

PAJARO NEIGHBORHOOD PARK - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The Pajaro Neighborhood Park, a new state-of-the-art five acre park, is the first public park in the unincorporated community of Pajaro in Monterey County.

Problem or Challenge #1: Significant Poverty and Lack of Open Space

Pajaro is one of the poorest and most underserved communities in Monterey County. A large number of its residents are farm workers who work hard to carve out a nominal living and lack knowledge and access to community resources and personal transportation and have fear and mistrust of institutions. Pajaro is located at the north end of Monterey County where the historical high density development pattern combined with the low-income demographics of the community has resulted in a severely overcrowded community with no open space and parks to accommodate recreation and social interaction.

Solution: Engage Community in Project from Inception to Construction

The Pajaro Neighborhood Park is the result of community-based planning and participation involving site selection, needs assessment, design, and project implementation. Since 1995, a variety of outreach methods were utilized to encourage residents and stakeholder groups to become engaged in developing this project and take ownership of its creation. In March of 2014, the County was able to give Pajaro the park they so evidently needed and has proven to be a significant contribution to improving residents' lives by enhancing community pride and encouraging positive social interaction. Major park features include: a combined soccer & baseball field, a walking track to promote good health among all age groups, playgrounds for multiple age groups, picnic areas for family gatherings, a pavilion for performances and parties, public art murals designed by local school children and implemented by local artists, a multiple use of parking lot for commuter park & ride, security features designed in conjunction with the County Sheriff, and many green and sustainable techniques including bioswales and solar panels.

Problem or Challenge #2: Community Blight - Where to Locate the Park

The first major hurdle to in development of the new park was to find a suitable site location as there is almost no undeveloped land of the size needed within Pajaro. The community is located within a FEMA-designated flood hazard zone, many areas are seismically unstable, nearly all land adjacent to Pajaro is zoned prime agricultural, and the cost to acquire new property would have made the project infeasible.

Solution: Convert Abandoned Site into a Destination Recreational Facility

The site identified for the park was a long-vacant and unused former construction equipment yard owned

by Granite Construction Inc. dba Granite Land Company. Working in collaboration with the then-Redevelopment Agency of the County of Monterey, Granite Construction remediated existing site contamination and donated the property for the park, thereby improving the community by eliminating a blighted eyesore and public hazard and allowing for the creation of a much-needed recreational and social focal point, while simultaneously significantly reducing the overall cost of the project.

Problem or Challenge #3: No One to Own & Operate the New Park

The next major project hurdle was who would own and operate the park once constructed. Then-current State law prohibited Redevelopment Agencies from owning, operating, or funding the maintenance of public facilities and Monterey County Parks Department operates regional parks funded through user fees and did not have the institutional capacity to operate and maintain an “urban” park. The County General Fund could not afford to contract out the operation and maintenance of the park, nor could the community afford a property assessment to fund such costs.

Solution: Local Community Services District Stepped Up

The Pajaro/Sunny Mesa Community Services District (CSD) provides water, sewer, and street lighting for the community of Pajaro. The CSD Board of Directors recognized the community’s need for a park and the value the project could provide to enhance the community’s quality of life and agreed to assume ownership & operation of the park upon its completion - without requiring residents to pay and increased property assessment. The CSD embarked on a fund raising campaign and ultimately achieved the pledge of funding for five years of operations and maintenance costs through public donations.

Budget / Costs/ Savings

The total cost to design and construct the park was \$6.26 million which consisted of \$1.3 million in design, environmental, permitting, utilities, legal, and staff administration costs, \$460,000 in construction management costs, and \$4.5 million in construction costs. Funding for the project consisted of a \$5 million grant from the California Department of Parks and Recreation’s Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Program of 2008 (Proposition 84), a \$138,500 grant from the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) Tire-Derived Product grant program, and \$1.2 million in Redevelopment Agency Tax Increment funds generated by the community of Pajaro.

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Optional Submission: Appendix – Pajaro Neighborhood Park