



*Let's Recycle Better, Together.*

# RECYCLING AND LITTER PREVENTION IN PARKS

WEDNESDAY MARCH 5TH 1:00 TO 2:00PM EST.



# Today's Panelists



**Meredith Gauthier**

*Sustainability & Resilience  
Program Manager*

City of Austin, Parks &  
Recreation Department



**Taylor Emerson**

*Manager of Strategic Planning*

San Francisco Recreation &  
Parks Department

# Join the Discussion

From your toolbar:



Share your experience  
& opinions

Look for links  
to resources

Type direct questions  
for panelists



# Recycling Implementation in Public Parks

**Meredith Gauthier**

LEED AP BD+C, SITES AP, TRUE Advisor

Sustainability & Resilience Program Manager

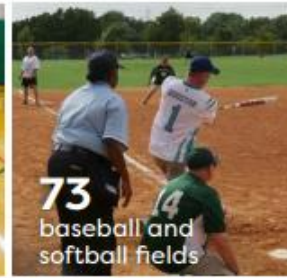
City of Austin Parks and Recreation



## PARD BY THE NUMBERS

The Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) has been the steward of the City of Austin's public lands since 1928. As such, we protect and maintain parkland and urban forests.

We preserve and restore natural resources and historic places, maintain trails, and offer a variety of sports, recreation, educational enrichment, arts programs, cultural opportunities and aquatic activities.



# PARKS & RECREATION ZERO WASTE INITIATIVES

MEREDITH GAUTHIER, SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE PROGRAM MANAGER



- Zero Waste Initiatives
- Recycling Plan Implementation

## Department-Wide Zero Waste Initiatives

- Ensure compliance with Universal Recycling Ordinance guidelines and support City of Austin Zero Waste goals and standards
- Develop and implement recycling and organics diversion guidelines for PARD facilities and events
- PARD Materials Reuse Group
- Coordinate with volunteer groups for litter abatement workdays

## Recycling Plan Implementation

- Phase I: Metro parks, Athletics sites, Aquatics sites, Golf sites, CIP projects
- Phase II: District parks
- Phase III: Neighborhood parks, greenbelts and trailheads, and special use sites



# Austin Sustainability Goals

## Zero Waste by 2040

Reduce the amount of material sent to landfills by 90% by 2040.

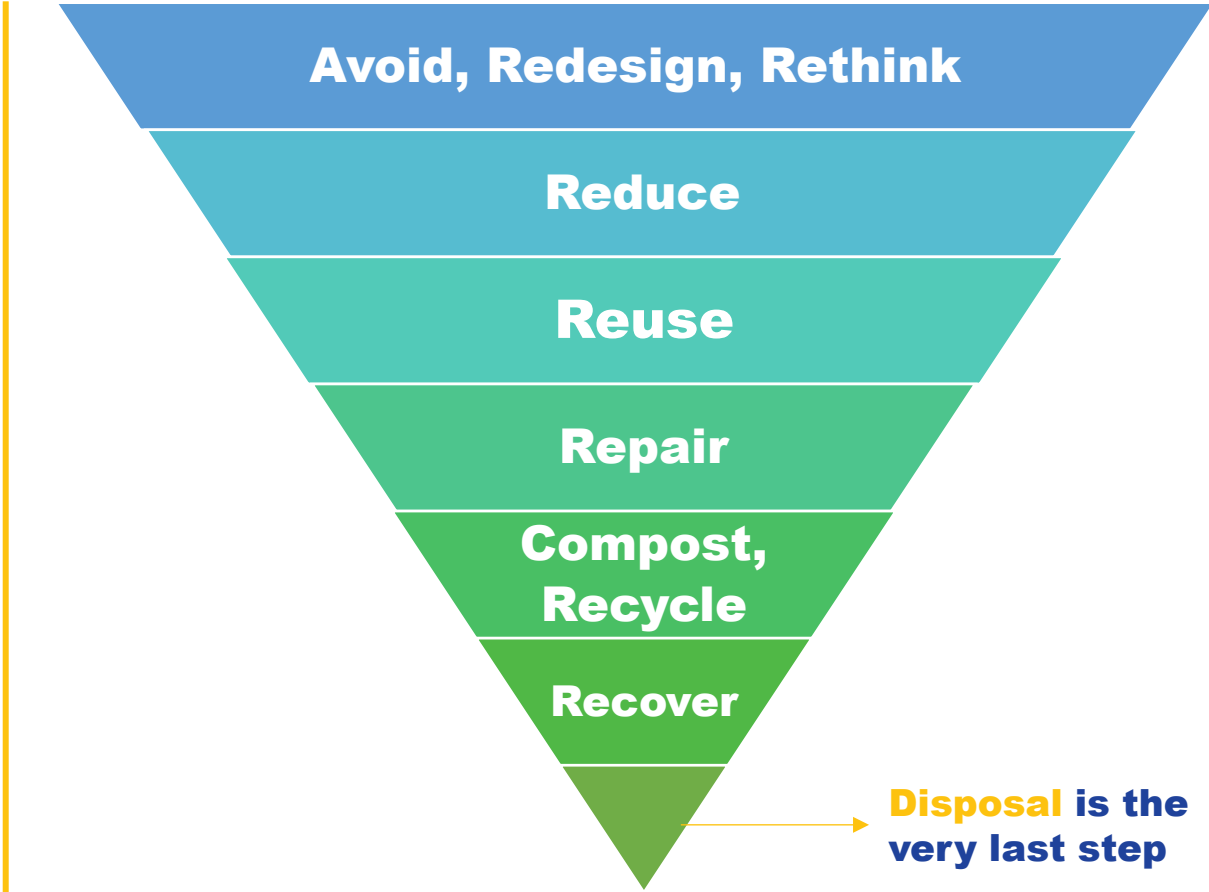
## Net-Zero Emissions by 2040

Mitigate the impacts of climate change as part of Austin's Climate Equity Plan and reduce fossil fuel use to nearly zero by 2040.



# What is Zero Waste?

- Minimizing waste production as much as possible
- Reducing consumption
- Prioritizing reusing, repairing, composting, and recycling over landfilling



# Phased Approach to Recycling Implementation in 300 Parks



Started in late 2019, recycling implementation completed early 2024.  
What's next? MAINTENANCE PHASE



# Updated Receptacles



- Removed outdated concrete receptacles
- Added new color-coded, paired receptacles with English & Spanish labels as well as Mutt Mitt Stations for dog waste
- Recycling on left, trash on right – placement doesn't matter as much as consistency throughout park system



# Receptacle Installation Plans for Each Park



- Deliberate, systematic approach throughout the park system
- Identified locations with maintenance staff -> **CRITICAL** to partner with your O&M team to understand daily usage & seasonal patterns
- Optimized dumpster routes
- Pocket Parks (smallest parks) transitioned to Pack It In, Pack It Out unless park has additional amenities (picnic shelters, playground, etc.)

# Let's Talk Litter...



# 2021 TrashBlitz Austin Litter Study

- How bad was our litter problem?
- Spring 2021 TrashBlitz Austin study
  - Community-based initiative w/ network of NGOs, volunteers, and local projects to collect litter-related data.  
Partners: The 5 Gyres Institute, Litterati, Inland Ocean Coalition, Into the Sea
- 168 volunteers + 80 randomly selected sampling points across Austin -> **6,656 total pieces of litter observed and collected**
- 30% of plastic litter observed was at these 3 watershed locations. →
- Cigarette butts (32%), wrappers (22%), and bottle caps (7%) were the top littered objects by number of items (count).
- Litter analysis showed 68% of observed litter was made of plastic.
- Single-use items were ~1/3 of all observed litter.
- Top 3 littered brands by number of items were Coca-Cola, Marlboro, and McDonalds.
- Glass and aluminum accounted for over 75% of the total weight of litter.



# 2022 Watershed Study

- **How bad was our litter problem?**
- Watershed Protection Department study in response to City Council Resolution
- 20 Creeks, 110 miles, Observations every 30ft -> **19,467 data points**
- 76% of the trash is found in about 10% of the creek area
- NO correlation with any one feature like zoning/land use, density, parks
- Top three sources for the trash are homeless encampments, overflowing dumpsters and dumping in general

## HOW TO FIX THIS?

**1) EXTRACTION** (physically removing trash from waterways)

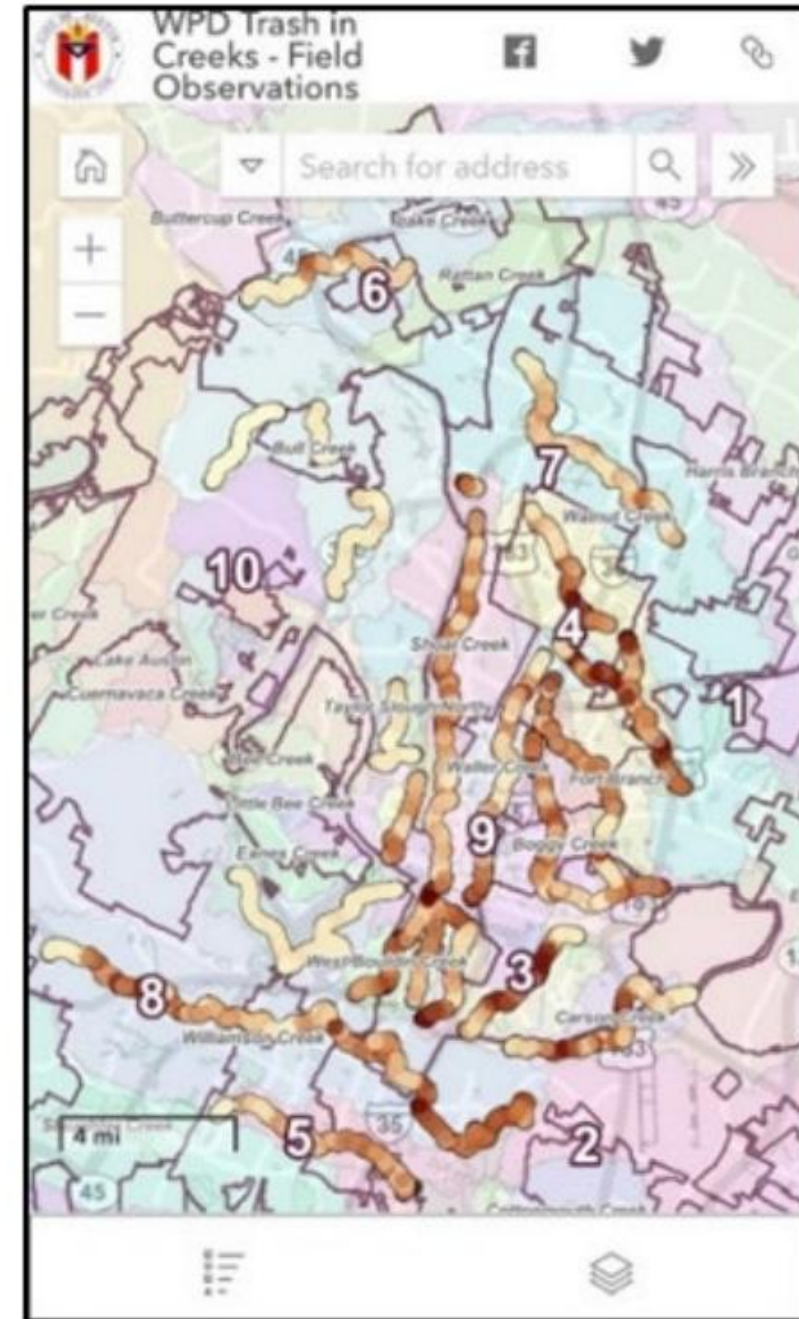
ex: structural controls, machines, manual labor

**2) INTERCEPTION** (keeping trash from entering waterways)

ex: education, enforcement, landscape cleanups, structural controls

**3) SOURCE REDUCTION** (stemming the flow into our community)

ex: limit single use plastics



# Where is litter coming from?

- Piling trash next to receptacles
  - Solution: more receptacles, increased servicing
  - Pack It In, Pack It Out signage (note: not followed here!)



# Where is litter coming from?

- Homeless encampments at parks
  - Solution: difficult issue, multi-pronged approach needed to assist those experiencing homelessness and help reduce litter from encampments
  - Partner with The Other Ones Foundation for park cleanups (alternative work program pays \$15/hr and offers case management)
  - Violet Storage Cart program for personal belongings and Violet Bags for trash with dropoff location



Photo source: The Other Ones Foundation



# Where is litter coming from?



- Illegal dumping
  - Solution: wildlife/game cameras to photograph license plates
  - Solution: locked dumpsters behind vehicle bollards/vehicle gates – prevent vehicles driving up to dump



# Where is litter coming from?

- Piñata/cake box/pizza box problem...

-->solution: oversized trash units added!



# Where is litter coming from?



- Third party events on parkland not planning for recycling
  - Solution: Zero Waste plans required for events on parkland



## Austin Event Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan

As of April 1, 2019, all Tier 2, 3 and 4 events are required to submit a Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan with their Special Event Permit application under the [Special Events Ordinance](#). Your event is required to meet the following standards **no later than 30 calendar days prior to the first date of the event**. You must:

- Provide the same capacity for recycling as landfill trash (1:1 ratio).
- Recycle all aluminum, plastics and cardboard.
- Educate event staff and vendors on the availability and location of dumpsters.
- Group, label and regularly maintain all collection bins.
- Store and maintain dumpsters to prevent overflow, leaking and to deter wildlife or illegal dumping.
- Include the location of dumpsters, roll offs, trash and collection bins on your event map or site plan.

Please note: A final Austin Center for Events (ACE) special event permit shall not be granted until a Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan has been approved by Austin Resource Recovery Special Events.

Please provide the following information for your event.

## Applicant details

# City Plastic Commitments



Global  
Commitment

## GOAL: Reduce & Eliminate Single-use Plastics

Address problematic plastic waste by creating a circular economy for plastics, as part of a national and global commitment through the U.S Plastics Pact and New Plastics Economy Global Commitment.

# 2024 Single-Use Plastics Policy

*“Employees shall not purchase single-use plastic water bottles or single-use plastic service ware (e.g., Styrofoam, straws, cutlery, bowls, etc.) for use by employees or the public at City of Austin properties or facilities. These items may be purchased and distributed on a periodic basis to respond to emergency situations or in specific times of crisis determined to be necessary by the Department Director”*  
*(ARR Zero Waste at City Facilities Procedure, pg. 11).*

## ZERO WASTE IDEAS:

- Encourage staff and program participants to bring their own bottle or mug
- Have a stock of donated & reusable coffee mugs
- Have a place where staff/program participants can wash cups or flatware with soap and storage for washed items
- Have kids or volunteers wash utensils as part of program



# More Litter Solutions

- “It’s My Park Day” spring and fall cleanup with partner nonprofit
- Waterway/ Creekside litter
  - Solution: Reusable yellow mesh bags provided to park campers so they can pack out recyclables to containers at entry stand/pay station area
  - Solution: Kayak Clean-Up Crew – park concession provides free kayaks for weekly cleanup event
- Monofilament fishing line problem
  - Solution: Reel In & Recycle units provided by an Eagle Scout project



# Vandalism



- Vandalism of receptacles including burning, graffiti, theft
  - Solution: Cable ties for lids, heavy-duty recycled plastic receptacles
  - Last resort: Adding old concrete receptacles back

# Public Education: Leave No Trace Campaign



PROTECT THE  
PLACES YOU LOVE.  
**LEAVE NO TRACE**

[austintexas.gov/leavenotrace](http://austintexas.gov/leavenotrace)



# Public Education: Consistent Colors and Labels

## LANDFILL TRASH



Color: brown, grey, black, silver (with label)

## RECYCLING



Color: blue or silver (with label)

## COMPOST



Color: green

# Public Education: Consistent Signage

## RECYCLING

## COMPOST

## LANDFILL TRASH

**WHAT CAN I RECYCLE?**  
¿QUÉ PUEDO RECICLAR?

**NO:**

AustinRecycles.com

**WHAT CAN I RECYCLE?**  
¿QUÉ PUEDO RECICLAR?

**NO:**

AustinRecycles.com

**ORGANICS**  
Orgánicos

**ALL FOOD WASTE - RESIDUOS DE ALIMENTOS**

AUSTIN RESOURCE RECOVERY

**ORGANICS**  
Orgánicos

**COFFEE & TEA COMPOST ONLY - NO FOOD - NO MEAT**

AUSTIN RESOURCE RECOVERY

**WHAT CAN I COMPOST?**  
¿QUÉ PUEDO COMPOSTAR?

**NO:**

AustinRecycles.com

**COMPOST**

**SOLAMENTE TOALLAS DE PAPEL**  
**PAPER TOWELS**  
*Only*

AUSTIN RESOURCE RECOVERY

**LANDFILL TRASH**  
**TRASH**  
BASURA SOLAMENTE

**LANDFILL TRASH**  
*Only*  
BASURA SOLAMENTE

**No**  
**PAPER TOWELS**  
NO TOALLAS DE PAPEL

AUSTIN RESOURCE RECOVERY



FREE SIGNS! Use [Sign Maker | AustinTexas.gov](https://www.austintexas.gov/signmaker)

# Public Education: Pet Waste

- Problem: pet waste thrown into woods, pet waste put in recycling bin
  - Solution: “Pet Waste Goes Here!” stickers on trash receptacles (coming soon!)
  - Mutt Mitt stations
  - Scoop the Poop campaign



# Pet Waste Pollutes

*Pet waste left on the ground spreads diseases and washes into our creeks.*



[www.ScoopThePoopAustin.org](http://www.ScoopThePoopAustin.org)



*Scoop the Poop*  
*Every Stinkin' Time.*



# Public Education: Recycling Signage



- Clear and consistent
- “EMPTY CANS & BOTTLES ONLY” to reduce contamination

# Staff Education: Waste Sorting Kit Game



2 sets of clean waste items,  
separated into bags

6 containers  
with labels



# Staff Education: Waste Sorting Quiz

## Which Bin Does It Go In?

\* Required

1

Which waste bin should PLASTIC WRAP/BAGS go in? \*



- Recycling
- Compost
- Landfill Trash

# Staff Education: Waste Sorting Quiz

4

Which waste bin should PLASTIC UTENSILS go in? \*



- Recycling
- Compost
- Landfill Trash

# Staff Education: Waste Sorting Quiz

6

Which waste bin should USED PAPER TOWELS OR NAPKINS go in? \*



- Recycling
- Compost
- Landfill Trash



# Protect the places you love. Leave no trace

[austintexas.gov/leavenotrace](https://austintexas.gov/leavenotrace)



## Thank You! Questions?

Meredith Gauthier  
[meredith.gauthier@austintexas.gov](mailto:meredith.gauthier@austintexas.gov)




# Live Poll #1

**Have you tried removing waste bins to address litter in a park setting?** *(Click only one)*

- Yes, successfully reduced litter
- Yes, mixed / inconclusive results
- Yes, but caused more litter
- It's worked in some location but not others
- No, have not removed bins to address litter

***Share details in the chat***



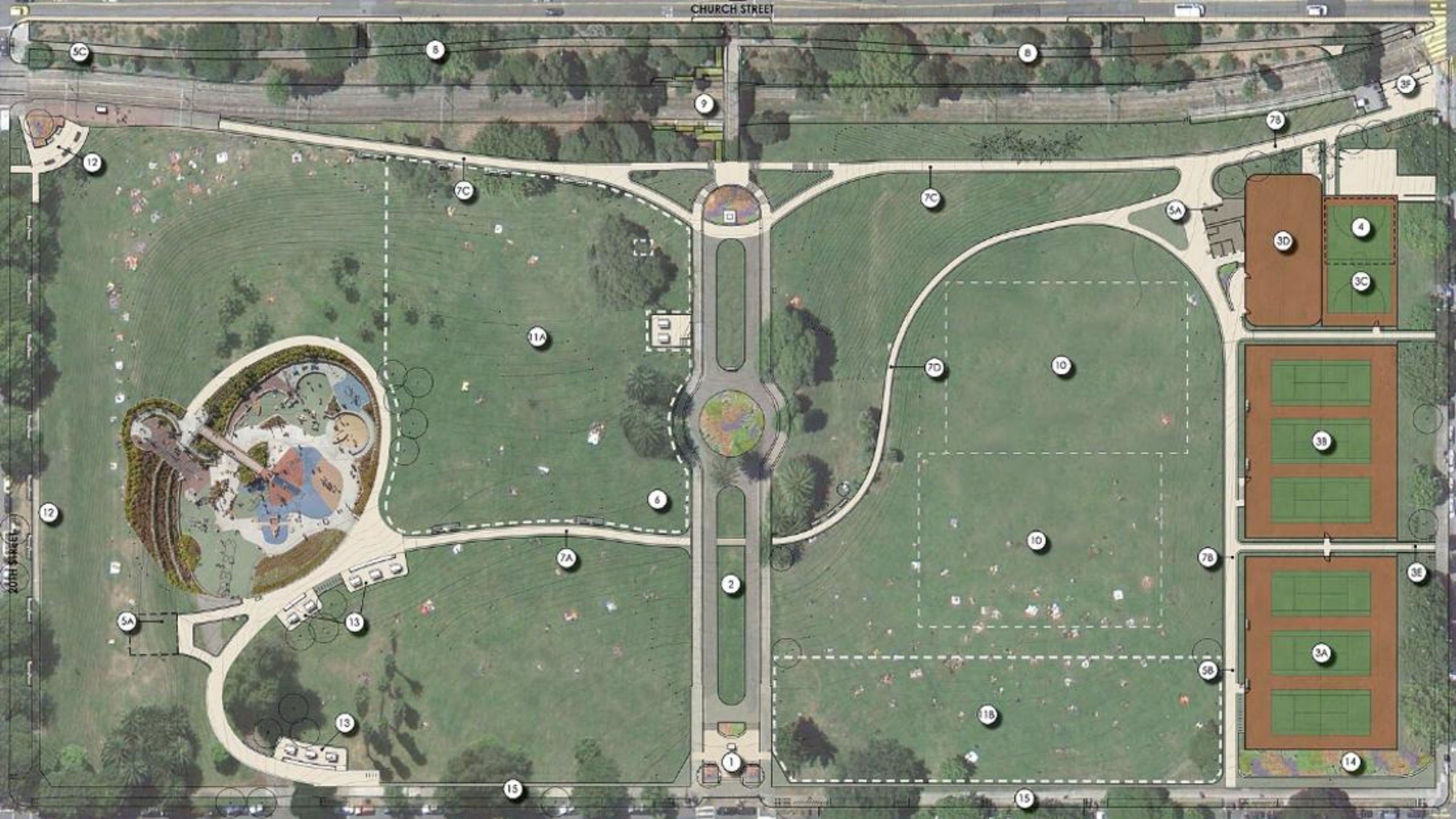
LOVE  
♥ DOL  
ORES

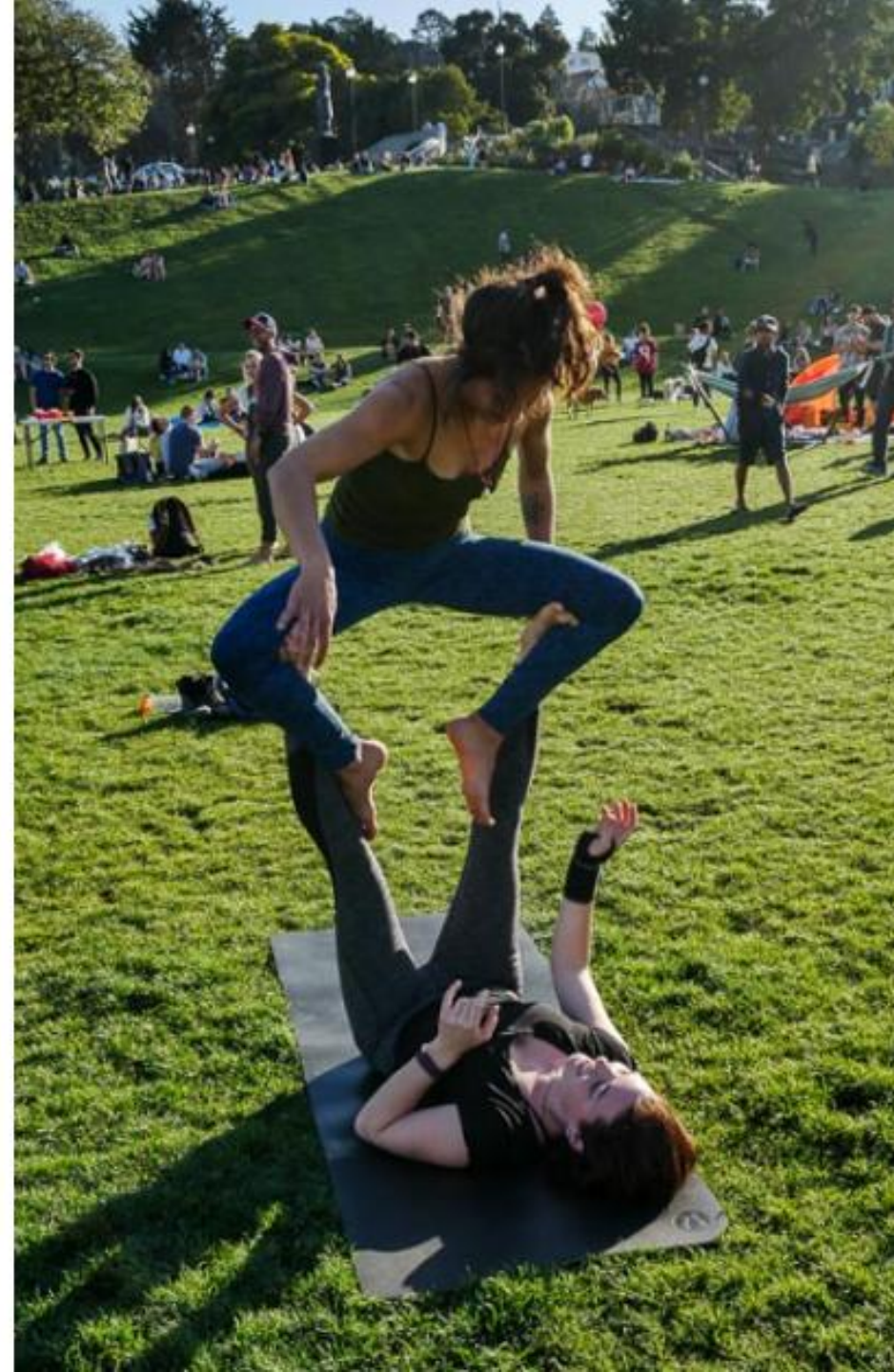


# LOVE DOLORES

*A 10-Year Stewardship Campaign  
at One of San Francisco's Most Popular Parks*













# PROBLEM DEFINITION (2014)

## Inadequate Park Infrastructure

- Only four restrooms
- Trash cans inside the park often overflowed, difficult service due to grade and park crowds

## Expensive Maintenance

- \$500,000 annually for gardeners doing litter abatement
- \$250,000 Recology scavenge costs

## Social/cultural context

- Significant increase in popularity ~ 2010
- Rise in convenience culture with food and beverage to go and single use packages
- A sense of lawlessness with raves, drinking, vending
- Media coverage criticizing park management
- 2014 Department intervention deemed “war on fun”



# OPPORTUNITY TO RESET

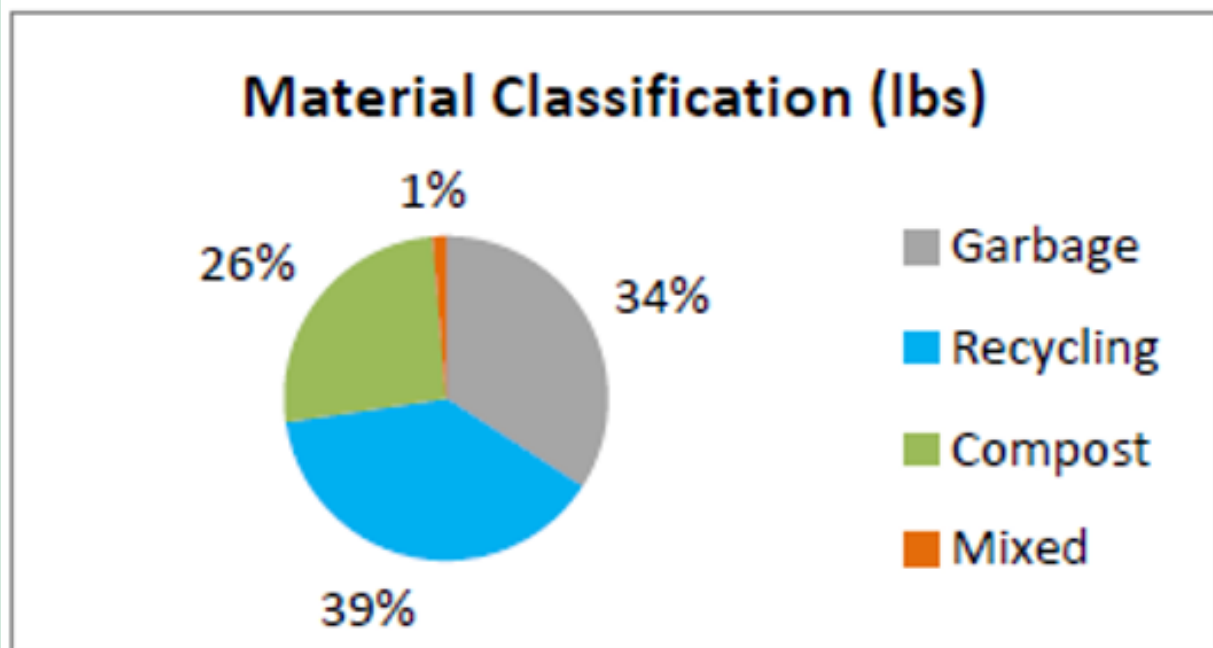
*\$20.5M renovation funded with General Obligation Parks Bond*

- New restrooms with expanded capacity
- Renovated tennis and basketball courts
- New multi-use court
- Improved designated off-leash dog play areas
- New overlook
- Improved irrigation, ADA access, and entrances

# LESSONS LEARNED

- 65% divertible waste
- Waste volume needed more capacity and/or higher service

Commodity	Weight (lbs)	% of total
Garbage	1519.4	34.1
Recycling	1715.8	38.5
Compost	1156.8	26.1
Mixed	59.2	1.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4451.2</b>	<b>100</b>



# LESSONS LEARNED

- More trash  $\neq$  less litter
- Direct communication is best. “Put trash in bin” is better than “Please don’t litter”
- Interpersonal contact is preferred over printed messages
- Role modeling can change social norms



# LESSONS LEARNED

Teaching and embedding the community value to leave no trace is a practice that has no end, the campaign is ever ongoing to create a culture where everyone cleans up after themselves and leaves a place better than it was found



# A NEW DOLORES (2015)

LOVE  
♥ DOL  
ORES



# ECO POP-UP STATIONS



A staffed service on weekends peak season to sort recyclables and compost in three perimeter locations

Landfill cans are self-serve

Pre-Renovation Diversion Rate: **3%**

Post-Renovation Diversion Rate: **81%**

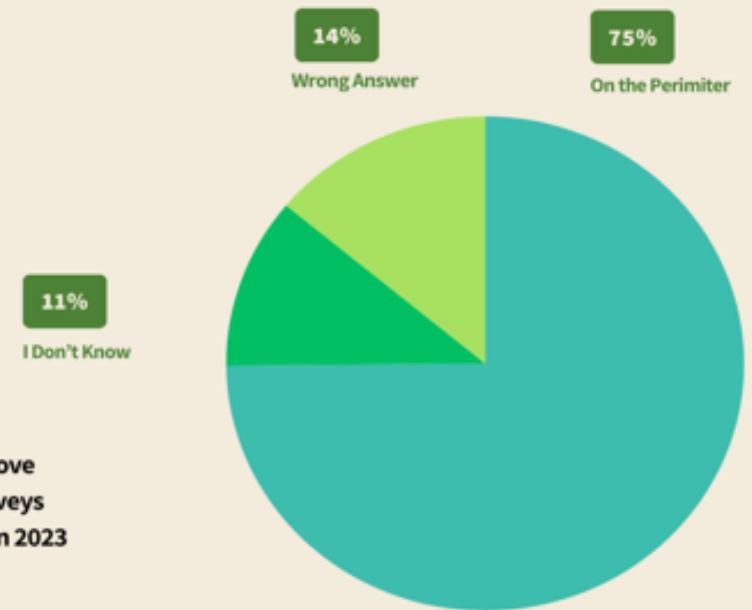
# SURVEYS

700 people surveyed (2023)

- ◆ 81% were return visitors
- ◆ 75% knew trash bin locations
- ◆ Bi-Rite & local corner stores are most common purchase

## Where are the trash bins located?

### SURVEY RESPONSES



Data from Love  
Dolores Surveys  
conducted in 2023

# ON-SITE MESSAGING

DON'T FORGET  
TO PACK OUT  
YOUR TRASH



# ON-SITE MESSAGING




# OUTREACH: PARTNERSHIPS

- BiRite Market & Creamery
- Cheer SF
- Delfina
- Dolores Outpost
- Dolores Park Cafe
- Dolores Park Works
- Easy Breezy
- Friends of Dolores Park
- Guerrero Market & Deli
- Barrel Proof
- Tartine
- Le Marais Bakery
- Atlas Cafe
- Morning Due Cafe
- Kasa Indian Eatery
- Namu Stonepot
- Pay N Save Grocery
- Recology
- San Francisco Mime Troupe
- San Franpsycho
- SF Surfrider
- Taqueria El Buen Sabor
- Woods Cerveceria
- Mission Pet Hospital
- Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
- Suchada Thai Massage
- Race To Zero Waste
- SF Park Stop
- Al's Deli



# OUTREACH: PARTNERSHIPS



**3 WAYS TO LOVE DOLORES**

- BRING CANS, FORGET THE GLASS**  
Broken glass is dangerous for kids, dogs, and park visitors.
- PACK OUT YOUR TRASH**  
Trash bins on the perimeter.
- HOLD ON TO YOUR BUTTS**  
Cigarette butts are toxic, they don't decompose.

A LEAVE-NO-TRACE CAMPAIGN  
LOVE DOLORES  
lovedolores@gmail.com  
www.lovedolores.com  
lovedoloresf



**Buy Cans!**

**LOVE DOLORES**

lovedolores.com

Aluminum cans are easier on Dolores Park than glass.



# SWAG



# COMMUNITY DAYS



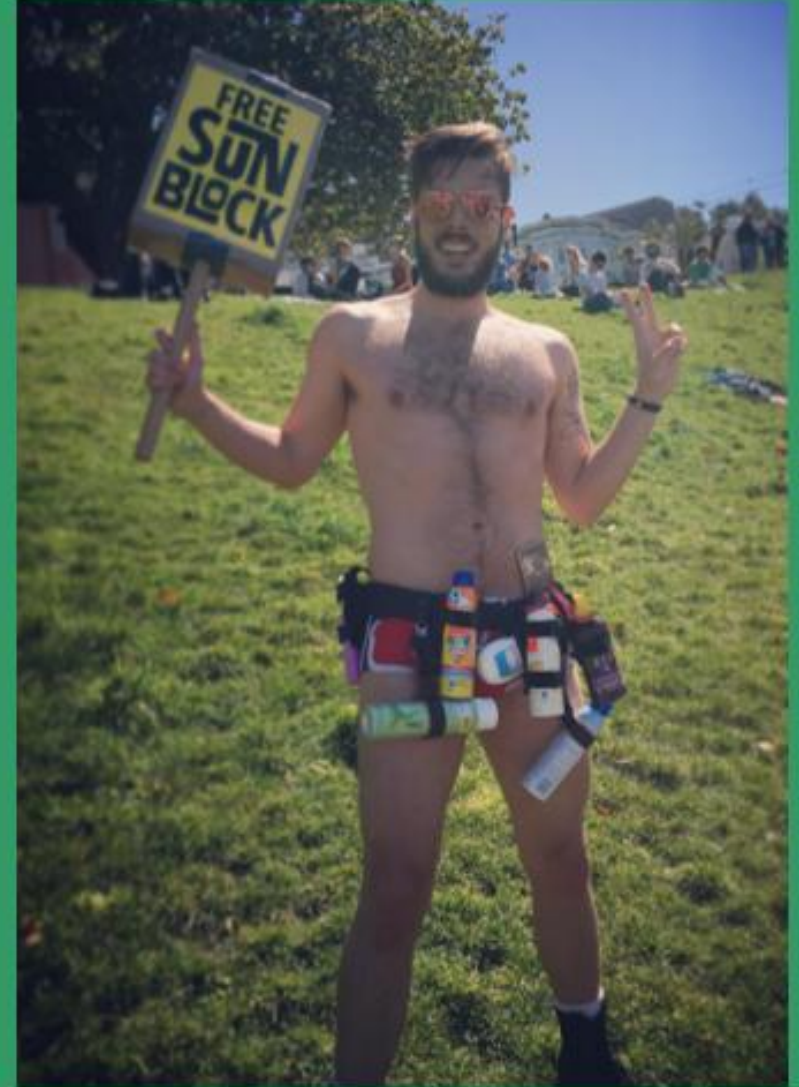
# COMMUNITY INFLUENCERS



*Coconut Guy*



*Truffle Man*



*Mr. Sunblock*

# SOCIAL MEDIA



Vibing right in the Dolo sunshine  
#reusables #lovedolores

Glass hurts  
barefoot babes,  
precious paws, and  
green grass  
#buycans  
#lovedolores



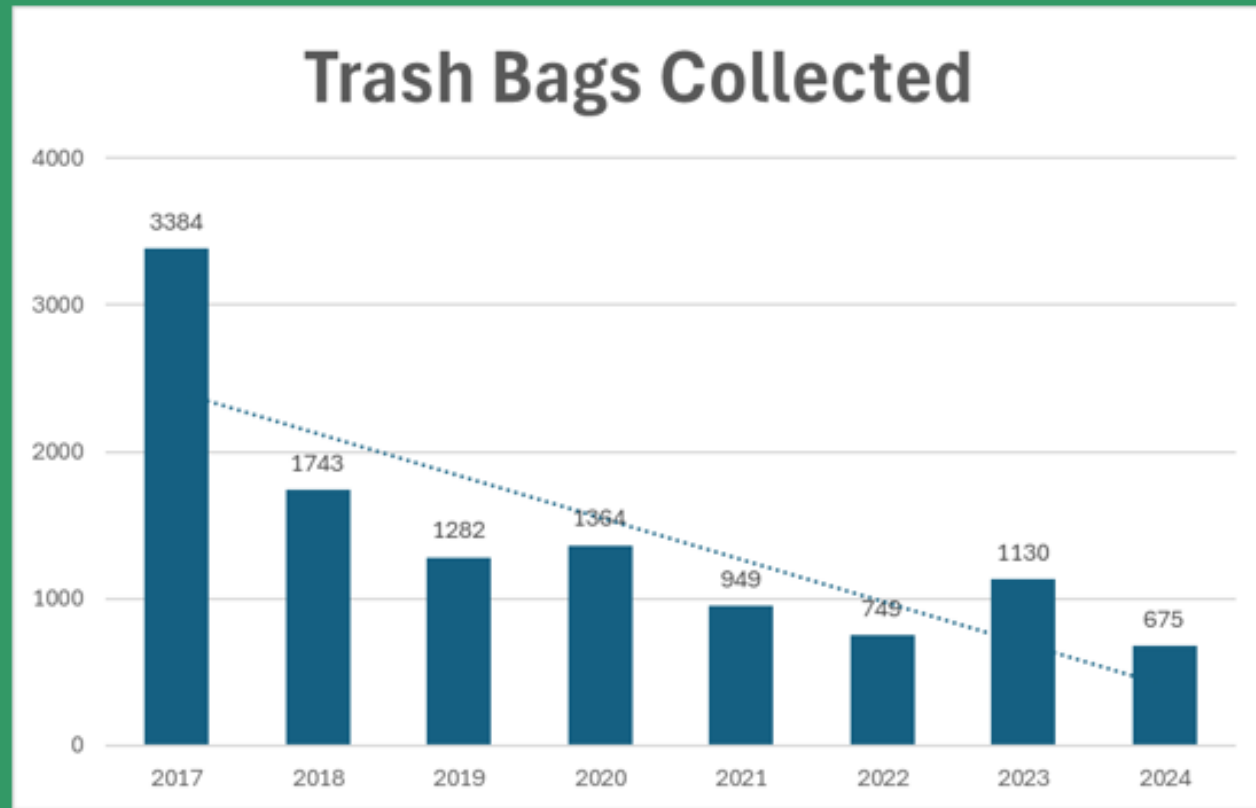
# Live Poll #2

**Which of the following have you done in your parks?** *(Click only one)*

- Onsite signage that speaks to the audience
- Leverage surveys as public outreach/education
- Use social media to encourage park stewardship
- Focus on getting glass out of the park

***Share details in the chat***

# PERFORMANCE METRICS



*San Francisco Chronicle*

Negative press: 2018

**80%** reduction in number of bags collected by gardeners (since 2017)

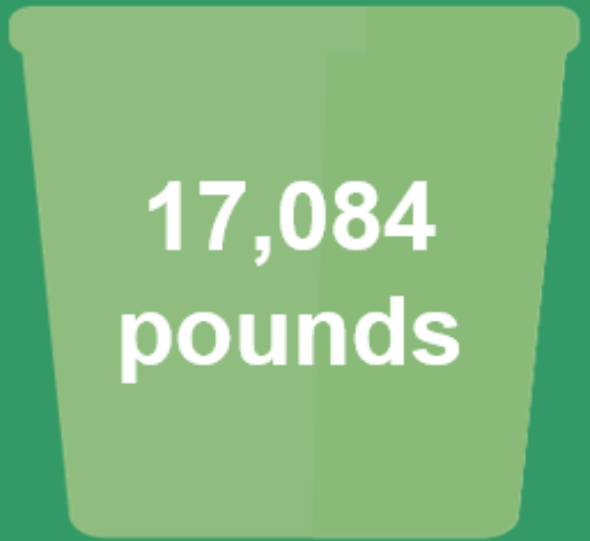
# WASTE DIVERSION



**7,951  
pounds**

**Recycling**

**25,000+**  
**pounds of  
waste diverted  
from landfill**



**17,084  
pounds**

**Compost**

2024



**TEAM EFFORT!**



# THANK YOU



SAN FRANCISCO  
RECREATION  
& PARKS

SAN FRANCISCO RECREATION AND PARKS

# Taylor Emerson

Manager, Strategic Planning  
Zero Waste Coordinator

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[taylor.emerson@sfgov.org](mailto:taylor.emerson@sfgov.org)



# Today's Program Online



- Recording
- Presentation slides
- Resources

*Link will be emailed in coming days*

# Archive of Past Programs

- April 2021:
  - City of West Vancouver, BC;
  - Orange County, NC
  - Operation Downtown, Des Moines, IA;
- February 2022:
  - Seattle Parks & Rec / Seattle Public Utilities
  - National Mall
  - Litter research



**+ Other Waste Reduction topics**

**Visit: <https://www.buschsystems.com> > Resources > Webinars**



# Next Up:



## Case Study Presentations:



Evelyn Amara Ferreira  
San Francisco International Airport



Molly Longton  
Arizona State University

# Thank You to our Panelists!



**Meredith Gauthier**

*Sustainability & Resilience  
Program Manager*

City of Austin, Parks &  
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**Taylor Emerson**

*Manager of Strategic Planning*

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# Please Share Feedback to Presenters

## Post-Webinar Survey:

- Prompt at end of program, or
- Look for Email tomorrow

# Stick Around for the Product Demo!



Sarah Hawthorne