

**SOFA POCKET PARK
VEGGIELUTION**
Capstone Studio in Community Planning

Community Outreach Recommendations



a supplement to the report
written in Fall 2021

by graduate students in the
DEPARTMENT OF URBAN PLANNING
at
SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

In collaboration with Veggielution, a few students from the URBP 295 Fall 2021 class expanded upon this list of recommendations. Initially shared as broad suggestions in the conclusion of that report, this document will dive a little deeper into the reasoning and provide some implementation suggestions for each. We recognize that some of these suggestions are more easily achieved than others, and therefore are presented as Short Term (ST) and Long Term (LT) Recommendations - from putting out signage to ongoing events and markets.

Short Term Recommendations

ST1 : Better Signage

In our initial survey of the neighborhoods adjacent to the SPP, some students made observations at the park itself of passerby behavior. Especially after learning that over a third of local survey respondents learned about the SPP simply by walking past the entrance, we wanted to understand other ways of getting the word out about its existence. When combined with those who learned about the SPP through word of mouth, over half of our respondents clearly are only learning about the park through informal methods and happenstance. In informal conversations with community members, we also learned that both folks who knew and did not know the SPP were interested in having more signage around the neighborhoods. Combined with the clear interest in more options to buy produce in the neighborhood, we feel this is an excellent opportunity for Veggielution to fill a clear local need. (For further information, please see LT2 - More Events.)

There also seemed to be some confusion distinguishing the SPP from the Parque de Los Pobladores triangular park between South First and Market Streets, directly opposite the SPP. With the largest text outside the space being the “Demonstration Garden” and “Dog Park” signs on either side of the entrance, and only the small neon “SoFA Pocket

Park” that is difficult to see in the bright sunshine, additional signage for the SPP itself could be helpful in allowing neighbors to identify the space clearly. Signage could also be used to help further advertise events at the park both now and in the future. Including the Veggielution logo on new signage could also help draw in those who are already familiar with their work, as well as build further awareness of the organization. For example, it seemed that not many people knew about the Farm Stand on Wednesday afternoons despite the strong interest in similar markets expressed in our survey results. With more prominent signage, perhaps more business would be drawn into the SPP. Because of the deep integration of this recommendation of more signage with all of our other recommendations, we have placed it at the front as perhaps the most important quick change that could be made.



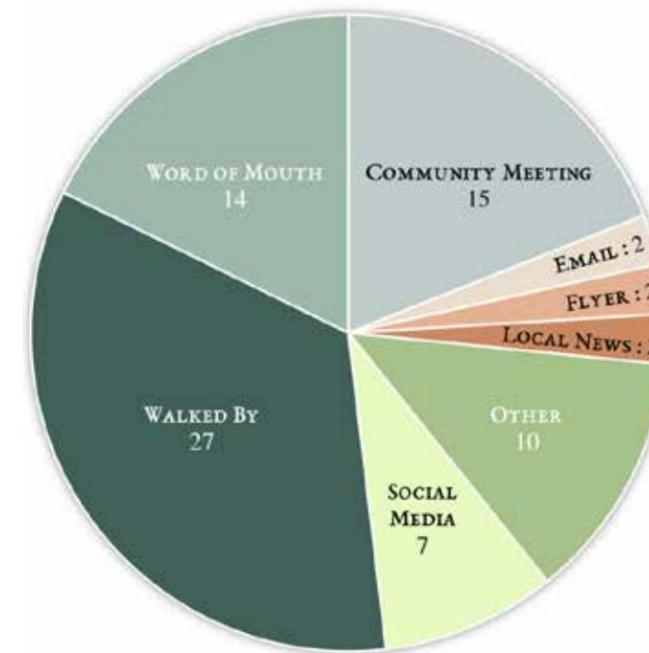
One example of alternative signage from the Grinnell Street Pocket Park in Key West, Florida. It's an official metal sign with the park name and local sponsoring agency logos permanently affixed to the metal fence of the park. Photo by [Dale McDonald](#). (public domain)

Report cover photo by Annale Damabeh.



An old brick building entryway is silhouetted against a deep blue sky. Through the large doorway space, the sky and interior of the space can be seen - there are lights crisscrossing where the ceiling would be and some planters with colorful trellises are on the left. On the outside left wall on a tan background is painted “Demonstration Garden Now Open.” Above the open door, washed out in the bright sunshine, is a tiny neon sign. The text “SoFA Pocket park” is barely visible on it. Photo by Matt Gustafson.

Survey Responses to “16. How did you learn about the SoFA Pocket Park?”



Pie chart with eight sections - Walked by 27, Word of mouth 14, Community meeting 15, Other 10, Social media 7, Email 2, flyer 2, local news 2.



Another signage example - a large wooden sign in a field for Norwood Park, a City of Brooklyn Park. It looks several feet tall, and has a stylized image of people standing next to a tree above the text. Photo from [brooklynparcs.org](#).

ST2 : Increased Seating

Another common refrain that we heard from our survey respondents was for more seating at the park. As seen in the pie chart on the following page, requests for more seating were second only to requests for longer park hours. While there are some benches alongside the planters, there is not much other seating available. Even in the dog park enclosure, there is not enough seating in the evenings when all the neighbors gather to hang out and exercise their dogs. Although dogs are not permitted in the garden side, it could still be a place of rest for folks who don't have dogs and want to watch the chaos, or those who want to step outside of it for a minute. Added seating would also be appreciated by park visitors with mobility constraints.

When combined with the long-term recommendation of having more events at the SPP (see LT2 - More Events), adding more seating soon could help lay some groundwork for encouraging more people to attend events. While it is important for the large space at the back to stay open for the market, having additional movable seating could increase the flexibility of the space for other types of events as well. If the SPP were to host a food truck event or events for

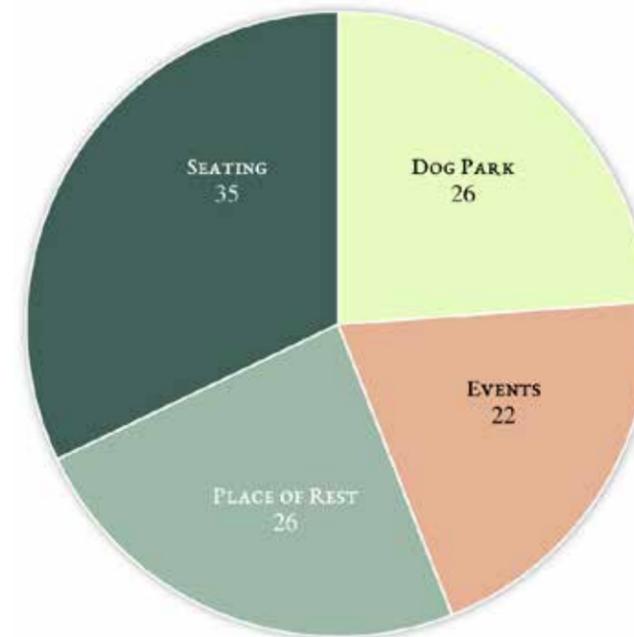
families with young children, already having lots of available seating would be beneficial.

One fixture of the neighborhood that we did not collect much data about was the nearby Notre Dame High School. If there is seating available, the SPP could become a space for students to spend time after school or for adults to wait while students finish up their activities. In one conversation, a parent waiting to pick up a student was very interested in the ability to shop for local produce while waiting. This also ties in with the previous recommendation for increased signage about both the park itself and events happening inside of it. Perhaps some signs along Second Street, particularly near the school, could help draw the Wednesday afternoon crowd into the park during the current Farm Stand hours. In addition, extra seating would provide additional space for adults who come with children - another frequent response included the need for more spaces, amenities, and activities for children. To support those activities there must be attractions for the adults as well, to wait comfortably and encourage further interaction with other aspects of the SPP.



Two small round white tables surrounded by white mesh wire chairs on a brick courtyard. Two people are relaxing at them occupied by books and phones. Along the back wall is an abstract mural. Photo by [Mike Boucher \(CC BY 2.0 - cropped\)](#).

Survey responses to “20. What amenities do you use at the park?”

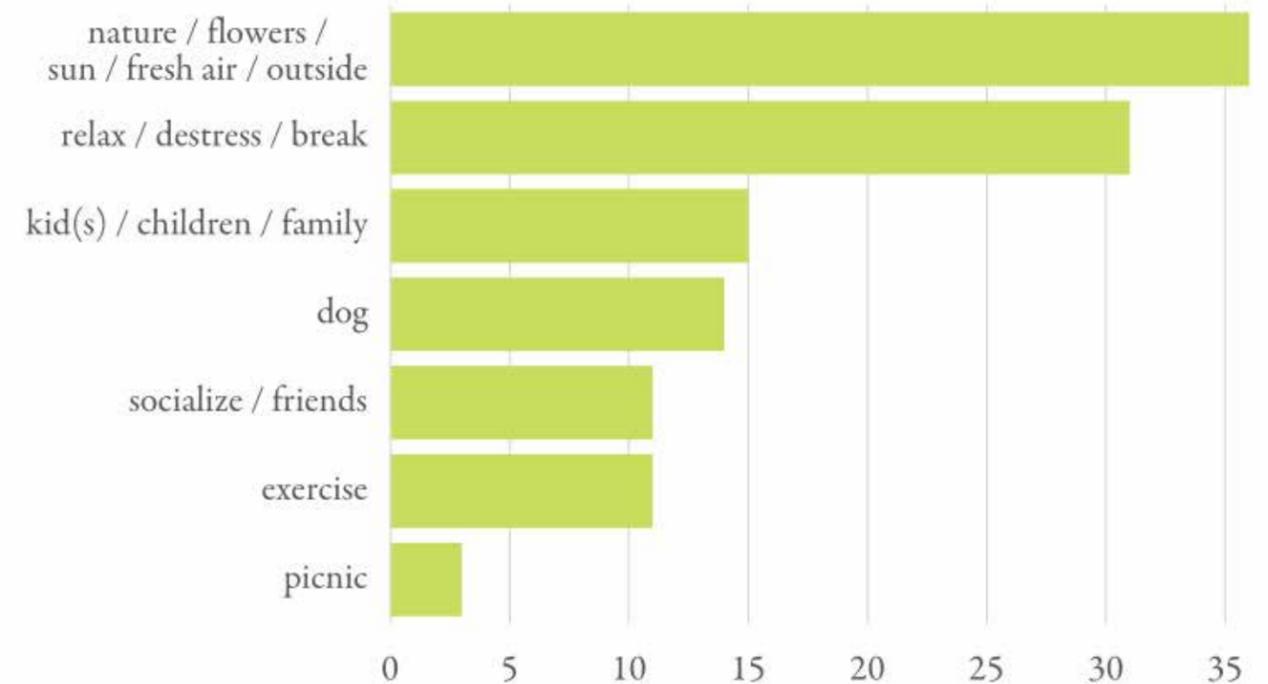


Pie chart with five sections : Seating 32, Dog park 26, Place of rest 26, Events 22.



A brightly-painted wooden picnic table, decorated with blue sea-like swirls all over and what looks like a boat on the top. This could be a fun activity and seating arrangement at the SPP. Photo by [Wayne Hsieh \(CC BY-NC 2.0 - cropped and isolated from background\)](#).

Survey results for “1. Why do you go to parks or green spaces?”



Horizontal bar chart in descending order labeled with common responses grouped together. Nature / flowers / sun / fresh air / outside 36, relax / distress / break 31, kid(s) / children / family 15, dog 14, socialize / friends 11, exercise 11, picnic 3. Common words have been selected and grouped from free response fields.

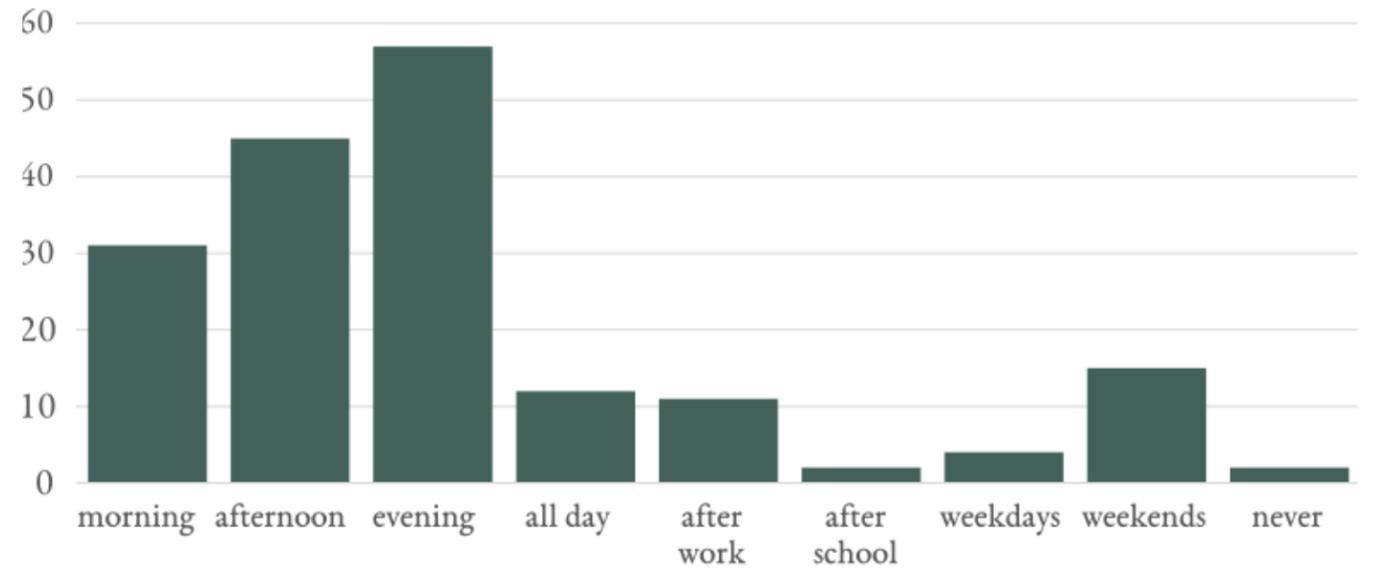
Long Term Recommendations

LT1 : Earlier Open Hours & Later Evening Hours

Understanding that the opening hours of the park are limited by staffing, we wanted to explore what schedule the neighbors in our study areas would prefer as times to be able to access a park in general. With the knowledge that most city parks are technically closed after sunset, it is interesting to see such a dramatic request for late evening park access. However, it also overlaps with the responses asking for park times that are after typical daytime work hours. This was a free response question on the survey, and the data had to be normalized since some responses are counted more than once; for example, if someone was interested in both “after work” and “weekend” park hours. Doing the best we could to interpret the data, however, it is clear that afternoon and evening are the most popular times of day for people to be available to go to parks.

Coupled with the first suggestion of increased signage, it seems that many people are not aware that the park is open until 7pm on Fridays - addressing the evening and “after work” requests. However, because the SPP doesn’t open until 4pm, the current schedule does not capture the few specific requests for park space availability after school hours. This will also shift as events are held at the park (see LT2 - More Events). Particularly during warmer weather, it seems likely that afternoon and evening events will become increasingly attractive both to host and to attend. As the sun beats down on the asphalt and brick corridor, though, the suggestion seen in the chart on page 8 for more shade elements will become more necessary. The need for shade will very much intersect with ST2 - Increased Seating - and LT2 - More Events - in order to make the park-goers more comfortable and willing to spend more time

Survey responses to “15. What times would you expect the park to be open and accessible to all? (you may select more than one)”



Vertical bar chart : morning 30, afternoon 45, evening 57, all day 12, after work 11, after school 2, weekdays 4, weekends 15, never 2.

at the park. We also understand that our October data collection, largely on sunny days, may have also influenced some of these answers. With the general trend of Bay Area weather towards more hot sunshine, though, we think it is key concern.

One of the major drivers of the change in opening times, though, will be seasonal: there is much less reason to have the park open at 8pm in January when the weather is already cold and dark than there is in June when the sun is still shining. Because our surveys were collected on warm days, we would strongly recommend re-surveying local residents about potential changes to the park hours as the seasons change to better gauge the evolving needs in the area. With the impact of the pandemic on work schedules, particularly for folks who are able to work from home, it is likely that the “after work” request may also shift as we collectively work towards a new definition of work hours. However there are still many work schedules that will remain as the “standard 9 to 5” and it is important that SPP be open

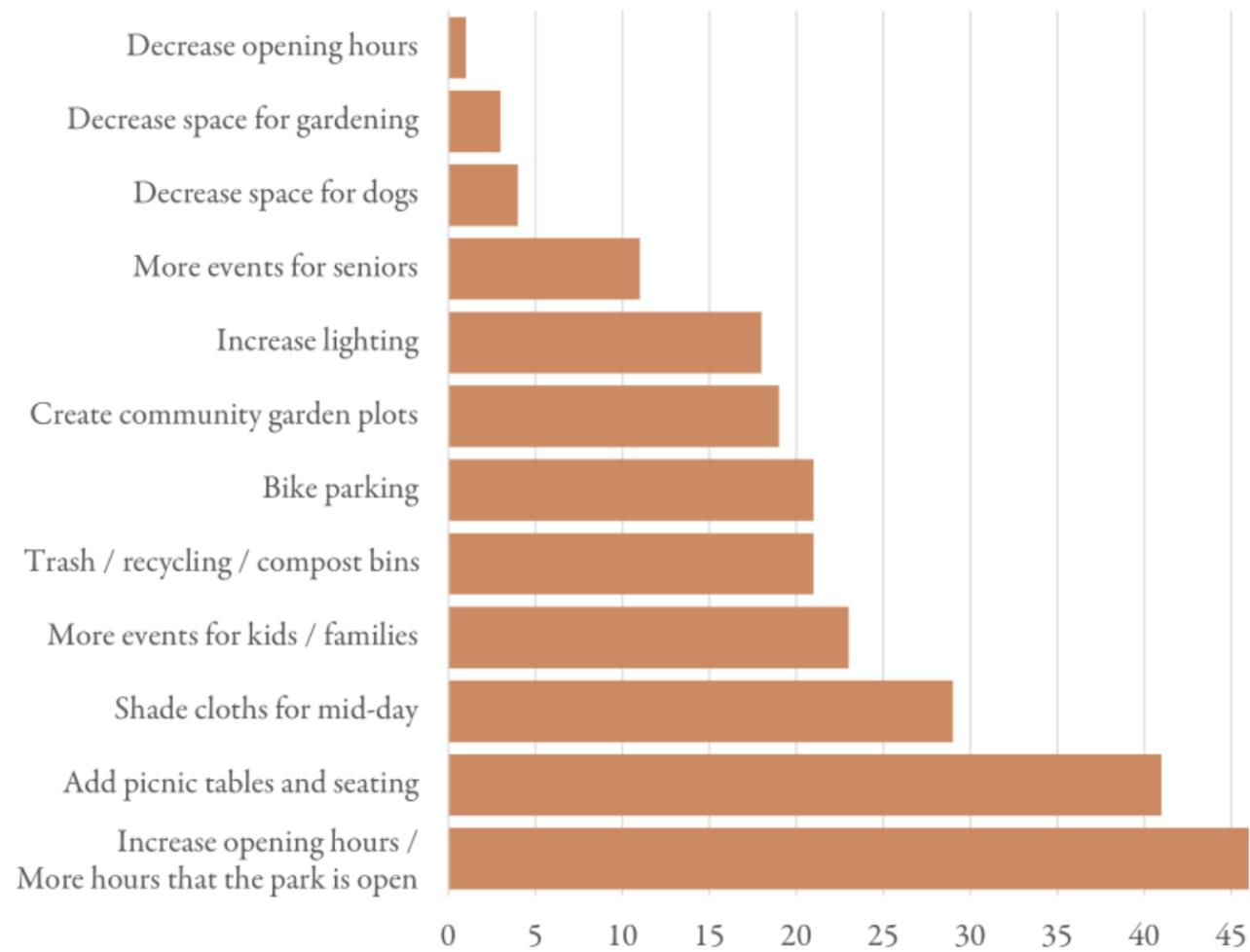
and welcoming to all, rather than only cater to those who are available at standardized hours. Perhaps coordinating with participants in the Eastside Grown program in 2018 could be a way to use the space in other ways at other times.

One aspect that we did not survey in the local neighborhoods was work hours. If these neighborhoods are dominated by service workers who are more likely to be available in the early hours of the morning, like the patrons of the Panaderia Oaxaca, perhaps finding a way to host a small coffee stand at that time could be useful. Some of this basic demographic data may be available through analysis of the 2020 Census data, although again the pandemic has altered many schedules and the precarious nature of employment in the Bay Area would suggest that even now those responses may be inaccurate. This again could be another avenue to explore through further surveys to better understand the park hours that would most benefit local residents.



Three people stand around a small food cart in an urban environment. The clear display case on top is open and steam escapes into the chilly evening, pleasantly lit by the fairy lights inside the umbrella standing in the middle of the cart. All three people are smiling and talking as one is buying food from the vendor. In the background are brightly-lit store fronts glowing in the night from a concrete building facade. Photo by Veggielution.

Survey responses to “21. What are some improvements would you like to see made to the Pocket Park? (you may select more than one)”



Horizontal bar chart in increasing order. Decrease opening hours 1, Decrease space for gardening 3, Decrease space for dogs 4, More events for seniors 11, Increase lighting 18, Create community garden plots 19, Bike parking 21, Trash / recycling / compost bins available 21, More events for kids / families 23, Shade cloths for mid-day 29, Add picnic tables and seating 41, Increase opening hours / More hours that the park is open 46.



Two brightly colored shade cloths strung between a trellis and a garden shed. They are shading a backyard garden, and make the green space look even more inviting in the bright sunshine. Photo by Ron Frazier (CC BY 2.0 - cropped).

LT2 : More Events...

2.1 ... with Food Trucks/Farm Stands

One of the constant remarks we heard while collecting surveys, in addition to more events for kids, was to have more options to buy local produce or the availability of other types of markets at the SPP. When we asked all survey respondents what activities they would like to see at a neighborhood park, the top two options were (1) Farmer’s or Maker’s Markets, and (2) Food / Culture / Music Festivals. It is clear that everyone is interested both in outdoor events and local food. Taken in combination with the fact that the Đại-Thành Supermarket on Second Street and East San Salvador Street is the only grocery store within approximately a 10 minute walk, the neighborhood would clearly benefit from increased access to food. Artega’s Food Center is

only a mile away, but requires walking under the Interstate 280 overpass and along the very busy South First Street corridor. Even our graduate student team struggled with the somewhat unpleasant walk with our backpacks on a warm day in October, so it is not a viable option for anyone who is busy or less mobile on a regular basis.

However, it is also clear from the number of responses that our respondents were not aware of the Wednesday Farm Stand that Veggielution is already running at the SPP. Tied in with ST1 - Better Signage - we think that this event could become very popular in our study areas as well as in the wider local neighborhood around the park once the word gets out. Having attended two Farm Stand days, it seemed that there was very little foot traffic to the stand. Although a small chalk sign was put out on the sidewalk, there were few passersby to see it and the few who did go by were not able to stop to shop. One respondent, a parent waiting to pick up a Notre Dame High School student, was very interested in being able to buy local fruits and vegetables while waiting. As shown in the chart on page 11, most of our survey respondents are traveling by car to grocery stores (anything from Safeway to the locally-owned Artega’s). Due to the fact that both travel type and food shopping location were multi-select questions, we cannot say for sure if more of our respondents are walking to farmer’s markets, but it is the destination to which the fewest people said they only drive to do their shopping. Between this inference and the number of residences around the SPP, we strongly believe that the park could easily become a local hub for fresh fruit and vegetables for nearby residents.

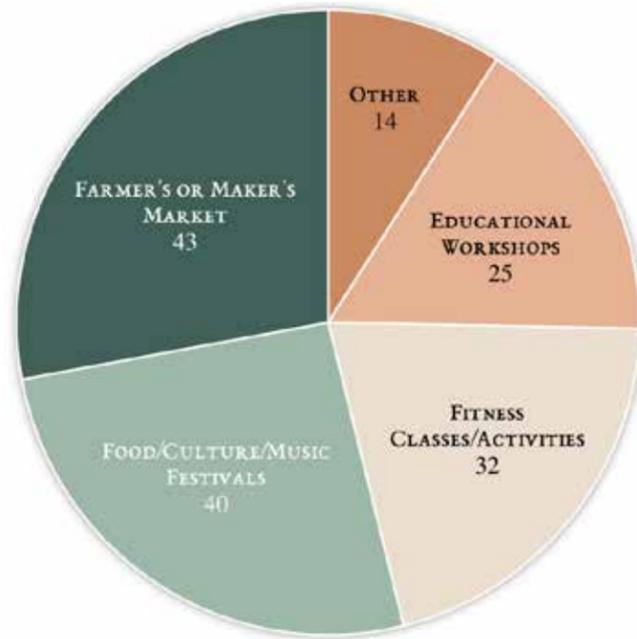
Especially combined with ST 2 - Increased Seating - the park could easily become an events hub. Mobile food truck groups like Off The Grid in San Francisco and the East Bay have been hugely successful in

A black chalkboard sign stands on a sunny sidewalk. Small handwritten text on it in bright colors says “Welcome! Today 12/1/21 Veggielution Farm Stand 1pm - 6pm (every Wednesday).” Photo by Annale Damabeh.



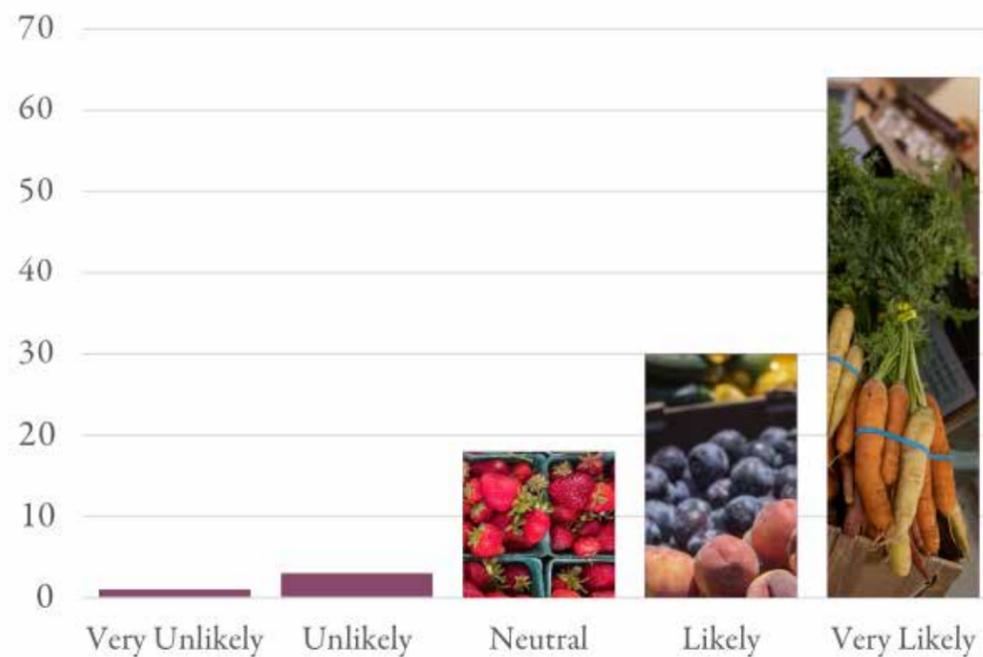
their temporary takeovers of parking lots or streets to hold regular events. One that was particularly successful before the pandemic was in combination with the Oakland Museum of California; especially with access to Second Street at the back of the SPP, a larger event that closes the street for a portion of a day could be a great way to connect the neighborhood to the park. While much of the area at the east end of the space could be dedicated to seating and activities, the food trucks could be positioned on the street to act as additional signage for the event. A farmer's or maker's market could be set up similarly, though could be more contained within the park. Working in conjunction with local businesses like the Panaderia Oaxaca, La Original Paletaria y Neveria, and other neighborhood fixtures could help increase the draw for folks who don't feel they have a place in the new SoFA. Especially with the increasing gentrification and displacement happening all across San José, it is important that Veggielution demonstrates their commitment to making this a welcoming space for everyone.

Survey results for “7. What are some activities/programs you’d be interested in if held at the park? (you may select more than one)”



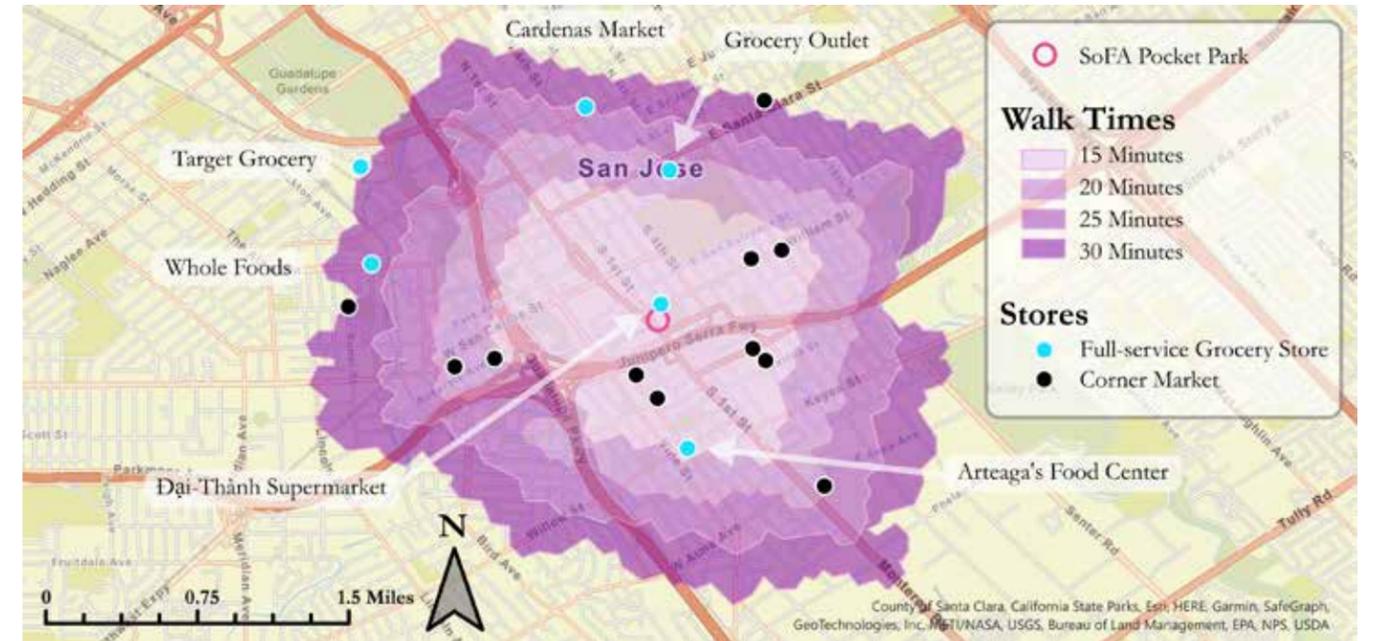
Pie chart with five slices. Farmer's or maker's market 43, Food / culture / music festivals 40, Fitness classes / activities 32, Educational workshops, 25, Other 14. Half of the "Other" responses included options for children or families.

Survey results for “11. How likely are you to visit the park if it offers local fruit & vegetables selections?”



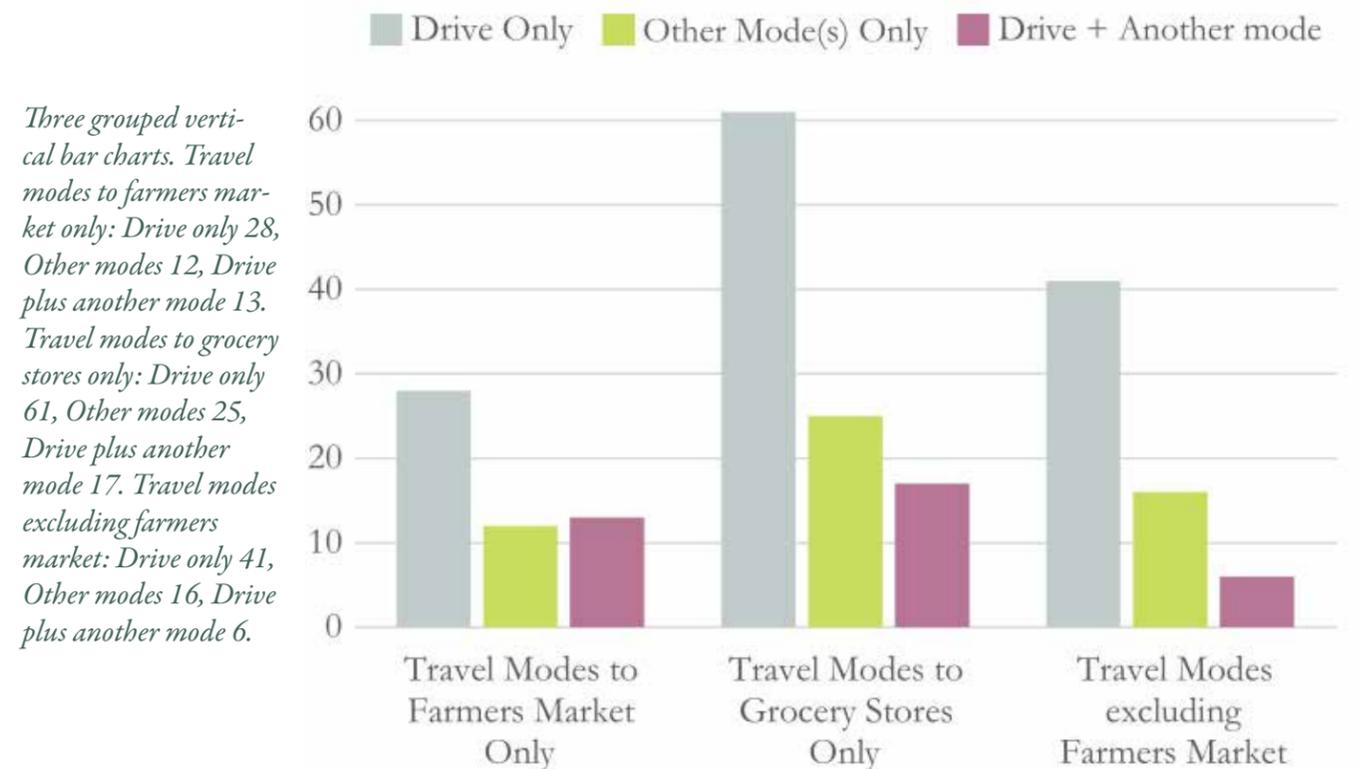
Vertical bar chart with images of fruit and veg as the largest three bars. Very unlikely 1, Unlikely 3, Neutral 18, Likely 30, Very likely 64. All images from Veggielution.

Map of Grocery Stores and Corner Markets Within Walking Distance of the SPP



Map of downtown San José with purple overlay showing 15, 20, 25, and 30 minute walking distance from the SPP. Within 15 minutes' walk, there are six corner markets, and one full-service grocery store just next to the park. Arteaga's, in Guadalupe-Washington, is at the beginning of the 20 minute range, along with several more corner markets and a Grocery Outlet near the SJSU campus. Three more grocery stores are available at the 25 to 30 minute walk range.

Survey results for “35. How do you travel to get produce? (you may select more than one)”



Three grouped vertical bar charts. Travel modes to farmers market only: Drive only 28, Other modes 12, Drive plus another mode 13. Travel modes to grocery stores only: Drive only 61, Other modes 25, Drive plus another mode 17. Travel modes excluding farmers market: Drive only 41, Other modes 16, Drive plus another mode 6.

2.2 ... for Kids

One of the most common recurring responses that we received, both from study area participants and those from elsewhere, was to provide options for kids and the adults caring for them. Of all the survey participants who offered other ideas for activities they'd like to see held in the park, nearly two thirds mentioned activities and space for kids. Suggestions were made for seating for those watching the kids play in the park, as well as suggestions for activities and options for children to engage with the space. This ranged from "dinosaur christmas" (suggested by kids themselves) to play structures to hosting kid-oriented family activities in the garden space. Tied in with these ideas are a need for seating, as mentioned in ST2 - Increased Seating; both the children and those who come with them will need somewhere to hang out.

Although some things like play structures are outside Veggielution's mission, there are some other ways of integrating these options into the existing framework of urban gardening education. Building off the existing programming at their East San José location at the Youth Garden, running kids' gardening clubs or other structured learning activities could be a great way to start engaging the wider community. Another option would be to reach out to schools that may have either their own existing gardens or don't have space for one - collaborative relationships using the SPP as additional garden space could be a great way to get the word out about the space and Veggielution more generally.

Based on the frequency of these suggestions, another of our ideas was to work towards shaping the park as a Community Activity Center that could accommodate all of the options that have been presented here. The SPP could easily become a community hub for neighbors of all ages, serving as a host space

for Veggielution's events as well as those that the community would like to run on their own. This might also help take some of the staffing pressure off of Veggielution, if they are able to have only one or two members present to assist with event logistics handled by an outside group such as local schools, community groups, or CommUniverCity.

For survey results related to this, see the pie chart on page 10 - many people specifically were interested in options for children and families at the SPP.



A table covered in park ideas built from all sorts of scrap materials - hair curlers, plastic flowers, pipe cleaners, wooden blocks, and other odds and ends. The general scheme seems to be a bridge across a lake with plants and flowers around it, lots of benches, imaginative play equipment, and decorative entryways.

Photo by [James Rojas](#). (used with permission)



A small child leans over the edge of a raised planter bed and very seriously pours water on new plants from a small plastic watering can. Photo by Veggielution.



In an open urban space against a white-painted brick wall, several people have gathered around brightly colored patio furniture. Some plants and green carpeting have been added to soften the space. One person is putting up a striped umbrella to provide shade from the bright sunshine.

Photo by [Joe Phelan](#) / Kennebec Journal. (used with permission)

LT3 : More Parks in the Area

An overwhelming 99% of our survey respondents said they would like to see more parks like the SPP in their neighborhood. Along with the requests for play structures, this is outside the scope of Veggielution’s mission at the SPP. However, we realized that it provides a strong mandate for the work that is currently being done there and presents a strong opportunity for Veggielution and other organizations to do similar work in other pre-development spaces all over San José. As highlighted in the recent MTI report about the work that our class did at the SPP, there is a lack of open spaces in the nearby area and many of our survey respondents were interested in safe spaces to relax with friends, family, and nature.¹ In addition, those who were familiar with the SPP found it to be a welcoming space that they enjoyed spending time. It is clear that other similarly well-tended and activated spaces would be positive

contributions to any neighborhood. Due to the temporary nature of the SPP, we would also recommend that Veggielution begin conversations with Urban Community and other local developers soon about what other spaces they could move to in the event that the development at this space is ready to proceed. With enough notice, everyone who uses the park even occasionally will be able to get the message and hopefully would be able to make the shift. Advance notice would also keep the trust that Veggielution will hopefully have built by then within the community. Perhaps there are spaces available right now that could be activated in a similar way; understanding that Veggielution is short-staffed to run more than two locations, it could be an ideal opportunity to partner with other local organizations who are interested in expanding open space access in downtown San José.

86%

would likely visit the park if it offered local fruits and vegetables



91%

said the SPP has “positively: or “very positively” influenced the surrounding neighborhoods including their own



85%

were “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied” with the appearance and cleanliness of the SPP



99%

would like to see more parks like this in their own neighborhood



¹ Richard Kos and Irma Garcia, “San José’s SoFA Pocket Park Project: Reclaiming and Revitalizing Surface Parking Space for Urban Agriculture,” <https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2166>, (2022).

Concluding Remarks

“Third spaces” like parks and libraries - locations where community members can gather that are not home or work - can also contribute to a sense of community identity for an area. A successful venture like Veggielution’s presence at the SPP could easily be a model for both community and organizations to create other spaces like this around San José. In the meantime, there are short-term improvements that Veggielution can make to increase traffic to and awareness of the park itself. All of this work will help cement the SPP as a neighborhood fixture and asset. When the time comes to develop the space, it would be beneficial to have a nearby space to simply relocate the SPP activities to instead of closing it down entirely. Ensuring continuity of programming, as well as having time to spread the word to neighbors

who have become attached to the park, would help build trust between the community and real estate developers in San José as well.

Short term recommendations like increased signage will hopefully also support the long term recommendations of expanding the event offerings at the park. With the overwhelmingly positive survey response to having farm stands at the SPP, we are hopeful that Veggielution can build successful and beneficial relationships in the local community. The unique partnership between the Downtown Association, Urban Community, and Veggielution has a potential to spark a revolution in how under-utilized spaces in San José are used, with local community members of all ages enjoying the benefits of increased access to open spaces in an urban environment.



As the sky darkens for the evening, a group of people are gathered in a narrow space along a mural-painted wall around tables of produce and backpacks and school supplies. Some are seated in a loose circle, others standing - everyone is focused on and engaged in a conversation that is happening among the whole group. Lights on strings criss-cross the space above, lighting the whole scene pleasantly. Photo by Gordon Douglas.