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Recreation

Fun with art: New play structures for Playground Fantástico win Napa committee's support

Howard Yune
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Where the wooden play structures of a well-loved Napa playground have been recently taken down, a pair of whimsically designed replacements will rise next year – outdoor artworks for children to clamber and climb upon.

Two custom-designed play structures are headed to Playground Fantástico in south Napa after their approval Tuesday night by the city's Public Arts Steering Committee.

Penned by the Napa-based designer Daniel Wodarczyk, the installations will be built mainly from steel and include one structure for older children up to age 12 and a second geared for younger ages 2 to 5 – with its structural elements spelling out “N-A-P-A” when seen in profile.

Construction of the rebooted Playground Fantástico, off Old Sonoma road near the Harvest and River middle schools, is expected to take place in the spring of 2019. The facility has been closed since demolition began Oct. 22 on the original wooden structures, which parks officials have said reached the end of their useful life after more than a decade and a half.

Conceptual drawings published by the city show a structure for younger children formed in the shape of the city name's four letters, with a slide on the left flank of the “N” and a crawling tube passing through the “P.” A structure for older children would be built around two tower-like platforms with peaked roofs, as well as a pair of enclosed, tube-like slides.

The new design evolved from talks this spring and summer between parks staff and members of the team of Napa volunteers that built Playground Fantástico in 2002, according to Ali Koenig, city parks and recreation project manager.

Wodarczyk, who owns the local design firm S2 Associates Inc., was a member of the playground's original team, which led a breakneck building campaign that erected the facility in six days with the help of several thousand volunteers and \$400,000 in donations.

Unlike the community-built model that brought the playground into being in 2002, the new play structures will be prefabricated off-site and then installed in Napa. For safety reasons, opportunities for volunteer labor likely will involve installing non-customized fixtures at the venue, under professional supervision, Koenig told the committee.

While Napa has budgeted \$475,000 for the project, another \$350,000 is needed to enhance the playground with unique equipment “to maintain the sense of wonder, creativity and fantástico” of the original, Matt Eisenberg, a Napa father who was the project coordinator in 2002, said last month. The Foundation for Napa Recreation is taking mail-in donations and has opened a GoFundMe contribution website for the project.

Napa estimates the artistic play structures will cost \$15,000, meeting a city requirement that large-scale construction projects devote at least 1 percent of the project cost to public art.

Other fixtures at Playground Fantástico have been preserved and will be carried over to the new version, including swings, shade structures, pathways, a picnic area, mosaics and a sculpture by the Napa artist Gordon Huether.

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