

Sunset Neighborhood Park: The Heart of a Vibrant Community

Located within a community that lacked access to open space, the 3.7-acre Sunset Neighborhood Park supports the Sunset Area Community Investment Strategy adopted by the Renton City Council in 2009 to equitably distribute infrastructure improvements throughout Renton. The park itself serves as a catalyst for transforming a part of Renton that is working to overcome academic, health care access, public safety, and economic challenges. The park serves a diverse population in age, income level, and ethnicity, and serves the community that lives within a ten-minute walk to the park.

In 2011, the City of Renton updated their “Parks, Recreation and Natural Areas Plan.” During this process, it became apparent that there was a lack of open space in the area. The Sunset Neighborhood Park became pivotal piece of reinvestment in the community, to be connected to and to build a strong relationship with, the public and private surrounding uses including a King County Regional Library (subsequently built), Bus Rapid Ride station locations, mixed-use developments (under construction), housing (under construction), community centers, three K-12 schools, and Meadow Crest Playground (Renton School District/City of Renton partnership).

The design effort included a public process with several open houses and community “walk n’talks” to gather input on the design, with additional emphasis on outreach led by the City to the existing Spanish-speaking and east African immigrant communities. Based on feedback, a primary focus was to provide open space for community-based and community-led celebrations, in addition to family-oriented recreation facilities. Key features include a central outdoor gathering space, active playgrounds, adult fitness area, looped pathways, a variety of picnic facilities for different sized groups, shade, and restrooms. A high level of design thought went into the detailing of “touch points,” the areas and furnishings that park visitors will touch, see, and interact with close at hand. It was paramount to provide high quality materials reflective of care and consideration for the neighborhood.

As part of the City of Renton’s Sunset Community Plan and Planned Action Environmental Impact Statement, the City’s goal is to capture stormwater runoff in the developed areas of the neighborhood’s watershed, and provide aquifer recharge and improved water quality. New storm drain lines and rain gardens were constructed along streets to the north of the park that filter and convey stormwater runoff to the Sunset Terrace Regional Storm Water Infiltration Facility located in the park. This low-impact development was combined with additional sidewalk construction improving access throughout the neighborhood. The rain gardens along the streetscapes, and planting in the regional stormwater facility were designed to blend seamlessly with the park design, supporting a visually, cohesive neighborhood.

In addition to public art, another community-led feature included custom-designed cabinets used as “Little Free Libraries” which is a free, public, book exchange: “Take a Book” and “Leave a Book.” The “Little Free Libraries” have been subsequently adopted and managed by two senior citizen neighbors.