



## Legislation Text

**File #:** 24-1019

**Version:** 1

**Agenda Date:** 10/23/2024

**Item #:** 7.

Report providing an update on the Linden Avenue Park project (project no. pk2305). (*Philip Vitale, Deputy Director of Capital Projects*)

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**It is recommended that the City Council receive an update on the Linden Avenue Park Project (project no. pk2305).**

### **BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION**

The proposed Linden Avenue Park project is comprised of two parcels located at 616 Linden Avenue, 700 Linden Avenue, and the section of Pine Avenue (Project Site) in between the parcels, totaling approximately one acre. The site is in a mixed residential and commercial area in the Old Town neighborhood of South San Francisco.

The 616 Linden Avenue property is a 0.32-acre lot, located on the southeastern corner of Linden Avenue and Pine Avenue. It is currently used as a parking lot.

The 700 Linden Avenue property is a 0.34-acre vacant vegetated lot, located on the northeastern corner of Linden Avenue and Pine Avenue. In 2010, a gang related shooting occurred on 8<sup>th</sup> lane in which three individuals lost their lives. Trees memorializing the loss of lives were planted at the site. The trees have since failed as they were not appropriate for the area's climate.

Both 616 and 700 Linden Avenue were owned by the former South San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (RDA). In 2012, all redevelopment agencies in California were dissolved and the Successor Agency to the RDA prepared a plan for State approval to govern the use and/or disposition of all former RDA properties. This plan, known as a Long-Range Property Management Plan (LRPMP), was approved by the State in 2015. In accordance with the LRPMP, 616 and 700 Linden were conveyed to the City. The LRPMP notes that the highest and best use of these properties is for high density housing; however, the LRPMP does not require the City to sell the properties for housing or any other purpose.

If City Council opted to sell the properties rather than develop them as parks, the City would have to follow the process required by the Surplus Land Act, as amended by the State Legislature in 2019. As part of the process, the City must provide notice to specified entities regarding the availability of the property. If a housing development entity notifies the City of its desire to acquire the property for low and moderate-income housing, the City must engage in good-faith negotiations with the entity to convey the property for that purpose. The developer must make at least 25% of the units available at an affordable cost to lower-income households. If the City and developer are not able to agree on price and terms after good-faith negotiations, the City may sell the property without following the Act. However, if 10 or more residential units are developed on the property, not less than 15% of the total number of residential units must be sold or rented to lower income households. There has been developer interest in constructing housing on the sites, but the City has prioritized using them for a park for the neighborhood.

The Old Town neighborhood was identified in the 2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan and 2022 General Plan as an area of concern for its lack of parks and open space. To address this need, the 616 and 700 Linden Avenue parcels were identified to be developed into a new park. This densely populated area is considered one of South San Francisco's most socio-economically diverse communities.

Funding was requested to transform 616 Linden Avenue and 700 Linden Avenue into a vibrant neighborhood park and

cultural plaza for the community to enjoy. Situated in the historic Old Town neighborhood, this is a highly visible public site due to its centralized location and cultural significance. In early 2022, City staff submitted a \$3,200,000 specified grant funding request to the State Department of Parks and Recreation for funding consideration in the 2022 budget to fund park improvements on these two parcels. The grant request was included in the Budget Act of 2022 signed by Governor Newsom and administrated through the State Department of Parks and Recreation. The City was also awarded \$830,000 in grant funding from the United States Land and Water Conservation Act grant program for costs associated with the acquisition of the properties.

The design and construction budget for the park is \$5.5 million. Sources include \$3.2 million from the State Parks, as noted above; \$1.3 million from Park Fees (pk2305); and a \$1 million developer community benefit fee from the IQHQ development.

The City is currently in the process of addressing issues related to the City retention of the properties for park development and the redevelopment dissolution process to begin construction of this community amenity.

In November 2023 the City engaged MIG, Inc. of Berkeley California to conduct community engagement, design, and prepare construction documents for the new park.

### **Environmental Work**

Volonte Automotive, a repair shop, operated at the 616 Linden Avenue property from the 1940s through the early 2000s. The layout of the property is depicted in Figure 2. A leaking underground storage tank (UST) cleanup case was opened under San Mateo County Groundwater Protection Program (GPP) oversight following removal of one gasoline UST and one waste oil UST in 1993, and the detection of petroleum hydrocarbons in soil below the USTs. According to the case closure summary (GPP, 2001), approximately 440 tons of soil were excavated and disposed of offsite following the UST removals, to remove the petroleum hydrocarbon impacted soil from the property. Groundwater monitoring and sampling were then conducted through January 2001 to assess the shallow groundwater for the presence of petroleum hydrocarbons. GPP confirmed that the investigation and remedial action were satisfactorily completed and closed the case in September 2001.

Working under a United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) grant, consultants retained by the EPA conducted Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs) for several sites in South San Francisco in 2021, including the subject sites.

The Phase I ESA, which is a record search, identified the following recognized environmental conditions (RECs) at the site:

- Vapor intrusion potential from residual petroleum hydrocarbons (616 Linden Avenue);
- Possible presence of additional USTs (616 Linden Avenue);
- Possible contamination from a former dry cleaner at 612 Linden Avenue (616 Linden Avenue); and
- Potential historical aerially deposited lead (700 Linden Avenue).

According to the Final Phase I/Phase II ESA TBA Report, the Phase II ESA did not identify any additional USTs at 616 Linden Avenue, but it did identify a buried concrete structure containing metal and elevated lead concentrations in soil.

During the Phase II ESA, which consisted of soil and soil vapor sample collection, the EPA consultant collected three soil samples and five soil gas samples at 616 Linden Avenue. The soil sample analyzed for petroleum hydrocarbons contained up to 930 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg) total petroleum hydrocarbons (TPH) as motor oil, 560 mg/kg TPH as diesel (TPHd) and 43 mg/kg TPH as gasoline (TPHg). Lead was detected in soil at concentrations ranging from 43.8 to 239 mg/kg. Low concentrations of polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs; benzo(a)anthracene, phenanthrene, and pyrene) were also detected in soil. Of these, only the TPHd detections and one lead detection (from the buried concrete structure) exceeded San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) environmental screening levels (ESLs) for direct contact with soil under residential land use. In soil vapor, the following volatile organic

compounds (VOCs) were detected: 1.2 to 68,000 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m<sup>3</sup>) benzene, 1.3 to 46,000 µg/m<sup>3</sup> ethylbenzene, 10 to 83,000 µg/m<sup>3</sup> toluene, 5.2 to 230,000 µg/m<sup>3</sup> total xylenes, 1,400 to 3,000 µg/m<sup>3</sup> 1,2-dichloroethane (1,2-DCA), and 1.8 µg/m<sup>3</sup> tetrachloroethene. Some of the benzene, ethylbenzene, toluene, total xylenes (BTEX) and 1,2-DCA concentrations exceeded Regional Water Board ESLs for vapor intrusion to residential indoor air.

Four composite soil samples were collected at 700 Linden Avenue and analyzed for lead, which was detected at concentrations ranging from 24 to 52 mg/kg. These concentrations are below Regional Water Board ESLs for direct contact with soil under residential land use, thus confirming suitability for use as a park.

In 2022, the City engaged environmental consultants Ninyo & Moore to conduct additional voluntary testing of the sites with the objective of evaluating risk to future receptors under the scenario of redeveloping the subject site into a park. Through Ninyo & Moore, multiple investigations were conducted on the 616 Linden Avenue property, soil samples collected, and the analytical results were compared to applicable regulatory screening levels.

The analytical results for 616 Linden Avenue show that existing soil conditions satisfy the State Water Board Low-Threat Closure Policy criteria for residential direct contact and outdoor air, and lead concentrations in shallow soil are equal to or below residential ESLs. Therefore, there is no significant risk posed by site soils, and additional excavation and off-hauling of soil is not necessary to allow property redevelopment as a park to proceed.

Prior to park construction, a Site Management Plan (SMP) will be prepared and submitted to San Mateo County Groundwater Protection Program (GPP) for review. This Plan will describe recommended steps necessary to ensure safety of workers, residents, and park users during construction. It will also describe procedures that will be followed if petroleum hydrocarbon impacted soils are encountered during construction, although this is not expected. Further, any soils planned for off-haul to a landfill will be tested and disposed of accordingly.

The City plans to voluntarily remove the lead-impacted soil located within the buried concrete structure at 616 Linden Avenue that was identified during the Phase II Environmental Site Assessment. This work will be proposed in the SMP described above and submitted to the San Mateo County Groundwater Protection Program for review.

The soil vapor contamination identified at 616 Linden Avenue does not affect redevelopment into a park because the screening levels apply to residential indoor air. If any buildings are planned, they can be built on the 700 Linden Avenue property without restrictions. If buildings are proposed at the 616 Linden Avenue property, additional investigation can be conducted or mitigation measures implemented, such as a vapor intrusion mitigation system (VIMS). There are no known environmental issues or restrictions for redevelopment at the 700 Linden Avenue property. Both sites are suitable for development into a park.

## **Circulation**

In early 2024, staff engaged Hexagon Transportation Consultants to assess traffic impacts of the park development that would potentially close, slow, or redirect traffic on Pine Avenue. Alternatives explored included:

- 1. Speed Table:** Under this alternative, Pine Avenue would be kept open and a speed table on Pine Avenue would slow down vehicles near the park. Speed tables are traffic calming devices that raise the entire wheelbase of a vehicle to reduce its speed. They are longer than speed humps and are flat on the top, with a height of 3 - 3.5 inches and a length of at least 22 feet. According to National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), speed tables may be used on collector streets and/or transit and emergency response routes. With this option, Pine could be closed for special events.
- 2. Pine Avenue Closure:** The intersection of Linden Avenue and Pine Avenue would operate as a three-legged intersection without the east leg. Pine Avenue, east of Linden Avenue would be closed off to vehicular traffic and a small roundabout/hammerhead would be installed on the east end of the park for vehicles on westbound Pine Avenue to turn around. The roundabout/hammerhead would be designed to accommodate large trucks, including firetrucks and waste collection vehicles. Through traffic on Pine Avenue would be diverted to the parallel streets of California Avenue and Aspen Avenue.

- 3. Pine Avenue Closure with a New Alley:** Pine Avenue would be closed off to vehicular traffic from Linden Avenue. Instead of providing a roundabout for westbound traffic on Pine Avenue to turn around, a one-way alley would be provided along the eastern boundary of the park that would connect to 7th Lane. Westbound vehicles on Pine Avenue would be able to make a left turn onto the new alley and a right turn onto 7th Lane to connect to Linden Avenue. Through traffic on Pine Avenue near the park is expected to use the parallel streets of California Avenue and Aspen Avenue to get to their destinations. The one-way alley would be designed to accommodate large trucks, including fire apparatus.
- 4. Pine Avenue Partial Closure:** Under this alternative, Pine Avenue would be kept open except if/when special events that warrant closure are conducted at the park.

Traffic analysis of the proposed Linden Park alternatives showed that all alternatives would be feasible to implement. Analysis of the existing roadway volumes and intersection operations during weekday peak hours showed that the roadways and intersections surrounding the park are operating well below capacity and therefore could accommodate additional traffic that would be diverted from Pine Avenue and no significant operational issues are anticipated for the Pine Avenue closure alternatives.

Staff engaged South San Francisco Fire and Public Works/Engineering Departments to review the Pine Avenue alternatives. Fire noted emergency response times would not be impacted by any of the alternatives. Fire also noted both Aspen Avenue and California Avenue provide adequate response routes in the alternatives where Pine Avenue is either partially or entirely closed. Additionally, both Cypress Avenue and Airport Boulevards support access and are preferable when evaluated as evacuation routes based on their network capacity when compared with Linden Avenue. Engineering noted no anticipated impacts to operation and services. Staff also engaged South San Francisco Scavengers who reviewed the alternatives and found that with either full closure or the alley bypass they would be able to adequately maintain service to residents along Pine Avenue.

The design team presented three options (Hammerhead, Alley, Speed Table) to the public in the first round of engagement to get initial feedback. The Hammerhead was the top choice, with Alley and Speed Table tying for second. Additionally, the design team heard that community priorities are slowing traffic and providing safety for children and seniors.

## Engagement

The project team's engagement work began with phase zero analysis work and included interviews with community members to help craft a successful engagement plan for this community and this project.

In spring 2024, the project kicked off publicly with several visioning events to learn about the community's goals, ideas, and priorities for the new park. At that time, a project website was established that provided information on upcoming outreach opportunities and site history. Information was also posted on site in informational kiosks in English and Spanish.

Two large bilingual public events were held, with about 125 people participating:

- **Open House and Listening Session** (April 13, 2024, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., at the site)
- **Pop-up Event & Intercept Interviews** (May 1, 2024, 4:00 - 7:00 p.m., at the site) Participants had the opportunity to describe their current and past activities at the site and comment on potential preferences for the new park. Along with speaking directly with City and design representatives, participants used stickers to rate priorities and recorded comments and ideas on large posterboards.

At a third event, City staff and the design team held a focus group session with the neighboring business owners at Amoura's restaurant, across the street from the new park:

- **Merchants Round Table** (May 30, 2024, Saturday, 2:00 - 3:00 pm, at Amoura Restaurant)  
This discussion centered on business-specific topics such as parking, loading, safety, activation, and customer experience. The group also looked at examples showing how other parks have supported surrounding businesses, including drawing in more daily customers and providing outdoor seating options.

A bilingual summary of these engagement activities and feedback gathered is posted on the City's website. The key takeaways:

- **Activate the Space:** gatherings, programming, and recreational opportunities to draw in community members;
- **Provide For Community Gatherings and Events:** smaller social gatherings, large events, and cultural activities like movies in the park;
- **Encourage Recreation and Fitness:** outdoor workout spaces suitable for all ages;
- **Be Inclusive, Safe, Comfortable, and Accessible:** welcoming spaces, improved walkability, safe biking, benches, sheltered seating, a restroom, and drinking fountain;
- **Connect Neighbors to the Environment:** green space, native/drought tolerant/pollinator gardens, memorial trees, less concrete, clean air, and a relaxing environment; and
- **Reflect the Community:** a community-driven park plan and artwork that reflects the community's rich character.

### Design Alternatives

Feedback from the visioning phase resulted in the development of two concept designs. Much like traditional plazas around the world that are the heart of the community, the concept alternatives are inspired by this history and seek to create a contemporary new plaza and active park for South San Francisco with gathering spaces, recreation, play, and art features.

Both concepts absorb part of Pine Avenue into the park, in different ways, to make the park larger and allow for a connected, safe park for all ages. **Concept A** is more park focused, with a one-way alley providing a connection from Pine Avenue onto 7<sup>th</sup> Lane then Linden. **Concept B** is more plaza-focused with Pine Avenue terminating at the park with a hammerhead turnaround, sized to accommodate fire engines and trash/recycling vehicles.

City staff and the bilingual design team took these concepts to a series of events for public comments:

- **National Night Out** (August 6)
- **Movie Night at Martin Elementary School** (August 16)
- **Open House and Listening Session** (August 24)
- **South San Francisco Youth Commission** (September 9)
- **Concert in the Park** (September 21)
- **Merchants Round Table** (September 27)
- **Centennial Way Park South Ribbon Cutting** (September 29)
- **Morelos Hall** (September 29)
- **Bilingual Online Survey** (August 16 - September 30)

Participants were able to take the bilingual online survey on iPads at the events or anytime on their own during the six-week window. Paper versions of the survey were offered at events and made available at the Grand Library and Library | Parks and Recreation Center front desks to be inclusive of those less digitally inclined. At the in-person events, the project team was able to answer questions in both English and Spanish and record additional community feedback on posterboards.

The preliminary survey results show that the two concepts both received high marks on a scale of 1 to 5. In side-by-side competition, the concepts polled very close, with Concept B slightly higher (47%) than Concept A (44%) and some wanting a combination of the two (9%). The community's input on the two circulation options was even more split at 50% for each.

The survey had additional questions to drill down on specific features and priorities. Concept A's top features were a flex lawn (a flexibly used open lawn area), play areas, gathering spaces, trees, and planting areas. Concept B's top features were a plaza, play area, flex lawn, and fitness areas. The design team heard common themes repeated both in person and in the survey comments:

1. Balance the plaza size with other key elements in the park and utilize Linden Avenue for occasional extra-large events;
2. Create a flexible lawn space to host a variety of activities;
3. Provide a variety of types of seating, tables, and shade throughout the park;
4. Play area should be inclusive and visible from other areas of the park; and
5. Ensure artwork reflects the community's identity and heritage.

Additionally, the team received feedback on the top play elements (top three: spinner, net climber, and climbing rock) and art/identity features (top three: colorful ground mural, festival light columns, art/play climbing sculpture). A complete engagement summary is being compiled to help guide the final concept, including input from this City Council session, and will be shared with the public on the City's website.

It should be noted that the merchant stakeholder group expressed concern about loss of customer and employee parking with the conversion of the current lot at 616 Linden to park space. With the understanding that the available land area of the two lots is very limited, the project team responded to the merchant concerns by adding between 13 - 15 spaces into the park design concept alternatives

The merchant stakeholder group also pointed out that the new park will draw families and other park users, and were concerned about the impact this may have on their businesses if the public requests use of their facilities. The project team acknowledges this concern. The size of this park defines it in the category of a "neighborhood park," which typically would not include a public restroom, however the project team is evaluating this option, with the understanding that there would be significant trade-offs in space and budget, given the high cost of constructing, operating, and maintaining public restrooms.

Community concerns about the condition and disposition of Cypress and Pine Park were also heard. The City is exploring the use of CBDG funding to make ADA accessibility upgrades, which would make the park eligible for more grant funding opportunities. It is important to stress that the City is committed to pursuing improvements.

### **Next Steps**

The design team will incorporate feedback gathered through the Design Alternatives Phase, including feedback to be provided by the City Council as part of the update on October 23 to develop a preferred concept design. The preferred concept design will be shared with the community in early 2025. The preferred concept design will be presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council for final approval.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact to the budget for fiscal year 2023-24. This project is included in the City of South San Francisco's fiscal year 2023-24 Capital Improvement Program. Transfer of funds from relevant accounts will be accomplished as funds are needed.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Approval of this action will contribute to the City's Strategic Plan. It aligns with Priority #2, which is focused on enhancing quality of life by building and maintaining a sustainable city, making our city a great place to live, learn, and play.

### **CONCLUSION**

Staff recommend that the City Council provide feedback on the design alternatives to inform development of a preferred concept design.