The History & Impact of Golden Gate Park
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

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Introduction to Golden Gate Park

The Golden Gate Park is a popular tourist attraction around San Francisco, California and originated in the 1870’s. Not only is
the park a prime example of an urban public park, but also Golden Gate Park has many features such as piers and museums that help to make the park very distinctive and unique. Below is a summary of the origins of the Golden Gate Park, which was inspired and modeled after Fredrick Law Olmsted’s design of New York’s Central Park.

**History & Background**

**BACKGROUND**

Sand Dunes residing on the plot of land where Golden Gate Park currently is. (*Holloran, n.d.*)

The west coast’s newer and bigger version of the eastern Central Park was not always the unique park it is today. During 1866, the Gold Rush led to a rise in westward expansion. As several towns and communities were being established, there were still a lot of various social demands that needed to be met. One of which was a desire for a new innovative, urban park. Californians, who wanted to be a part of the new “modern” America, were eager to have a park similar to Fredrick Law Olmsted’s Central Park in New York. Inspired by Olmsted’s ideas, a man named William Hammond Hall began planning a 1,017-acre public park with the help of a landscaper named John McLaren. Four years later on April 4th, 1870, Hall and McLaren established Golden Gate Park near the bay of San Francisco (William, 2016.) Expansions in the park were made later on such
as the addition of a playground in 1898. Another popular early addition was the Japanese Tea Garden in 1894. Despite several earthquakes, the park managed to survive with the exception of a few buildings.

**HISTORY & CONSTRUCTION**

Originally, it was difficult for San Francisco to obtain the land needed for the park. People who had currently lived in the area argued that the land belonged to them. However, in 1866, Congress declared that the land would belong to the city of San Francisco. The mayor of San Francisco compromised with the occupants of the land and soon after construction began on Golden Gate Park (Pollock, 2017.)

William Hammond Hall, the designer of Golden Gate Park, was inspired by Fredrick Law Olmsted and based the park on Olmsted’s ideas. Initially, Hall wanted to create roadways throughout the park, which led to another idea of having a racetrack instead of the park. Eventually, both ideas were abandoned and the original idea of a regular urban park was reinstated. The land chosen for the park was unique since it was resting on numerous sand dunes. As a result of being covered in sand dunes, the land designated for Golden Gate Park was extremely arid. Water technology used during the Gold Rush-era was used to create man-made rivers, streams, and waterfalls throughout the park. Various new animals, plants, and trees were introduced in the park. The new trees growing around the area helped stabilize the sand dunes. In the late 1800’s, several monuments and the Japanese Tea Garden were added to the park (Pollock, 2017.) While the exact cost of the original construction is not clear, buildings and renovations added later on inside the park have been known to cost hefty amounts. One newly renovated
building, for example, cost 300 million roughly (Rogers, 2013.) Taxpayers continue to support renovations inside the park that estimate to be millions (Pollock, 2017.)

**Golden Gate Park in 2017**

Golden Gate Park has successfully helped California’s desire for an urban park become a reality. Today, Golden Gate Park is still a widely popular tourist attraction. The park also serves as a large, distinctive landmark and social hub for people. The numerous benches, stairs, and ledges give visitors many different seating options while the park still has a lot of usable green space. These are concepts that originate from urbanists Kevin Lynch, William Whyte, and Lewis Mumford and help classify Golden Gate Park as an urban area.

On average, the park has about thirteen million visitors per year, making it one of California’s top tourist attractions (Gosnell, 2016.) Thirty-five thousand visitors enjoy the park’s abundance of activities. Aquariums and a zoo, museums, sports fields, a recreational center are just a few additions to the park that help make it more modern and unique than other common parks. The Japanese Tea Garden still remains as one of the most popular attractions in San Francisco (Polluck, 2017.) There are also several seasonal activities, including the World Veg Festival (Golden, 2017.)
The widely popular attraction in Golden Gate Park: The Japanese Tea Garden. (Golden, 2008.)

**Controversy & Issues**

**THE HOMELESS POPULATION**

While there are many positive impacts of Golden Gate Park, there are still many issues to be resolved. One main controversial topic within Golden Gate Park is what should be done with the homeless people residing in the park. Throughout the years, Golden Gate has housed a good portion of San Francisco’s homeless population. The majority of homeless in Golden Gate Park, which ranges between forty to two hundred people, are usually elderly (Anderson, J., Angelo, J., Barr, J., et. al., 2013.) In more recent years, the homeless have drastically increased; this increase is most likely due to the failure of the economy during this decade.

A more specific issue resulting from homeless people taking refuge inside Golden Gate Park is whether or not San Francisco should make it illegal for them to reside within the park at night. While sleeping within the park is already discouraged, it is loosely enforced. Advocates for the homeless in San Francisco argue that
adding and enforcing these types of laws risk the safety of the homeless, while others would argue that the homeless endanger the rest of the population and pollute the park’s environment. Another point to consider is that prohibiting the homeless living in the park goes against Golden Gate Park’s label as a “public” park (Keyes, 2013.) These laws also could bring unnecessary attention to the population of the homeless that are not criminals. The graph below shows the steady increase of homeless people living within Golden Gate Park from the last four years (San Francisco, 2017.)

CLEANLINESS OF GOLDEN GATE PARK

The other major issue of Golden Gate Park is the level of cleanliness inside the park within the last few years. Many would
argue that this is a result of the increasing homeless population. Dirty and rusting water fountains, used hypodermic needles and syringes, liquor bottles and cigarette butts litter are common types of litter found around the more park-like areas in Golden Gate.

While there are volunteers to help clean up the park, the types of dangerous litter found within Golden Gate risk the reputation of the park being family-friendly. Others have noted the human feces issue due to the increasing homeless population. One visitor noted that walking the dirt paths of Golden Gate Park was “unpleasant to say the least.” Accidentally finding used hypodermic needles is a serious risk to naïve children and distracted adults by exposing them to the fatal HIV virus (Nevius, 2007.)

Evaluation

The general idea of having an urban space like Golden Gate Park is an innovative idea that should be introduced into every state. While there are many flaws that come with having such a large park, such as the risk of an unclean environment, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. The creation of the Golden Gate Park solved the issue of not having a nice urban space. Individuals can choose to interact with others, use the park for recreational purposes, or use it to simply pass through a beautiful area. Implementing this idea in other states would solve similar problems in other cities who desire a space similar to Golden Gate Park.

In order to have a suitable, utilized urban area, the area should include different activities to accommodate various needs of the public. According to urbanist William Whyte, Golden Gate Park would satisfy a lot of the common needs of the park users. In
fact, Golden Gate Park goes way beyond the basic needs of a park. Having comfortable and movable seating, having enough grass, providing food, and containing a lot of color and flowers are included in Golden Gate Park, but the park provides way more than that. The de Young Museum, Rainbow Falls, various sports fields, and different events that take place in the recreational center gives tourists and the people of California a wide-ranged experience (Top, 2017.)

IMPROVEMENTS & ADDITIONS

Activities in Golden Gate Park are limitless. However, this does not necessarily mean that the park is flawless. Several improvements could be made to fix Golden Gate Park, along with precautions to take before a city should decide to create a park similar to Golden Gate. Many of these precautions would help create a safer, more pleasurable experience for the public.

When creating such a large park, it is crucial to plan transportation and parking within the park. Golden Gate Park has buses within the park along with bike lanes on the roads throughout the park. The buses typically run every twenty minutes. The addition of a few more buses that run every ten minutes could reduce the wait time for users of the park, which could reduce parking costs.

While free parking is available, it is very limited. The payper-hour parking garages include an underground and an aboveground garage. Cities should factor in the population, popularity, and space when adding parking areas within a park similar to Golden Gate. Golden Gate Park receives roughly thirteen million visitors yearly, which means that the park receives thirty-five thousand visitors per day. An improvement Golden Gate Park could make would be to add more underground parking garages.
More underground parking garages mean that people have more space to park their cars, but it would not force Golden Gate to remove any buildings from the park.

Safety is another important issue that can always be improved. While the homeless population in Golden Gate Park is increasing, so is the threat of danger within the park. Making the bike lanes more distinct, more protected, and more common would help make the park more usable and safe for cyclists. Two cyclists were killed during two different hit-and-runs in 2016 alone (KTVU, 2016.) At least one shooting occurred in 2016 as well (Lanaras, 2016.) Adding a lot of security is necessary and would help make the visitors of Golden Gate Park feel safe along with preventing the death of innocent people.

**Conclusion**

Overall, cities would ultimately have a lot of benefits from having an urban park like Golden Gate Park. Despite some of its issues and safety concerns, a park like this provides benefit for society, market, and even government points of view through the park’s several attractions. Revenue brought in from these attractions help both the government and the economy while entertaining visitors of Golden Gate by satisfying their need for a social center. Golden Gate Park has thirteen million visitors annually (Gosnell, 2016); Considering that a large portion of those visitors are tourists, Golden Gate Park also helps the hotels, restaurants and other shops in San Francisco. Any city would improve by having a park similar to Golden Gate Park.
References


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Top 10 Things to Do in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, CA.

