

The Thirty Three Year Shoreline Park Saga

This is a curious Tale of Two Projects, one of which required a matter of a month or so to complete while the second, though similar, was more ambitious, and required somewhat more than 33 years to finish.

In 1974 Darlene and Jim Byers lived at the water's edge toward the west end of Ocean Ave. and adjacent to what appeared on maps as the stub end of Harrison St., a dedicated, but undeveloped, city street. In fact, it was a roughly 50 by 75 foot rectangle of land then in occasional use as a car park for rowdy youths who, at wee hours, took boisterous delight in chucking their freshly emptied beer bottles from the bluff to the rocky beach below. Police informed the Byers that, while a curfew was enforceable in the case of legitimate parklands, no such authority existed for undeveloped public property. The Byers' solution was to assume \$1000 of the cost of clean up of the neighboring lot and of development sufficient to warrant the appellation "park". The City Council promptly accepted the proposal and the Harrison site was cleaned of trash and overgrowth, bollards (posts) installed to exclude autos, a city sign erected - and a curfew was now enforceable. The Byers both solved the noise problem and provided a neighborhood amenity for others to enjoy. The Richmond Independent reported this successful completion of "Project #1" in November of 1974.

At the same time, Lucretia Edwards, a long time proponent of public access to the Bay, and others were entertaining similar ideas about the remaining four stub end "paper streets" variously at Marine, Clarence, Western and Santa Fe, all of which were equally trashy and overgrown with blackberry, fennel and the like. It was feared that, sooner or later, the City Council would abandon one or more of the unused sites to adjacent property owners (as had been the custom) thereby enabling construction of a virtually unbroken "Chinese Wall" along Western and Ocean avenues. In the winter of 1973 and early months of 1974, these residents, speaking in the name of the Point Richmond Civic Group, predecessor to today's PRNC, obtained the support of the City Recreation and Parks Commission for "public access" and "minimal development" of "pocket parks". Further, the acting Director of Public Works went on record: "a pedestrian pathway is a street purpose", establishing that the proposed use would not conflict with controlling ordinances referring to "street purpose". City Council approval was sought. Three years later a BCDC permit for a nearby subdivision required the placing of a trash can and a minimalist bench at the end of Clarence St. overlooking the water. However, perhaps because there had been no complaint that these other Bayside sites constituted sources of nuisances to neighbors in their unimproved condition, neither the City nor any other agency took further action. The record remained silent for the next 20 years while costs steadily escalated and impediments

multiplied, mostly in the form of procedures and regulations applicable to Bay front development.

The effort to revive this long buried and almost forgotten corpse of a plan commenced when Maurice Doherty responded to the suggestion/directive from Lucrecia Edwards to try once again to put the remaining distressed parcels to good public use. In August of 1997 at Doherty's initiation a PRNC subcommittee was appointed including Bonnie Satre-Daley, Bruce Beyaert and Doug Corbin with Doherty as Chair. It styled itself the Pt. Richmond Public Access Committee.

Local architect Ron Gammill volunteered elaborate and colorful conceptual drawings for the Western Drive site which were used to gain community support, raise funds and serve as models for various of the subsequently prepared working drawings. Other architectural drawings were prepared, pro bono, by Marcia Vallier, Dick King of AN West Inc. and Alan Green of Tanaka Architect Group. With these in hand, committee members visited various waterfront homes to discuss the projects with the people most likely to be impacted and therefore most likely to take exception to the plans—and were more than reasonably successful in unearthing a number of vocal opponents. Evening sessions with neighbors and at general membership meetings of the PNRC were well attended and contentious. The more adamant objectors carried their opposition over to subsequent hearings held to satisfy CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) requirements as well as protesting to the City Council, but the PRNC committee prevailed.

Noting that the "Project #2" lacked a cash incentive to move the City to action, the committee began looking for financing. Its efforts were rewarded with \$41,000 from BCDC (CALTRANS project mitigation money) and \$60,000 from the Coastal Conservancy. Brenda Buxton of the Conservancy guided the funding process and proved a great help with advice and counsel. The committee also worked closely with Tony Norris of Richmond Parks and

Recreation who prepared the BCDC applications. This was essential as the project was to use City land and, hence, was treated as a project of the City of Richmond. City engineer Rich Davidson was relied on for expertise and assistance, especially regarding repairs needed to two storm water outfalls to the Bay which had to be addressed anticipatory to the commencement of the general clean up and construction. So-- in the course of five years Phase #1 of Project #2 was completed, but the first spade of earth had yet to be turned by way of developing the park areas visible today.

The committee at this point realized it needed some new blood with professional expertise and found it in architect Andrew Butt. He provided many of the construction drawings and recruited engineer Joyce Clark who served as our thoroughly professional project manager. It was they who transformed our precious bay side lots from the neglected, nondescript and generally forbidding patches they had been into inviting parkland with paths, benches, vehicle barriers and open ground suitable for planting of low maintenance, drought resistant California natives. Clark obtained railroad ties for steps (courtesy of Richmond Pacific RR Company) and selected Cleary Brothers Landscaping as contractor for the heavy earthmoving, grading, etc. Others helpful in this, Phase #2 of Project #2, included Rod Satre, Bob Binsacca of AN West Inc., and Sharon West and Andy Yeung of the City.

The near conclusion of this community-wide effort was celebrated by dozens of volunteers who showed up on successive Saturday mornings in mid winter 2005-2006 to spread mulch and tuck tiny plants into the ground at the Western Drive and the Santa Fe sites. Some plants were purchased by Beyaert and Satre-Daley from specialized native plant nurseries, and on a wholesale price basis thanks to the good offices of landscaper Carol Burdick, and others were donated by The Watershed Project. Plants were distributed as needed from the home of Bonnie Satre-Daley and Rod Satre near the Santa Fe site where they had been delivered from the nurseries. The City of Richmond delivered the truckloads of mulch at Sharon West's request; and Beyaert organized and directed the mulching and planting work parties.

Altogether there were more than 50 volunteers involved over the years in moving this second project from dream to reality. Long term success of the revegetation effort is dependent upon neighbors' willingness to remove weedy plants which will certainly try to reclaim the sites.