

# MY TAKE

Mark Parsons

## Food and loathing in the Tenderloin

THE daily migration around food in the Tenderloin is a sort of verbal chain letter requiring swift action and the ability to process dilemma without intellect.

To leave the line at St. Anthony's for a sandwich handout up the block can introduce so many variables that even a chess player would beg for mercy. Food is hurled out of the back of trucks, doors open, lines form, favors are extended and friendships broken over the daily chase and challenge for food.

A dash for pork chops at Glide, interrupted by a prayer (in exchange for a cookie) can result in missing the number handout and losing the momentum to stay on course.

Is the music in Boeddeker Park anchored by a bag lunch? Should I splurge today and buy a burger at Mimi's instead? Will the nuns with the curry show up at Civic Center on Sunday if it rains? In a world where a carpenter can get resurrected, can't a sandwich for the poor have mayonnaise?

Deep in the basements of love, where the two major players serve their meals, food is eaten, stuffed into pockets, packed into containers, hedged like Wall Street securities against the strategic realities of tomorrow's hunt.

At St. Anthony's, Pork Adobo is the sleight of hand that becomes Posole Pork. Hoisin Chicken is distinguished from Chicken Fricassee by a common spice: cornstarch. If you breed kangaroos with parakeets, then undercook their offspring, you have Glide's Sunday Meal. Served on chipped plastic trays, still wet from washing after the previous meal, it occurs to me that perhaps Jesus didn't die for our sins — he just got sick of the food.

To suggest that, with few exceptions, this food might be simply awful is to risk the wrath and thunder of a predatory class of civil servant pension wannabes, well-intended volunteers, court-mandated thugs and, of course, the Church. The effort is enormous, involving hundreds of people, representing impressive amounts of money, both private and corporate and anointed by the Walter Cronkite of the business community, Warren Buffet who each year auctions a lunch with him for a million-dollar donation to Glide.

To suggest the effort has so overshadowed the result is to introduce theological ideas on suffering and redemption and to bring down the hammer of silence. Damaged, addicted, traumatized or poor, you have no voice, you have no taste buds; but you are magically imbued with a virtue by those who work on your behalf — and that is of being grateful.

Pissed off? Never.

Mistreated? No.

Disrespected? Certainly not.

You are Oliver Twist without the soundtrack. You are the meek and not only will you inherit the Earth, you will get to eat it as well.

On a corner, not so far away, the dreams of a grandmother, Ruth Brinker, live on. Much smaller in scale, not ambition, Project Open Hand's secular version of food delivery represents the possible without the intervention of the divine. Operating a food pantry, meal production and delivery service, there is a sense of organization, kindness and hope that would give an agnostic pause.

No dark basements here. The simple but mass-produced meals, even after being frozen, thawed and microwaved, are tasty to the point of suspicion. The pantry runs like a bingo game, where everyone is a winner.

Unlike Father Alfred at St. Anthony's who, 58 years ago, heard a voice that became "The Miracle on Jones Street," and traded the quality of the food for the hope of a "second miracle," someone at Project Open Hand put their finger in the soup and sang hallelujah. ■

Mark Parsons has lived — and eaten — in the Tenderloin for more than a year.

"My Take" is a new feature of The Extra that offers neighborhood writers an opportunity to reflect on life in the Tenderloin in 600 words or less. Email manuscripts to [mytake@studycenter.org](mailto:mytake@studycenter.org).



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

The Trust for Public Land's Mary Muszynski shows Betty Traynor the mock-up of the makeover.

## Ideas for \$3 million park makeover all in

*It's unanimous: Fortress fence around Boeddeker must go*

BY TOM CARTER

EVERYBODY agrees on one thing: Boeddeker Park's ugly, prison-like fence, inside and out, must go. Folks like the idea of a new clubhouse, too — but glassy and inviting, one that looks out over a park sporting a nice big lawn.

For real style, drop a sunken plaza smack in the middle of the 2½-acre park where people can lounge on its sloping sides while listening to live entertainment.

Residents saw an elaborate design of Boeddeker that looked something like this in 2007. But it was a fantasy exercise of some young local architects who did it for free. It wasn't meant to do anything but pique the imagination, and it did. It got people thinking about changes, and made them realize the park actually could be transformed.

Now, there's a design that includes their ideas, a \$3 million overhaul that is funded and spearheaded by the Trust for Public Land with Rec and Park cooperation. The design draft is the result of public input at five public outreach meetings.

### PLAN TO ARTS COMMISSION

Trust officials say the draft could get tweaked, depending on the response of the final few neighborhood youth and senior focus groups scheduled for a presentation. The basic design will go to the Arts Commission for approval in Jan. 11 and eventually to the Board of Supervisors. The project timetable has the work starting next fall and finishing in 2011.

The hope for an \$8 million renovation project died when California's bond status plummeted some months ago. The trust had been confident the park would qualify for up to \$5 million from 2006 Prop 84 bond funds earmarked for park and water conservation. But, said Trust Project Manager Jake Gilchrist, applying for the money in the current market would risk an indefinite delay.

Gilchrist began attending Friends of Boeddeker Park meetings several years ago, looking for a city park in need. The trust would finance the upgrade with grants, bond money and private donations. Boeddeker was a perfect fit: central city location, low-income demographics, substantial senior and children populations and the requisite community committee that kept a faithful watch over the park.

The park hasn't changed much since the mid-1980s. And though activists have for years decried the drug-dealing, drinking and fighting, it wasn't until Gilchrist started showing up at the Friends of Boeddeker meetings that the design has been so heavily debated. Critics say the space is inefficiently used, the foreboding fencing is more suitable for a fortress, there's not enough green space, and the clubhouse — once besieged by drainage problems — is inadequately designed. And for most of the year, the park has been underused because

red ink reduced staff and hours of operation.

A grant from the San Francisco Parks Trust will help keep the whole park open on Saturdays 11 a.m. to around 4 p.m. through December.

The draft design opens the park up and makes it more inviting, a prime goal of the trust.

A mockup of the design was on display in the Boeddeker clubhouse at the fifth and final outreach meeting Oct. 20. Two signature characteristics had been eliminated: the wide brick walkway that divides the park, and the massive wrought iron entry gate at Eddy and Jones.

### BIG LAWN, BASKETBALL COURT

An 80- by 45-foot lawn suitable for field hockey and soccer, and with a perimeter walk, would occupy that southwest corner. Above the lawn would be a high school-size basketball and all-purpose court. The sunken, amphitheater-like plaza, 35 feet across and also with a walkway around, would be in the middle of the park near a new clubhouse facing Eddy Street.

Brian Milman, project architect, said the clubhouse will be "3 or 4 feet" higher than the sidewalk so people stepping out of it and into the park will be on ground level. The one-story clubhouse will also have floor-to-ceiling glass walls and an attached recreation and exercise room next to the park entrance steps, or ramp, on Eddy.

Planned, too, is a "living roof" with plants and grasses that require little maintenance. Solar panels are being vetted for it.

Outdoor lighting is undecided as is the kind of replacement fencing.

The park's west and south sides will be lined with trees, "poplars, mostly," Milman said. "We'll keep just about all the trees."

### THE SCULPTURES STAY

The two park sculptures will remain: Bruce Hasson's ark — animals sculpted in a dark granite block symbolizing the park as a sanctuary for families; and Anthony's Smith's globe with 12 inset faces representing the Tenderloin's diversity.

The park, which slopes 16 feet upward to Ellis Street, will be terraced every 3 to 4 feet, Milman said. The north sector next to the Preservation Senior Community would continue as a gardening site and space for arts and crafts.

More than 25 people attending the meeting voted on characteristics they'd like to see the park. On the wall, under four categories — fitness, fencing, clubhouse and landscape — the trust had put up 16 color prints of scenes from city parks. Each person was given four orange dots to stick on the images they liked.

The winner was landscape. A picture of beautifully flowering bushes on a patch of healthy grass got eight votes, the most of any image. ■