. Remodeling it didn't involve many physical changes but involved scheduling more activities."

Sunday's workshop focused on activities at the park. Concerts, art shows, adopt-the-park days topped people's wishlists.

"The only thing my group came to a consensus about was a community center," said Jackie Bort, a church member, who had been in Group One. "We want the park to be people-friendly."

"But I don't want to see the park become a courtyard for profit," said Andrea Pritchett, a member of Cop Watch.

"I want to be able to sit in the park peacefully without the fear of police coming. I want more of a community environment. Where is the user development? It looks like everybody is a customer."

Dione Cota, neighbor, said that she didn't feel very safe walking near the park. "Most women don't," she said. "Something needs to be done about that."

Vincent Casalaina, who said he had helped tear down the fence around the park in 1969, said he would like to see a lot more history in the park. "There's no place to go to learn about it," Casalaina, who is president of the Willard Neighborhood Association, said.

"We want a place that will honor the citizens' history," quipped in Berkeley resident Martha Jones. "Something like a distinguished monument."

Naturalist Terri Compost, who gardens at the park, agreed. "What it needs is for us to be there as a community," she said. "I am a little wary of stuff like, 'we are going to cement it all.'"

Most park users agreed that they wanted to see as little cement in the park as possible.

Sharon Hudson, an immediate neighbor, said that it was important to have a balance of events at the park. "We can't have too many noisy big events there," she said. "People's Park acts as a buffer between residents and a very active South Campus area. It's a very valuable green space."

Park user and disabled people's activist Dan McMullan said that the park suffered from negative propaganda. "If good people go to a place, then it gets the bad people out," he said. "That's what we want at the park."

Carlos Ponce, who lives right across from the park said the neighbors were constantly dealing with homeless problems. "It's a lot of screaming, a lot of cursing," he said. "People are living outside my window and shitting there. I cannot use the park when my friends come. They are terrified of going there. The students live there for three or four years and then they leave. But for us, it's very stressful to live across the park like this year after year. I feel the neighbors have been very neglected."

People's Park Advisory Committee board member Gianna Ranuzzi said she wanted more involvement on the part of the city.

"I think the park should be for all of us," said Doris Moskowitz, who owns Moe's Books on Telegraph. "Moe's needs the park, UC needs the park and the city needs the park. I am frustrated because sometimes it spills over. The drugs are a problem. I'd definitely like to see more women and children use the park." Suggestions for improvement included better bathrooms, a needle exchange box and a bigger recreation center.

"We found out that people agree more than they disagree," Miller told the Planet. "But they are always fearful of change. They don't want to be disregarded and disrespected. That's why we are looking for alignment and vision that works with the history of the park and community preservation. We want to break down the stereotypes."