

New Life for Winn Park

Founded 80 years ago, the fire alarm building of the Art Deco era was an important part of the city of Sacramento. Located at the heart of Winn Park, the building was linked to all parts of the city through a fire alarm system. It provided safety and gave the residents a sense of ease. What once contributed so much no longer has a use within the city. Today, the building sits abandoned in an underutilized park, disconnected from the city and its district of Midtown. We intend to revitalize the building and park and reintegrate them into the city by creating a universal design that is not only walkable and bikeable, but also provides public amenities that encourage adults and children to use the park at all hours of the day. After studying the site, the building, and surrounding context, our team decided that three main areas needed to be addressed at the site. First, the site—specifically the building—needed to become accessible for everyone; second, new elements and infrastructure had to be introduced to the site in order to improve conditions and create spaces where the public would want to stay and spend time in the park, all the while respecting the existing architecture. And finally, sustainability and feasibility had to be tied into the project in some way.

Winn Park has the potential to impact the community in a positive way and become a destination for many people in the Sacramento area. Its close proximity to the developing Midtown, and the surrounding demographics, make it a perfect place for the park to transform into a social center where events can be hosted, such as concerts. The amenities available in the new design of the park cater to the demographic of the community, which primarily includes single men and women around the age of 38. Furthermore, the growing bicycle community in Sacramento makes it a great place for cyclists to frequent and establish as a cyclist hub or pit stop. According to Walk Score, the bike score of Midtown is 100 while the walk score is 93. Additionally, the League of American Bicyclists recently awarded Silver to Sacramento for its Bicycle Friendly Community. Thus, providing a bicyclist café would not only encourage people to continue biking, but it would also spark the interest of others and could propel the bike movement to help Sacramento achieve Gold. With more people biking, the health of the people and the environment around them would improve. Currently, “the air quality index in Midtown is 10% worse than the national average,” however, biking and walking would lower the pollution caused by automobiles (AreaVibes).

The first big move we did to Winn Park was tackle the landscape and come up with a strategy to make the building on site accessible. Since the building is currently a split-level, it makes it relatively hard for people in wheelchairs or with other disabilities to access the building. Our solution was to manipulate the terrain in a way that would provide a direct route to the building, making it accessible for people and cyclists. On the south side of the building, there exist stairs that step down to meet three entries to the building. We decided that the topography should meet this level and become the “ground level.” We created sloped walkways starting from the southwest and southeast corners of the park to meet the bottom of those doors. As a result, the sloped walkways framed a green area, which we transformed into a lawn-style amphitheater with a stage that could be used for entertainment events. On the east side of the building, where the main double door entry is, we decided to raise the doors to the second level and remove the mezzanine level. A grand entrance was created on the exterior composed

of stairs and a ramp with access to a wheelchair lift inside the building. This creates an open entry and allows abled and wheelchair bound users to enter at the same level.

In addition to adjusting the entrances to the building, the interior was also rearranged. The shell of the building was kept mostly intact with the exception of replacing the glass blocks with large windows and creating openings for large kinetic doors to blur the line between interior and exterior. Many of the interior walls were demolished in order to create more open and usable spaces. On the ground level there is a café seating area, bar, kitchen, and accessible restrooms. The café seating spills out through large kinetic doors into an intimate area on the west side of the building as well as to the south behind the outdoor stage. From inside the café, users can climb the interior staircase or use the wheelchair lift to reach the second level, which can be used for private events. This is the same space that can be entered from the grand entrance on the east side.

While our initial changes emphasize the building in the park, we also addressed the surrounding park. To accommodate the bicyclists, bicycle parking and repair stations were placed throughout the park. New paving was made to help bicyclists and pedestrians circulate through the park and various types of seating were incorporated around the existing trees, as well as built into the landscape, providing areas of rest and relaxation. The existing playground and fencing were removed and replaced with nature-based play equipment, using wood or other local elements to inspire imagination and create fun challenges for children.

With the intention of improving the park we thought it was important to include sustainable elements and feasibility into the new design. Sustainability is an important part of our design, because it allows the park to produce some of its own renewable energy, thus reducing outsourcing and lowering costs to power the park. Adding the new playground equipment gave us an opportunity to produce the renewable energy. The Watts accumulated from children using the play equipment would be turned into electricity used to power the lights throughout the park. An information board near the playground would inform the users of how much energy has been produced and what it's being used for. This creates a fun and unique learning experience that teaches children, as well as adults, about sustainable living. In addition to producing renewable energy, the park will also facilitate economic growth. The new café and the events hosted in the park will generate revenue for the city and support the costs to maintain the park.

In conclusion, we hope the improvements to the park will transform the city and bring the community together. The new design and public amenities provided will reconnect Winn Park to Midtown and restore its value as a positive community space. The accessible walkways and building will also allow for various users to circulate through the site as well as occupy the building. The different zones around the site: playground area, bicycle café, indoor event space, and outdoor amphitheater, give the public some variety to appeal to their diverse needs.