



Proposal Nature Exploration Area At Heron's Head Park

Proposal for Nature Exploration Area @ Heron's Head



Inspired by the Children & Nature movement to get kids to unplug and reconnect with the outdoors, the San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department and the Port of San Francisco in collaboration with SF Children & Nature are proposing to install a Nature Exploration Area (NEA) at Heron's Head Park.

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What is a Nature Exploration Area (NEA)?

- A space that encourages people of all ages to engage with natural elements including tree trunks, boulders, and loose natural parts.
- A place where kids are encouraged to touch and climb, balance, jump from stump to stump, and use branches, bark, leaves, pine cones and their imagination to build dens, castles, towers... and more.
- A place to enjoy childhood experiences such as fort building, playing in mud, scrambling on rocks and logs, experiences that are getting harder to come by in cities.
- A way of inspiring lifelong connections with nature.

The proposed project would be the fourth NEA for SF Rec & Park, after [Rolph Nicol NEA](#), West Portal, and Forest Hill Station, and the first in District 10. It can serve as a model and testing ground to inspire future NEAs across the city.



Heron's Head Park | Proposed Site



Part of the India Basin project that is transforming dilapidated industrial spaces and underperforming existing parks into a unified network of inspirational open spaces.



The proposed site is between the EcoCenter and the parking area by the established outdoor classroom or “stump circle” where kids already jump and balance on the existing stumps.

The NEA will create a safe and welcoming space for child-led unstructured play and discovery in nature as well as team building challenges to complement EcoCenter programs.

Heron's Head Park | Proposed Site



+EcoCenter staff and Greenager Program youth will oversee programming and maintenance

+The majority of the site area is currently enclosed by a fence, unprogrammed, and inaccessible to the public. As part of the project, the fencing will be removed.

+ Photo following July 2020 fire. The project will bring in new native plants to restore some of the damaged areas..

Heron's Head Park - Concept Sketch



GATHER | seating area to kick off EcoCenter programs and serve as outdoor community gathering space nestles among taller brush.



PLANTS | Native-plants selected to promote exploration with the 5 senses through color, texture and smell.



CREATE | Space filled with loose parts such as tree cookies, branches and pinecones to inspire building & creativity



PLAY | Area with large stumps and boulders to encourage movement, climbing, balance and action.

Partners & Timeline



Non Profit Partner: KABOOM!, a national nonprofit that works to end playspace inequity. KABOOM! amplifies the power of communities to build inspiring playspaces that spark unlimited opportunities for every kid, everywhere.



Funding Partner: Kaiser Permanente



Design and Construction Consultants: Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds, , a leader in the world of natural play and exploration.

Community Partners: APRI, BMagic, Literacy for Environmental Justice, Parks Rx / Third Street Youth, Feline Finesse, YMCA of San Francisco

Timeline:

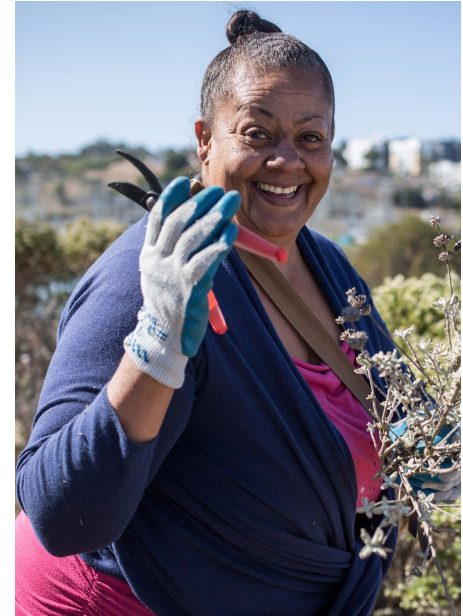
- April: Community Design
- Mid May: Review Concept Design
- Mid June: Design Finalized
- Fall 2021: Construction
- TBD: Community Event to celebrate new Nature Exploration Area



Nature Exploration Area | Project Goals

Project Goals:

- Increase nature connection infrastructure in the Bayview.
- Engage local families and youth in a participatory design process.
- Provide leadership opportunities for Greenagers and other youth programs in the design, construction, stewardship, and programming of the site.
- Support EcoCenter environmental education programming



To receive updates about this project including information about upcoming community design days, please fill out [this form](#) or email maria.durana@sfgov.org

Precedents & Inspiration

Nature Exploration Area @ Rolph Nicol, San Francisco



Rolph Nicol Nature Exploration Area was a pilot project of the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department and San Francisco Children & Nature. Created by repurposing downed natural materials, the pop-up space at Rolph-Nicol offers opportunities for unstructured play and discovery in nature. A combination of natural challenges and loose parts helps to promote physical activity, stimulate creativity, inspire discovery, negotiate risk, and encourage teamwork, all while cultivating an appreciation and respect for nature. Additional photos [here](#).

Hunter's View | Create-With-Nature Pop-up

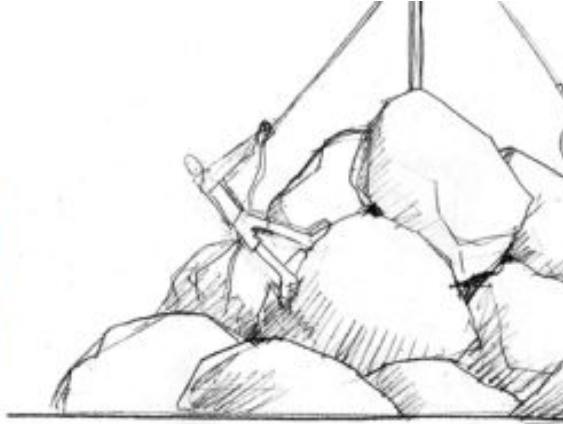
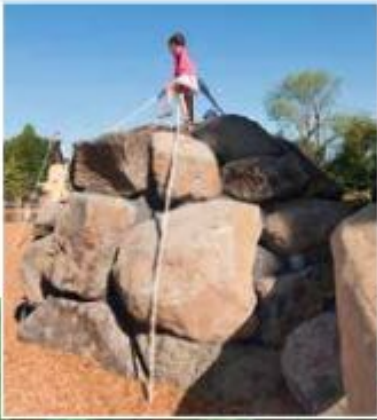


Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds



Westmoreland Park, Oregon

WESTMORELAND PARK



Article on forts and loose parts [here](#).

NATURE PLAYGROUNDS | Welles Park, Chicago



Site Design | More Photos and info:
<https://www.site-design.com/projects/welles-park-nature-play/>

Prospect Park, New York



A photograph of a landscaped area. In the foreground, a large, thick tree trunk is visible on the right side. A wooden fence with a wire mesh runs across the middle ground. Behind the fence, there is a gravel path that curves through the landscape. In the background, a house with a blue roof and white walls is visible, surrounded by trees and greenery. The overall scene is a well-maintained outdoor space.



Aug 2020 | Made entirely of repurposed downed logs from the SF Rec & Park Urban Forestry team, this new area combines natural challenges and gathering spaces to ensure that children can play, learn, and grow outdoors. This Nature Exploration Area is part of the Forest Hill Irrigation Improvement Project by the SFMTA and the San Francisco Public Utility Commission's Large Landscape Grant Program. The project replaced the station area's 40-year-old irrigation system with a more efficient one, replacing existing sod with a variety that requires less water, and introducing drought-tolerant native plants.