



## **2010 Community Report Card on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks**

Submitted by

**The Oakland Parks Coalition**

**Susan Montauk, Chair & Lisa Hire, Secretary**

**December 21, 2010**

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### **Attached to this Report:**

- PDF: Survey Comments
- Excel Document: Survey Chart

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## Introduction

*“Oakland has been recognized a top ten green U.S. city eight times in the last four years, including recently being ranked 4<sup>th</sup> among large U.S. cities by both the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Mother Nature Network.”*  
Oakland Public Works Agency, 2010

Parkland is essential to Oakland’s status as a model green city. It adds to quality of life by providing recreational and exercise opportunities, educational benefits through environmental facilities, and enhancing public safety by providing youth safe opportunities for socialization and recreation. According to the 2009 *Trust for Public Land* survey of America’s park acreage the City of Oakland had the highest level of park acres per 1000 residents in the country.<sup>1</sup> TPL also credits Oakland with an additional 2000+ acres of parkland since its 2006 survey. After factoring out regional park areas, the City owns 4,101 park acres including mini-parks, parks with recreation centers, special use parks, landscaped plazas, three golf courses, playing fields, open space and conservation areas. Oakland’s parks include historic and cultural resources of national importance like Dunsmuir Hellman Estate Park and Lake Merritt, the first wildlife refuge in the United States. Some of Oakland’s small neighborhood parks were among the first playgrounds in the country.

Maintaining park assets as diverse and extensive as Oakland’s has become increasingly difficult since the 2008 economic collapse. Deficit budgets have forced cities and states throughout the country to impose often severe cuts to park maintenance. While 150 California parks have seen reduced services and part-time closures, Oakland City officials, when faced with declining revenues, have elected to keep all parks open. In order to do this, however, the Public Works Agency (PWA) had to reduce maintenance services. Currently, parks with recreation centers, public building landscaping and ball fields receive routine service while other parks, medians and plazas receive periodic service and complaint driven care.

In this report we will describe measures Oakland’s Public Works Agency has taken to address budget cutbacks and will assess the current condition of our parks, medians and plazas. We will also present the results of the 2010 Annual Love Your Parks Day Survey and explain their significance. We will make recommendations that we feel are the key to survival of our park system during protracted lean times.

## Oakland Parks Coalition Overview

Oakland Parks Coalition (OPC), a volunteer organization formed in 2003, was founded by Oaklanders Gillian Garro and Audree Jones-Taylor to address a perceived decline of conditions and programs in Oakland Parks. Its mission at that time was “to build a productive partnership between Oakland Parks and Recreation (OPR) and the public for the purpose of creating excellent parks city-wide”. OPC has been working to achieve these goals for the past seven years by encouraging members of the community (neighbors, businesses, service organizations)

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<sup>1</sup> 2010 City Park Facts, The Trust for Public Land.

to participate actively in the care and improvement of their local parks and median strips; by developing accessibility and accountability to the public within the City agencies caring for parks; by encouraging the public to report park problems and track their resolutions and by facilitating regular park evaluations and meetings between communities and maintenance staff.

In 2004, in an effort to optimize resources, park maintenance was split off from OPR and reorganized under the Public Works Agency (PWA). OPC, responded to this reorganization by realigning its mission to concentrate on park maintenance. Our revised mission statement in 2006 read: "Oakland Parks Coalition is a city-wide association of community members and agencies working to implement standards of excellence for the maintenance of our parks and medians." OPC works to achieve those standards through a partnership with PWA by promoting and supporting park stewardship, by organizing an annual park or median workday, by conducting an annual city-wide park survey to assess park conditions and by advocating at City forums for improved park maintenance. Every other year OPC co-chairs the annual Oakland Volunteer Recognition Evening with PWA. OPC's Board of Directors meets on the last Wednesday of each month and invites representatives from various agencies of City government to attend.

### **Park Maintenance-A Brief Overview**

Park maintenance staffing has plummeted since its zenith in the early 70s but the reductions occurred slowly over the years as Proposition 13 curtailed City revenues. Faced with a General Fund deficit In 1989, voters approved the Landscaping and Lighting District (LLAD) whose funds were to be dedicated to the maintenance of parks, grounds and medians, ball fields, open space, custodial services at Park Enterprise Facilities, streetlight outage repairs, tree services, and free standing restrooms at parks and ball fields. In 1994, Oakland voters rejected a ballot measure challenging the LLAD. Since this reconfirmation of the LLAD Oakland has acquired additional acres of parkland and costs have escalated, (especially electricity costs for street lighting). With no provision for a Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA) in the LLAD, by 2005 the General Fund had to begin supplementing the LLAD by \$5.5M and that pattern has persisted in each budget since.

Faced with decreasing funding for park maintenance it was essential that PWA find ways to increase productivity. In 2006, PWA reorganized park maintenance into the Hub Deployment System, which promised to foster in workers a sense of ownership and pride and increase efficiency. The Hub System grouped all parkland properties into 32 geographical units, each maintained by a team consisting of a crew leader and a Gardener II. The work load was more evenly distributed under this system and a new spirit of friendly competition among crew leaders emerged. It was not a perfect solution but it did manifest increases in productivity. Part II of the reorganization established routine maintenance schedules for mowing, irrigation and litter pickups which park users could access on-line.

In 2008, a deficit budget reduced maintenance staffing by 21% (9.5 FTE Gardener positions alone were lost!) and the new Hub System had to be reconfigured into 18 hubs. At this writing

there are 3 vacancies of gardener crews so only 156 hubs are functioning. Then, in fiscal 2009, as the recession took a firm hold, PWA saw an additional 24% reduction including a loss of 12 FTE gardener positions. No gardener positions were lost in 2010—they held at the 2009 level of 36. To put that in perspective, ten years ago 65 gardener FTEs worked in Oakland’s parks, almost twice as many as in 2010. An overworked and older staff (workers with less seniority were laid off) was more prone to injuries. Public Works Supervisor Brian Carthan reported that the average age of the staff today is 40 years old. At the time of this writing there are four workers out on injuries.

The 2009 cuts prompted PWA to take extreme measures: Effective July 1, 2009, two-thirds of parkland properties were designated as “non-priority”, i.e., they would receive no routine maintenance. This left 212 mini-parks, neighborhood parks, special use parks, parking lots, plazas, medians and streetscapes without litter baskets, or gardening care other than infrequent mowing. They would be serviced only by “complaint crews”. The remaining 104 “priority locations” (parks with recreation centers, ball fields, public building landscaping) would continue to be serviced, albeit at a reduced level. 940 acres at 17 resource conservation areas would receive no maintenance. This policy remains in effect today.

### **Making Do in Difficult Times**

Fortunately, monies for park improvements are still forthcoming from measures that were passed during better economic times and Redevelopment Area funds continue to provide capital for upgrades to parks in Oakland. The Coliseum Project Area in Council District 7, for example, allocated over half a million in funds in 2009/10 for a new tot lot at Officer Willie Wilkins Park and a new restroom at Sobrante Park (currently under construction). Earlier, in 2007-09, the Coliseum Project Area and other grants paid for the Carter Gilmore Greenman Field renovation, providing an attractive new park equipped with children’s play areas, and landscaped walking paths adjacent to the existing ball fields. The installation of new landscaping, hardscape and new equipment provides short-term relief to an overburdened maintenance department, but weeds still grow and litter still accumulates in these areas.

Bond Measures are also a source for improvements to existing sites: Measure WW (2008) will eventually provide funds totaling more than \$13M for improvements to Oakland parks, fields and paths in every Council District. PWA used about \$225K of Measure WW funds, combined with other funds, to make improvements to Raimondi Park in West Oakland, primarily to replace the playing field with artificial turf. Other fields in Oakland are scheduled for turf replacement. Reports from users of the synthetic turf at Raimondi have been generally favorable and, if it proves safe and durable in the long run, it will save many maintenance hours. Exploration of other cost-saving materials should be a priority in an effort to reduce maintenance costs.

Savings can also be realized by increasing the number of part-time workers. Part timers and temporary workers have always played a role in the broader maintenance picture and, over time, the ratio of part-time workers to gardeners has risen and fallen from as low 1 part-timer to 14 gardeners (1/14) to a high of 2/3 in both 2009 and 2010. Why so many part timers when budgets have been cut? Because, during times of reduced staffing, essential tasks such as litter collection and mowing, which require little training, take precedence over jobs that gardeners are trained to perform. Assistant Director of Public Works Brooke Levin reports that this year Oakland was fortunate to receive Alameda County stimulus funds which provided twenty temporary employees to do fundamental cleanup work in parks and medians from August 9 to the end of September.

Oaklanders love their parks and, historically, have voted for measures that provide for new parks. With ever-increasing park acreage and fewer maintenance workers PWA had no recourse but to increase its plant establishment period requirements for developers of new projects when budgets allowed, for up to 3 years. The care of these projects all revert back to the City at



*OPC Bancroft Median Cleanup*

some point: Mandela Parkway (15.1 acres, completed in 2008) will revert back in 2011 and Lake Merritt Measure DD landscaping will revert back incrementally, the first stage having already occurred in November, 2010. OPC organized a clean-up along 10 blocks of the Bancroft Median (which runs the length of the Avenue from 73<sup>rd</sup> Street to 106<sup>th</sup>) on August 14th of this year. The litter accumulation there was startling. The many new park acres which accrue from new development, bond measures and other funds eventually all become the province and responsibility of Oakland Public Works Agency, adding to the burdens of an already over-tasked maintenance department.

### **Love Your Parks Day Survey Results**

On July 1, 2009 this PWA service bulletin was circulated:

*"Parks and open space are living assets and as such require on-going care. With the downsizing of staff that maintains these assets, Oakland's landscaped assets will be critically compromised, resulting in increased blight, weeds, litter and a generally unkempt appearance. Service reductions will have an immediate visual impact."*

The 2009 Love Your Parks Day Survey was conducted soon after this bulletin, in September, 2009, and the results indicated that park conditions were not yet adversely affected by the park maintenance policy changes. One year later however, our survey indicated that park conditions had declined, albeit, not to a great degree, as judged by our surveyors. Seven of the nine survey

categories received somewhat poor ratings than in 2009. Restrooms received a better rating and one category, **Greenery**, received a significantly poorer rating.

Our survey was conducted over a period of one month in the fall of 2010. During September, 75 park surveys were completed by OPC Park Stewards. On Saturday, October 2, thirty-five volunteers came to the Garden Center at 8:30am to finish OPC's fifth annual all-city park survey called **Love Your Parks Day**. Teams of 3-5 adults and students from Oakland High Honor Society were formed and assigned 42 areas to survey by noon. Those surveys and the 75 area surveys that were conducted in September constitute a total of 117 distinct parks, medians, plazas and open space areas in all seven Oakland Council Districts surveyed this year.

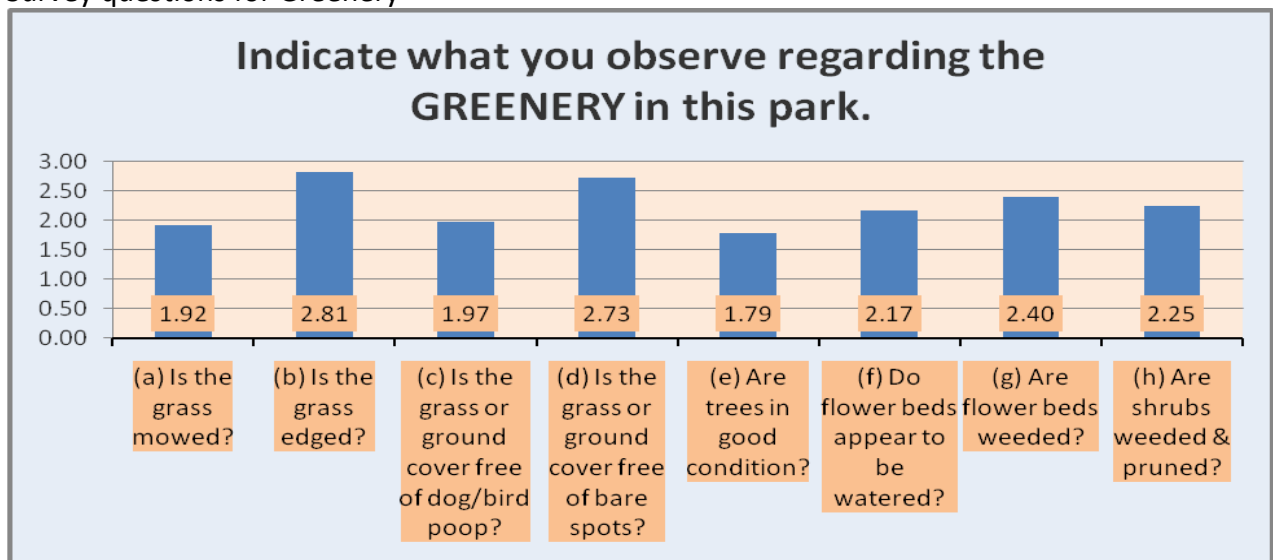
Parks, open spaces, medians and plazas were rated in nine categories—Litter, Picnic Areas, Restrooms, Hardscape, Drainage and Irrigation, Greenery, Recreation Centers (exterior only), Outdoor Sports Areas and Children's Play Areas. Each category had a range of 3-9 questions and an overall rating. Each question was rated on a scale of 1-4, 1 being the best rating.

**Survey Category Averages**  
**Rating Scale Range: 1=Good, 4=Poor**

CATEGORY GRAND AVERAGES	Litter	Picnic Areas	Rest- rooms	Hardscape & Signage	Greenery	Drainage & Irrigation	Rec Centers Exteriors	Outdoor Sports Areas	Outdoor Children's Play Areas	Overall Rating	Final Average
2008	1.98	1.86	2.35	1.98	2.08	2.29	1.85	2.04	1.89	1.99	2.03
2009	1.86	1.84	2.26	1.73	2.00	1.73	1.56	1.81	1.91	1.94	1.86
2010	1.88	2.03	2.05	1.88	2.25	2.06	1.67	1.88	2.01	2.18	1.99

**Greenery** had the poorest score of all the categories:

Survey questions for Greenery



Rating Scale Range: 1=Good, 2=Satisfactory, 3=Fair, 4=Poor

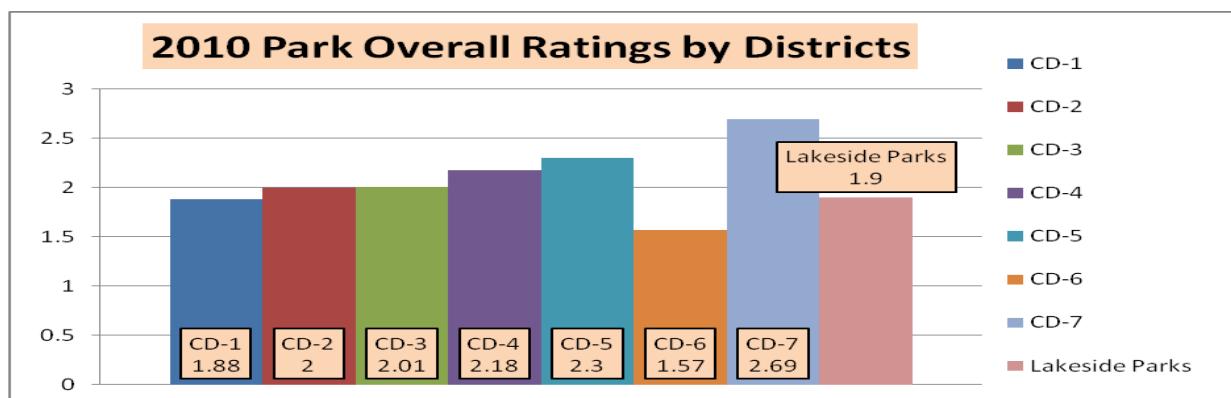
Surveyors' (60% of whom were park stewards for their surveyed area) comments and scores about **Greenery** repeatedly indicated a pressing need for care for shrubs, plants and trees. Typically, weeds, dead tree branches and dying trees, ivy invasions and bare spots were mentioned in the comment section of this category. The entire list of comments regarding **Greenery** is attached to this report. Not only does it pinpoint specific problems it also highlights positive developments in each area. Above all it shows, time and time again, the great extent to which the volunteer stewards strive to improve conditions.

The poor showing for **Greenery** can easily be explained. Plant, shrub and tree care fall victim to severe cutbacks in skilled gardening staff. Tree service staffing levels have been cut in half, making timely removal of dead limbs and dying trees a formidable challenge and a potential danger to park users. With much longer intervals between mowing, park users will often find the grass too long.

**Drainage & Irrigation** received the second poorest ratings, which comes as no surprise. With radically reduced budgets for irrigation system replacement parts and personnel—there are only three irrigation specialists for all of Oakland—repairs to systems are put on hold. Water may accumulate where systems are malfunctioning and where broken systems are shut off bare spots abound.

Paradoxically, the **Litter** category was among the best scoring in 2009 and 2010. Ms. Levin postulated in 2009 that the removal of trash containers from many parks would result in less litter and her theory, based on results of experiments in other cities, seemed to hold up. Stimulus funds also provided twenty temporary workers assigned to litter collection in August and September. Coincidentally, because of fewer trash pickups, those parks that have trash containers are often strewn with litter because overflowing containers have toppled.

The final category in the park survey is a **Park Overall Rating**. After the surveyor has rated each individual category he/she is asked to give the area an overall rating. This year, District 6 had the best overall rating with 1.57 and District 7 (as in 2009) had the poorest rating, with 2.69.



District 6 has the fewest parks of any district, three of which have recently had major renovations. District 7 has few regular volunteers. In fact, in the seventeen parks in District 7 there are only two active OPC volunteers. OPC has continuously tried to identify stewards for District 7,

without much success. Many of the parks are in fringe neighborhoods where safety is an issue, a definite deterrent to recruitment. Parks without consistent volunteer oversight and care are on the decline.

### **PWA Analysis of Conditions**

We interviewed Assistant Director of Public Works Brooke Levin and asked for her response to the survey results. Her initial reaction was disappointment that ratings were poorer than last year's but said she understands fully that the accumulated lack of staff is going to adversely affect park conditions. Here are some excerpts from the interview.

Q: What have been the effects of the latest staff reductions (July 2009) on park, median maintenance?

A: The main effect is that there is no scheduled routine maintenance. The model we are using is complaint driven maintenance. It's not just the layoffs that make maintenance more difficult to achieve, there are more parks to maintain. As new landscaped areas come out of the development phase where they are maintained for the first 2 years they then they become the city's responsibility. For example, there are three staff members devoted to irrigation. None were cut but they have more acreage to cover. Also we lost some staff with a Golden Handshake so the position cannot be filled for two years.

Q: How would you rate the condition of the various areas—parks, landscaped plots, medians?

A: Parks are the highest priority, with the 25 recreation centers first, so they are pretty good. Medians are the lowest priority but are in good shape after the supplemental work accomplished from the end of July using stimulus funding available through Alameda County.

Q: How have you compensated for the loss of workers?

A: More training to be efficient and effective and working to leverage stimulus funds in the best possible ways. Alameda County stimulus funds paid for twenty temporary who clocked approximately 5,800 hours working in parks from August 9 to the end of September. We also try to scheduling the part-time employees well so as not to use all of the hours up front and to spread out their work time over the whole year.

Q: What are your biggest concerns?

A: I have a few:

- As new rates for the employee health care benefits increase it will cost more for each employee.
- New projects are coming online without additional funding for maintenance. Although they have "*plant establishment periods*" covered in their installation contracts, they still need care--litter and weeds still grow and care of hardscape, water and electric costs are not included in the *plant establishment period*. Measure DD locations at Lakeshore will be coming on line soon. The Cryer site adjacent to Union Point was re-landscaped by



redevelopment and state grants 2 months ago. Redevelopment has 20 projects in the hopper.

- Litter and illegal dumping outside of planting areas

Q: Are the challenges insurmountable?

A: No, there are remedies. Condition of parks is highly dependent on creative partnerships. Getting the community involved is essential, with Oakland's BIDs contributing not just volunteers but in some cases more. We will be getting a full-time Volunteer Coordinator. This was a recommendation made by OPC in their report last year. City Works is almost fully operational and it, together with the Call Center, helps to prioritize complaints.

### **OPC Grows its Steward Network Stewards Report In**

OPC believes that Park Stewardship is material to the survival of parks and must be nourished and supported, especially in lean times. We have grown our steward pledge numbers to a robust 83, with an active volunteer list of an additional 29 people, yet we know that in some Council Districts there is still much room for growth. Our volunteers are eager to make a difference. On a regular basis they pick up litter, weed, clear brush, organize clean-up work parties and monitor and report problems. OPC offers certain kinds of support to help them get started and keep them going.

We support our volunteers by providing an organizing toolkit and helping them to connect to other volunteers at their site. We provide a website with information about PWA maintenance, contacts for neighborhood park groups, an event calendar and volunteer opportunities related to parks. OPC also recommends that stewards sign on with Keep Oakland Clean and Beautiful so they can receive certain City support services such as trash and green waste pickups and hand tools for the jobs.

But, the most beneficial support comes from a partnership of stewards with gardeners and other maintenance workers. Optimally, stewards should be able to meet with a PWA gardener or crew leader and create a work plan together. Many of our stewards have reached out to maintenance workers and continue to have rewarding volunteer experiences. Others, especially those working in areas that are on the "No Routine Maintenance" list, never meet a gardener or a City worker, try in vain to get repairs or service, become frustrated over time and eventually give up.

With shrinking budgets for maintenance, PWA and City Council must do everything possible to provide a consistent and well defined support system for the valuable work that citizens want to do. Here are some 2010 reports from OPC stewards that illustrate the positive energy that stewards bring to their jobs and some of the obstacles they encounter along the way.

### **Snow Park/Steward Mike Udkow**

*My wife and I put in 4-6 hrs per week at the park for the past few months. So far we have cleaned up both flower beds at the parks entrances and replanted one of them. We have been clearing the weeds around the tree wells, and pulling a ton of invasive ivy that is encroaching on the grass. We are trying to keep the weeds under control around the bathrooms and have been attempting to get Public Works to deal with the feces and flies around the bathroom entrances. We walk the park and pick up trash (which has not been a big problem).*

*Future plans include planting the second flower bed, and weeding the areas under the palm trees. We could the put down paper and mulch under the palms. And of course keep on top of the weeds.*

*Wish List: Replace the "grass". Bring back the putting green.*

### **St. Andrews Plaza/San Pablo Corridor Coalition, Steward Alex Miller-Cole**

*Myself or one of our members visits the Plaza daily. This past Saturday we conducted our third mass clean-up of the park. And on **Friday the 26th** we also washed, sanded and primed the Plaza's main planter and sitting area.*

#### ***Our goals and achievements:***

- Washing of benches
- Sweeping of entire park
- Emptying of trash cans
- Collecting and reporting of illegal dumping
- Painting of park infrastructure
- Overgrown vegetation and trees trimming
- Local neighbor outreach through mass-mailings
- Homeless, sex workers and local addicts outreach
- Installation of Cameras to deter crime
- Holiday decorating
- Checking on park lighting
- Improving park illumination



*Seenardo from Market St.  
powerwashing the entire park*

### **Ostrander Park/ Stewards Georgia and Sam Scherer**

*Having played across the street in Ostrander Park for much of my life, and more recently becoming one of the park stewards, I was disappointed to hear that there would be no more service to the park. Although I have grown out of playing in the park, I thought that it might be a good piece of community service to clear the weeds in the park. It was very tough to clear the thistles with gardening tools and when I came in from only clearing about 30 feet of thistles in one hour my mother suggested that I could write to you being the head of the Oakland Parks Coalition to see if we could borrow a weed-whacker to make the job a little easier. My sister and I have started a non-profit organization with the help of my father in order to buy some trees for the park. The weed whacker would help greatly and we would appreciate it a lot.*

### **Astro Park/Steward Beth Detweiler**

*On The outer bounds of the play area the soil is full of big fat worms, dark chunks of decomposing organic matter and just damp enough in some places to make us want to attempt a few drought tolerant plants. After going on a plant buying spree, we ended up at the park with two trunk loads of lavender, salva, tickweed and primroses. We made a nice dent in the outer ring and are already plotting new spots if these plants take.*

*That's fine with me. It is just myself and one other mom. We worked mainly with Clint and his crew. There is another gardener assigned to the space and he is doing a great job keeping things going.*



*Young volunteer helps to haul compost.*

### **Garber Park Open Space/Steward Shelagh Broderson**

*Garber Park is a 13-acre woodland open space (undeveloped) park behind the Claremont hotel, on the south side of Claremont Ave. The trail that loops through the park leads us by beautiful old oaks, bays, big-leaf maples, as well as an old WPA-era stone fireplace.*

*Garber Park Stewards began last fall in response to Council member Jane Brunner's outreach for volunteers to help maintain North Oakland Parks. We quickly established a mission: Reduce the risk of wildfire, improve the limited trail system while protecting, maintaining, and restoring the natural beauty. We have been holding regular twice-a-month stewardship sessions – the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of the month and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the month. We have tackled invasive weeds such as cape ivy, Himalayan blackberry, and scotch broom, repaired creek bridges, removed debris and are actively working with the City of Oakland Wildfire Prevention District for a special project for wildfire mitigation. We have partnered with the City of Oakland and the Claremont Canyon Conservancy (which began a special Garber Park Fund), and participated in Earth Day and Creek to Bay Day as well as held a week-long clean-up in July.*

*Participation in our large events, such as Earth Day and Creek to Bay Day has been phenomenal; each successful event has inspired us to do more. The City of Oakland, especially Martin Matarrese, Parkland Resource Supervisor, Bryn Saunders who runs the Adopt a Creek Program, Maria Barra-Gibson from Jane Brunner's office, and LeRoy Griffin, Director, Wildfire Prevention Assessment District have been most helpful, providing advice on how we can accomplish our goals one small piece at a time as well as providing the structure and resources to enable a successful Earth Day and Creek to Bay Day.*

### **King Estate Open Space/ Oak Knoll Neighborhood Improvement Association/Philip Dow**

*The 80 acres of natural grassland and oak woodlands that is Glenn Daniel King Estate Open Space (KEOS) is a popular community asset for the neighboring residents of Districts 6 and 7. With a panoramic view of the Bay, the open space is a popular spot for dog-walking and low-environmental-impact recreation, such as running and biking. KEOS provides the solace of nature within an urban setting. It is a place to learn the local birds and native wildflowers, see a fox or red-tailed hawk, or set up a lawn chair to watch a summer meteor shower. Bordered by two public schools, KEOS is an education asset for the study of nature and ecology.*

*Over time, the natural wild land habitats have become the most important aspect of KEOS. Hundreds of hours of volunteer work have been spent removing invasive plant species and planting native oaks. Two years ago, in a surge of effort with OPR oversight and generous sponsorship from District 7 Council Member Larry Reid, Volunteers of Outdoors California and local residents constructed an expanded trail system. These popular meadow and woodland trails offer additional access routes through the park and are maintained through volunteer labor organized by the OKNIA Park Committee.*

*In July of 2009, OKNIA began keeping Adopt-a-Spot liability records. Volunteers have since provided over 180 hours towards trail maintenance, invasive plant eradication, and oak propagation. In addition, OKNIA has a “dog committee” that through community fundraising provides and maintains dog bag dispensers, dog bags, and trash cans at two popular KEOS trailheads.*

*During the Master Plan approval process, the Oakland City Council made it clear that there would be no funds available for any improvements to KEOS. The surrounding community understands that reality and has embraced the stewardship of this unique City of Oakland park.*

#### **Allendale Park/Steward Don Hamilton**

*Don lives next to this park and deeply cares about it. He has been picking up trash daily in Allendale for more than ten years and he works as a volunteer in the Allendale school twice a week. As he makes his daily rounds he is dismayed to see that trash receptacles in some corners of the park are infrequently emptied and trash is flowing to the ground. He would like to engage the local school kids in community service activities in the park and wishes that PWA would increase its trash pickup services.*

### **OPC Recommendations**

We have written at length about volunteerism because OPC believes that volunteerism is the key to the survival of our parks, medians and plazas. In recognition of the declining state of their parks or medians, many new citizen volunteers have come forward; some work quietly and anonymously, cleaning up their little pocket park or median strip; some join groups and attend regular workdays; others lead projects and “work the system” to get what they need. The one thing they all share is a desire to make Oakland a better place to live. But, at best, our City has a disjointed park volunteer support system and most would say it has no real system at all.

If we are serious about keeping our parks viable through this economic downturn we must provide a better structure of support to volunteers of all stripes so they can do their work effectively and feel appreciated. In our 2009 report to the City we stressed the need to create a new position of Volunteer Coordinator for Parks. We are happy to report that, at this writing, a new position has been created and approved and candidates for the job will soon be interviewed by Public Works.

**OPC recommends that the position of Volunteer Coordinator for Parks be carefully designed to provide training and guidelines, to bring the disparate volunteer groups and programs together, to provide clear lines of communication between volunteers and maintenance staff, to encourage the formation of “Friends” groups, to track and quantify volunteer efforts; in short, to optimize volunteerism in our city.**

We cannot leave our business districts out of the equation for they have much to offer to the care of our green spaces. Many Business Improvement Districts (BID) already supplement care to medians or plazas on a regular basis, either by sponsoring workdays or by hiring service crews to clean those areas. Technically, they are prohibited by the City Charter to hire “outside contractors” but, in most cases, Public Works has chosen not to interfere. On the other hand, the centrally located and very high profile “Lake Merritt Uptown and Downtown Oakland” Community Benefit Districts struggled with City authorities to provide a contracted cleanup service to Snow Park and met with considerable resistance. A temporary laissez-faire agreement has been worked out but it is not a long-term solution.

The time has come to give a serious look at the legal prohibitions to hiring “outside labor”. When the City cannot provide services it is folly to reject offers from bona fide Public/Private partnership groups that can.

**OPC recommends that PWA work with the appropriate entities to explore opportunities for Business Districts to provide paid maintenance services to sites that are designated “No Routine Maintenance”.**

Since 2000, Oakland has lost about a third of its maintenance FTEs. Ten years ago there were 120 FTEs, today there are 88.2 authorized positions. Gardener positions took the biggest hit. In 2000 there were 64.75 gardener positions, today, only 36. Tree crews are down half. The loss of so many skilled workers is reflected in the condition of many parks—landscaping is over-grown, trees have dead limbs, shrubs need pruning. Oakland cannot afford to lose any more of its maintenance positions, especially the skilled ones.

**OPC urges City Council to hold the line on budgeting for park maintenance and, when revenues turn north, to dedicate additional funds to the care of Oakland’s parkland.**

In conclusion, OPC asks our representatives to keep in mind the following: a vibrant park system provides children and teens with safe and healthy alternatives; well maintained parks are an important way to attract businesses and/or residents, and to increase property values; parks preserve the historic and cultural character of Oakland. In short, our quality of life is inextricably tied to the quality of our parks; our precious assets must be valued and preserved to keep us all safe and healthy.

**CC:**

The Honorable Jean Quan  
 City Administrator Dan Lindheim  
 PWA Interim Director Vit Trojan  
 PWA Assistant Director Brooke Levin  
 PWA Parks & Buildings Manager Jim Ryugo  
 OPR Director Audree Jones-Taylor  
 Councilmember District 1 Jane Brunner

Councilmember District 2 Pat Kernighan  
 Councilmember District 3 Nancy Nadel  
 Councilmember District 4 Libby Schaaf  
 Councilmember District 5 Ignacio de la Fuente  
 Councilmember District 6 Desley Brooks  
 Councilmember District 7 Larry Reid  
 Councilmember At Large Rebecca Kaplan

