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# Hayes Valley Playground and Community Center

**Client /**

**The Trust for Public Land  
San Francisco Recreation & Parks**

**Architecture Firm /**

**WRNS Studio**

**An on-going series of case studies that feature projects  
by AIA members participating in The 1% who are making  
pro bono service an integral part of design practice.**







## Project

**Hayes Valley Playground  
and Clubhouse**

## Location

**San Francisco, California**

## Date

**2011**

## Client / Landscape architecture

**The Trust for Public Land (TPL)  
San Francisco Recreation & Parks  
Department (SFRPD)**

## Landscape architecture team

**Jennifer Isacoff; Alejandra Chiesa;  
Trudy Garber; Jacob Gilchrist**

## Architecture firm

**WRNS Studio**

## Architecture team

**Bryan Shiles, AIA; Brian Milman,  
Kyle Elliot; Russ Sherman; Li Kuo,  
AIA; Geoff Brown; Jenny Huang;  
Melinda Turner**

## Cost

**\$3.9M**

## Value of pro bono architecture services

**\$120,000**

## Area

**Clubhouse 2500 sq. ft.**

**Site 12,500 sq. ft.**

## More info

**[www.wrnsstudio.com](http://www.wrnsstudio.com)**

**[www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)**

**[www.sfrecpark.org](http://www.sfrecpark.org)**



## Architect /

**Bryan Shiles, AIA, Founding Partner, WRNS  
Brian Millman, Partner, WRNS**

WRNS Studio connected with TPL through The 1% program. After our interview with TPL, it was unanimous in the office that the Hayes Valley Playground and Clubhouse project was a great opportunity to give something back. Although we were unsure of where the project would take us, we took it on and worked pro bono through schematic design. We had to go through the city's regular bidding process, which took time and effort. After we got through schematic design, we then negotiated a contract for a reduced rate, pretty much at cost, and continued on.

This project was unique in its multiple partnerships and voices. TPL and SFRPD worked as a great team and were united on the vision as the project clients. As a city agency, SFRPD had multiple divisions

## Client /

**Jennifer Isacoff, Program Director, TPL  
Alejandra Chiesa, Project Manager, TPL  
Trudy Garber, Project Associate, TPL  
Jacob Gilchrist, Project Manager, SFRPD**

In 2007, four CEO's from large local corporations approached TPL with the challenge to match a \$4M gift to use towards building parks. TPL developed the Parks for People – San Francisco Initiative based on the need and condition of existing open space in San Francisco, which included Hayes Valley Playground, Boeddeker Park, and Balboa Park. The city had already allocated \$1.9M for the Hayes Valley Playground and Clubhouse project. TPL used this money and other private funding to provide a \$4M to match the challenge and raise over \$16M total to re-build the three parks and clubhouses.

SFRPD assigned a project manager to work as a liaison with two TPL project managers; all of whom are landscape architects. Jacob was working for TPL during the Hayes Valley project and has



and connections with political powers like the district supervisor and the Mayor. Along with the complex client partnership, the local community's ability to maintain a united vision really made this project unique.

We started the design process by looking at the culture and socioeconomic reality of the Hayes Valley neighborhood. We also asked the community a lot of questions to draw out information to help us move the design forward. They wanted something different, something unexpected.

The Hayes Valley Clubhouse is unique and doesn't look like the rest of the neighborhood. The building has some very distinguishing characteristics because everyone involved precipitated its story. The community developed a powerful narrative in the public outreach process. As a result the project expresses the local identity in ways that aren't literal.

This bright, colorful, and somewhat unexpected building represents an openness through its massing. The design is a barbell scheme, with two simple community rooms joined by the porch. In reconfiguring the site, we moved the building out of the way of the park, and let a green roof roll over the structure. The multipurpose room is the larger volume and is meant to be like a community living room, as it opens to the park and connects the two masses. The breezeway is a porch, a place for people to hang out when it rains.

Designed to be accessible to the public on a regular basis, the building's operable glass face makes a transparent connection between the community and the program inside. Because of city budget cuts, the clubhouse currently is not open to the public unless coordinated with clubhouse tenant. Youth programs are run by a private organization who rents the space. The open design instead says, "there's going to be a better day." The doors can be thrown open for big events, or closed to allow use of the magical reading nook.



Courtesy of WRNS Studio

**"The collaborative efforts of the architects, TPL, SFRPD and the community made the project a success. Now the community loves and watches over the playground and clubhouse, and the park is used all of the time."**

— Alejandra Chiesa

**"... the project demonstrates what the city is capable of creating"**

— Jacob Gilchrist

since become a project manager at SFRPD.

Although uncommon to most city park projects, the Hayes Valley Playground needed an architect to design the clubhouse. TPL connected with WRNS Studio through The 1% program. After the public bid process, we chose WRNS because they truly believe in collaboration and the benefits of community participation in the design process.

Over seven months the community participated in the design process in ten workshops, including meetings and focus groups in schools and at the food bank. While SFRPD hosted the community meetings, WRNS and TPL worked as a team to facilitate them. WRNS donated their time on this huge outreach process, where we asked the community about their vision and the problems they experienced with the existing conditions.

As a team we went on site visits to understand existing design conventions. We looked at SFRPD clubhouses around the city, identified their strengths and weaknesses, and brought those ideas to community meetings. The community was equally dedicated and involved. Their opinions on how the site should function were an important addition to the analysis as well as the design.

To provide the community with a public park they will use and want, the designers needed to listen and accommodate everyone as best they could. The best public design comes through collaboration. The collaborative efforts of the architects, TPL, SFRPD and the community made the project a success. Today, the community loves and watches over the playground, and the park is in use all of the time.

The residents of Hayes Valley were inclusive, collaborative, and sophisticated about design and planning. As a result of the 1989 earthquake, a freeway fell in their neighborhood. Residents worked together





The inherent sustainable approach to this project was reinforced with TPL's mission to conserve natural resources. The money that would have gone to LEED accreditation went instead to photovoltaic (PV) panels on the roof. Luckily, other site priorities allowed the building to have mostly north facing windows, which meant fewer mechanical systems and less heat gain. The clubhouse was designed without air conditioning. The main activity room is passively ventilated and cooled with fans and operable windows. The PV panels on the roof heat the water for the radiant floor heating system. All of the clubhouse insulation is made from recycled reclaimed blue jeans donated by Levi Strauss & Co. and all the wood is Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified. As SFRPD's first building with a green roof, it was a big commitment for them to take on. In order to convince the city it was feasible, we conducted a lot of research. With SFRPD, we met with the head of facilities at the California Academy of Sciences to learn from their green roof experience and expertise.

Every time we visit the park it is lively and being used. That is the best indication that the design is a success. We have been surprised and delighted by the diversity of the people that use the park and clubhouse. It's been really exciting to see people in the morning on the outdoor treadmill.

The community process for the Hayes Valley project was incredibly successful. As a result, TPL came to us with a second project, Boeddeker Park, and asked us to be involved again. Now with this one underway, we are continuing the partnership. Compared to the Hayes Valley project, the site and community are both very different and it shows how important the community and context are to design. Boeddeker Park is an incredibly complex and interesting site in a super dense neighborhood laden with historical significance as well as a variety of socioeconomic issues. The contextual complexity required our utmost sensitivity and care in making design decisions. For these reasons our experience on this second park and clubhouse has been phenomenal

to re-imagine and rebuild Hayes Valley as stakeholders in the Central Freeway Replacement Project. They brought their technical knowledge honed through that process, along with strong relationships and good communication skills among each other, to the Hayes Valley Playground design process.

In the original site layout, the clubhouse was adjacent to the street. You couldn't see the playground behind the building and it felt unsafe. Right away, the community knew that they wanted the building at the back of the playground, not the front.

Today, along with the children's play area, the site design incorporates a fitness area for adult groups and pairs. Just down the hill is Patricia's Green, another public space with a lawn. Because there is access to green space in the vicinity, SFRPD leased the clubhouse (and others in the city) to a tenant who was from the community and who provided programming that was compatible with the mission of Recreation and Parks. TPL and the community worked with them to find a tenant who shared the vision of Hayes Valley Playground to be an open, vibrant hub of activity and diversity.

The clubhouse was designed as a multi-purpose space where Opportunity Impact now runs a neighborhood after school program for kids during the week. Due to budget constraints, during the construction process SFRPD decided they could no longer staff city-owned clubhouses and they devised a strategy to rent them out Monday through Friday. TPL worked with them to find a tenant that shared the same values and so far it has been working great. During the weekends, it is available for anyone in the community to rent it out.

Originally the neighborhood wanted a roof deck with community garden plots. Eventually, we agreed that an inaccessible green roof would be safer and would bring other sustainable aspects to the building. As a compromise, we designed a community



**“San Franciscans are proud of the new park and building. Hayes Valley Playground is not just for the community, it’s for the city as a whole.”**

— Trudy Garber



and exceptionally rewarding as well. We are looking forward to sharing both of these great spaces with our children and communities. •

garden on the ground level and the city now maintains the green roof.

The benefits of the green roof include better storm water management by way of capturing rainwater that would otherwise go into the sewers. A living roof’s water retention provides better insulation for the building and reduces heating and cooling costs. The upper layers also protect the roof membrane which makes it last longer, while the plants themselves reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Our shared role in the design process enabled several unique features including the living roof. Since this is the first living roof on an SFRPD building, the design team worked closely with operations and maintenance staff on the details. While cautious, SFRPD was eager to incorporate green building strategies into their public facilities.

The park and clubhouse are both progressive in their design and valued by the community; the project demonstrates what the city is capable of creating. San Franciscans are proud of the new park and building. Hayes Valley Playground and Clubhouse is not just for the community, it’s for the city as a whole. •





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