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Hamilton Park Renovation Project – Post Mortem

Linda Bonder, December, 2002 (rev 0.1)

Project Summary

Hamilton Park playground is next to Bridlemile Elementary School. Until the fall of 2001, the playground had only a merry-go-round with asphalt surfacing around it, a big old metal slide (where little kids fell between the stairs, there was little “turn-around room” at the top, and little kids’ shoes got stuck and they fell off the sides of the slide), a set of 3 teeter-totters, a swing set, and some rock art that kids climbed on.

The neighborhood raised \$73,000, worked with contractors, SWNI, Portland Parks & Recreation, (and subsequently Portland Department of Transportation, and Department of Planning & Review). The merry go round and old slide were removed, a new swing set for babies & a new play structure were built, along with a path for ADA accessibility, a new water fountain, drainage systems, and a wood chip safety surfacing.

General Note

The lessons of any project depend ultimately on the experience of the project manager & team going into the project. As project manager, my expertise was in marketing, so most lessons learned were in construction.

Timeline

Sept '00: notices placed around the neighborhood to form a committee

Oct '00: 1st committee meeting

Dec '00: fundraising begun

Jan '00: forms filed with PP&R for “Citizen Initiated Project” and grant request

April '01: first meeting with parks planning staff

May '01: first drawings submitted to Parks

Late June '01: ordered the play structure

August '01: drawings finalized, contractor selection started

October '01: broke ground

Late October/early November '01: volunteer weekends to install structure & distribute wood chips

January '02: construction 85% complete

March/April '02: finished grading, planted grass

November/December '02: installed plaques, resolved final issues with plumbing

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Budget & Vendor Analysis

	Cost	Vendor/Contact	Comments on vendor	Gen'l comments
PLANNING				
Fundraising (mailers, t-shirts)	\$ 2,670	T-shirts:		Title company provided mailing list at no charge, Kink discounted mailers, used SWNI non-profit postage #
Portland Parks & Rec fee	(waived)	Planner: George Lozovoy. Construction manager: Gary Woodruff		We had an initial commitment from PP&R to bill us \$2 for their time. Their actual time spent came to about \$7000. In the end, they waived the fee.
Landscape architecture	(donated)	WRG Design, through Jeff Simpson		Jeff is no longer at WRG. Work was valued at ~\$16,000
EQUIPMENT				
Play structure (incl shipping)	\$ 21,731	GameTime, through Sitalines, Inc. (Jim Ringelberg)	Couldn't have asked for a better partner.	Shipping was about \$4K
New swing set (incl. shipping)	\$ 789	GameTime		Parks wanted to use their own chains & swing seats.
Donor recognition plaques	\$ 984	Macadam Aluminum & Bronze	Plaques are beautiful. Possibly could have paid less elsewhere.	Ordered the first plaque when we thought we were done with fundraising. Next time I'd wait!
INSTALLATION				
Rentals: fence, ladders, truck, PDOT permit	\$ 612	National Rent-a-fence, Barbur rentals, Budget		
Site work: (Demolition, excavation, rock prep, play area holes, trenching, etc)	\$ 25,000	Bedrock Excavation (Joe Walsh)	Great to work with & did a great job at far below market rate.	Would have done an even better job if someone w/construction experience had been managing them directly. Market rate might have been near double.
Play structure construction	(donated)	Neighborhood volunteers, Dept of Community Justice	Definitely use both!	Adult Community Justice volunteers did a super job!
Seat wall & curbs	\$ 7,335	DFC Construction (Doug Fifield)	Might use him again for very simple concrete work. No walls, no curves.	~40% seat wall, 60% curbs. His price enabled the project (was ~30% of other vendors), but we got what we paid for. Very slow work pushed construction into a very wet Dec. Quality of curbs is bad.
Handicap ramps, trash can pad, water fountain pad	\$ 865	DFC Construction	Did fine on this.	
Concrete pumping	\$ 800			
Handicap sidewalk (6'x20')	\$ 975	DFC Construction	Did fine on this.	Would have cost half as much if PPR & PDOT hadn't spent so much time negotiating about it.
Sidewalk in park (asphalt)	\$ 2,000	Metro Paving (DJ)	Great!	Donated \$510, got name on plaque. Other bids were >\$3000
Laying out structure holes, supervision for hole drilling & volunteer assembly	\$ 1,250	Platinum Construction (Ed)	Would not use again	Layout was fine, but supervision was sub-par, and he didn't come back for last days. Would use Jim Ringelberg for supervision
Wood chip surfacing & drainage system purchase	\$ 8,844	GameTime	Fine	GameTime's drainage system is unique. Maybe could have bought wood chips separately for less \$.
Grass seed	(donated)	Hobbs & Hopkins	Thank you	Value \$320. Contact through Jeff Simpson.
Grass planting after construction	(donated)	Total Landscape Care	Dale	TLC was prepared to donate all this work, but PP&R decided they'd rather do it.
Fix piperail fence	(donated)	Neighbor?		
Misc site work finalization	(donated)	PP&R		Parks generously finished up the site work rather than coordinate with our vendors.
TOTAL	\$ 73,855			

To do again: Among all vendors & potential contractors, we promoted our non-profit status and offered recognition on the park plaque in exchange for a tax-deductible in-kind donation.

To do differently:

- We had 2 people consulting on construction costs, and we went to final plans with their estimates in mind. It turned out that neither of them were very accurate. When actual bids started coming in, we were WAY over budget. Next time I'd talk to actual contractors to get estimates way before finalizing plans.

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- Because of the schedule we were trying to meet and the schedules of the landscape architect and playground designer, we allowed the play structure and landscape plan to be developed independently. As a result, we ended up with a landscape design & a play structure that were not the best shapes for one another. We could probably have saved a few thousand dollars in site work & materials by optimizing the structure & landscape design for one another. The balancing factor was that given the schedules involved, this change would have cost us at least a month if not more, and would likely have pushed construction from the fall out to the next spring. There is also a chance that such a delay would have cost us the significant discount given by the play structure manufacturer.

Time of year considerations

Because of the way things turned out (mainly how long it took to find a concrete contractor that we could afford, and the time it took him to do the work), we did much of the construction during the winter months. Unfortunately, 2001 was a particularly wet winter (32 days of downpour in a row).

To do differently: try to start construction Sept 1 – to avoid the busy park & construction summer season, and the wet winter season. It also may be easier to get volunteers in the fall than in the summer.

Play structure installation

To do again: have at least some volunteer days, whether for assembling equipment, distributing wood chips, or both. It was a great experience, gave people pride & ownership, saved lots of money, and wasn't really that hard. Use Community Service volunteers from the dept of Alternative Justice (they were awesome, and free).

To do differently: get a better supervisor for the installation (if it's done by volunteers). Try to budget for a contractor to finish whatever volunteers don't get done.

Working with "The City"

To do again: Work on having a real partnership with PP&R.

To do differently:

Understand better the different departments who had to approve various parts of the plan. Despite having asked "what permits will we need?", I didn't hear that we needed buy-off from the city's Dept of Planning & Review and Dept of Transportation. Late interaction with these departments cost serious time, effort and money!

Publicity:

To do again: do a neighborhood mailing & mailbox stuffings. Have a title company provide the mailing list for homes closest to the park. Get regular coverage in the SWNI news, Multnomah Village Post, Southwest Connection, Oregonian. Post fliers in community centers, preschools, the school etc. Make personal visits to the homes

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directly across from the park to ensure they knew about the project and to get their comments. Work with the soccer club on playground layout & construction timing.

To do differently: instead of doing a 5000 piece mailing, I'd stay closer to the park and do a 1000-2000 piece mailing multiple times.

Fundraising

To do again:

- T-shirts: \$20 for the 1st, \$15 for each additional. Selling the t-shirts was helpful, and did help publicize the project (people saw others wearing the shirts, made it easier to ask for money). But most donors did not even request t-shirts – they wanted all their \$\$ to go to the play structure. We did not order sizes for really small kids, because we would have had to pay extra charges to have the artwork reduced in size. Many people asked about small sizes, but were ok with our rationale, and gave donations anyway.
- Plaque: \$500 to get your family's name on a permanent plaque in the park. Lots of people donated exactly \$500. Listed names on the plaque in alphabetical order.
- Grant applications & letters to businesses: we did have some success with these, got local businesses to post park information, and got donations of food for volunteer days as well.
- Broad involvement: we got donations from about 250 families and 25 businesses. Some donations were only \$10 or a batch of brownies, but the broad financial & volunteer participation made it feel like a true neighborhood accomplishment.

To do differently: Perhaps have another tier of some sort for donors of \$750 or more? Wait to order the plaque until fundraising is really, really done. Try to get small kid-size t-shirts. Find another way to approach businesses, and use the Oregon Foundations Book to get more grant money.

Hundreds of people made the new Hamilton Park playground possible. THANK YOU!