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Memorandum
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TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Albert Balagso

SUBJECT: KaBOOM! Playground Construction **DATE:** 02-25-09

Approved

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Date

3/3/09

INFORMATION

On Saturday, May 3, 2008, nearly 300 volunteers worked at Welch Park in Council District 8 to help reconstruct a playground structure. This effort was a culmination of an intense four month collaboration between KaBOOM!, the City of San Jose, the San Jose Redevelopment Agency and our community partners. The purpose of this memo is to provide a summary of the event as well as lessons that were learned along the way that will be used by Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) to evaluate future playground renovation projects. In summary, these lessons are:

1. **Cost:** While the KaBOOM! method of building playgrounds is a tremendous community building exercise, it works best on simple playground retrofit projects and does not provide significant financial savings to the City. This type of project can typically be accomplished quicker and at similar costs by City only forces.
2. **Commitment:** A firm commitment and understanding of the project should be received in writing from a core group of a minimum of ten community members prior to the City sponsoring an application for a future project build.
3. **Community:** KaBOOM! is an amazing community building tool and should be used exclusively in areas where there is a strong desire to build community.

BACKGROUND

KaBOOM! is a national nonprofit organization that, among other activities, works with communities to coordinate community-built playgrounds. This entails working with the owner of the proposed playground and the local community members during an approximately four month planning process and then rallying local volunteers during a one day time period to build the playground with their own hands. To date, KaBOOM! has partnered with communities to construct over 1,200 playspaces throughout the nation, constructing over 200 playspaces in 2007 alone.

On August 21, 2007, the City Council authorized the City Manager to enter into contracts with KaBOOM! to develop playspaces while waiving certain contractual terms related to insurance, indemnification and record keeping. In January 2008, the City and the San Jose Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) executed contracts to provide for the reconstruction of a playground at Welch Park, located at the corner of Huran and Clarice Drives in Council District 8.

ANALYSIS

The build day took place on May 3, 2008. Overall, the build day was extremely successful with nearly 300 participants. These participants included neighbors of Welch Park, City staff, SJRA staff and volunteers from the City Year San Jose/Silicon Valley. Although no formal satisfaction survey was completed, it was obvious to those in attendance that the vast majority of the volunteers had a wonderful time and gained a tremendous sense of pride in helping to improve their community with their own hands.

At the end of the day, a ribbon was cut on a brand new playground for the community, and, along the way staff learned a number of valuable lessons that will be considered when preparing an application for a future KaBOOM! project build. The three key "lessons" that staff learned are described below:

Lesson #1: Cost: While the KaBOOM! method of building playgrounds is a tremendous community building exercise, it works best on simple playground retrofit projects and does not provide significant financial savings to the City. This type of project can typically be accomplished quicker and at similar costs by City only forces.

Explanation:

As noted in the below table, the costs to deliver a KaBOOM! project are actually greater than the estimate to deliver the exact same project through City forces.

| Project Cost | Actual/Estimated Costs* | Estimated Costs with Equipment Sponsorship |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| KaBOOM! Project | \$96,500 | \$55,000 |
| City Forces Estimate | \$74,500 | \$33,000 |

*Kaboom costs are actual, City Forces costs are estimated. Kaboom costs do not include 150 hours of City/SJRA staff time not billed directly to project.

It should be noted that the estimate is much lower than the costs to renovate a typical playground as the KaBOOM! project only replaces the playground equipment. It does not include any costs for potential reconstruction of foundations, drainage, rubberized surfacing or other work outside of the simple replacement of the playground equipment. In addition, since the community is

tasked with overseeing a large portion of the project, as well as the actual construction, this effort works best for simple project equipment change-outs as opposed to complicated projects that require significant construction (such as projects that require a rubberized surfacing with concrete base). In addition to financial, there are numerous contractual hurdles on these projects. For example, the City worked for over a year with KaBOOM! staff to develop an agreement that would work for the City. A few months after the Welch Park build, KaBOOM! staff informed PRNS staff that they may not be able to use this contract template moving forward. This could be a major hurdle if the City is to engage KaBOOM! on a future project.

Lesson #2: Commitment: A firm commitment and understanding of the project should be received in writing from a core group of a minimum of 10 community members prior to the City sponsoring an application for a future project build

Explanation: The community members who worked on this project were amazing. They committed a tremendous amount of their own personal time to making sure that this event was a success. As part of the KaBOOM! process, community members are required to drive the following efforts: (1) Volunteer recruitment; (2) Food for volunteers; (3) Safety Committee; (4) Site Preparation Committee; and (5) Playground Build Day Event Logistics Committees. However, even though the community is tasked with recruiting volunteers and arranging food donations, the City/SJRA is ultimately contractually obligated to meet certain requirements for food and volunteers. So, even though the community worked very hard on this project, substantial time was spent by City and SJRA staff to ensure that all of the advanced preparation was taken care of to ensure a successful build. In the future, City/SJRA staff should do a better job of working with the community ahead of time to ensure that all time commitments are understood and that the community is ready and willing to take on these tasks.

Lesson #3: Community: KaBOOM! is an amazing community building tool and should be used selectively in the future in areas where the City and the community have a desire to build more community (and where there is a playground that needs replacing!)

Explanation: Even though the KaBOOM! effort is not a significant time or cost savings, it is a tremendous community building exercise. Literally days before the event, staff were nervous that we wouldn't get more than 50 or so volunteers (KaBOOM! required 150). On the day of the event, nearly 300 people showed up to help and support the effort. The feeling of pride at the end of the day from the members of the community who used their own hands to physically assemble and construct the playground was amazing. There are few efforts that could duplicate this experience.

The biggest lesson that we left the project with was that this effort is about building community, not necessarily saving time or money. Substantially more City staff time is spent on a KaBOOM! project than if the exact same project was accomplished through the City's typical processes. Due to the staff time involved as well as the potential continued contractual hurdles, we will look for opportunities to partner with KaBOOM! only where we can determine that the need and commitment exists within the community and that sufficient staff resources are available to manage the project. In addition, we will make every attempt to locate a school, non profit, or other agency in that area that can benefit from the KaBOOM! project delivery process

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

02-25-09

Subject: KaBOOM! Playground Construction

Page 4

as well as looking at City parks. By partnering with other agencies, we have the opportunity to achieve the same community benefit while focusing our limited staff resources on renovating our playgrounds as cost effectively as possible.



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Neighborhood Services

For questions please contact Matt Cano, Division Manager, at (408) 535-3580.