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recreation

## Tour of Napa city parks explores what's new, and what's to come

Howard Yune

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A Wednesday tour of Napa's city parks and recreational spaces included a stop at Playground Fantastico off Old Sonoma Road, which is slated for the replacement of the wooden play structures originally built for its debut in 2002. Spectators paused beneath the playground's brightly painted pavilion, a metal structure designed by the local artist Gordon Huether.

Howard Yune, Register

**F**rom a Browns Valley hiking preserve to an Old Town softball haven to a freshly renovated senior activity center, Napa's parks and recreational spaces provide many ways for city residents to spend their leisure hours. Wednesday evening, an annual tour displayed to city leaders, park advisers and a handful of townsfolk the diversity of Napa's public open spaces – and some of the changes to come.

For three hours, a party of 16 people crisscrossed Napa in a rented bus, on a circuit of leisure-time destinations that gave Napans the chance to see for themselves the improvements wrought by city funding or volunteer labor.

Whether for those advising the city how to improve and refresh its parks – or those who simply enjoy them – the tour, which debuted in 2018, is intended “to get them out into the field and show some of the good work we're doing, and some of the work we're envisioning and planning,” city Parks and Recreation director John Coates said at the start of the tour, which included five members of Napa's Parks, Recreation and Trees Advisory Commission.

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Among the stops on Wednesday's tour were Playground Fantástico, which will receive a fresh set of play structures to replace the wooden equipment built by residents in 2002, and Kiwanis Park, home to the Napa Valley Girls Fastpitch Association, whose softball teams will benefit from energy-efficient LED illumination to replace existing lights that are nearly 30 years old.

The tour's final destination also was the newest fruit of Napa's recreational overhauls – the Senior Activity Center, which had reopened two days earlier after a nine-month makeover that cost \$2.45 million. Tour members strolled through hallways and rooms lined not only with contemporary flooring and lighting but new furniture, a large-screen TV over the fireplace and a commercial kitchen stocked with gleaming stainless-steel appliances, where food will be prepared for the meals-on-wheels delivery program serving infirm and aged Napans.

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“This is just so respectful for seniors,” said an admiring Paulette Litz, a Napa resident who had signed up for the tour. “It’s just lovely; I really am impressed.”

While change may be as visible as rebuilt play structures and light towers at some parks, others are instead benefiting from more manpower and attention. At the foot of Westwood Hills Park’s main hiking trail, parks commissioner Kevin Hansen described to spectators the progress made there with the help of a year-old volunteer group – a rollback of French broom and other invasive plants that have crowded out native vegetation and raised the risk of wildfires.

“We have a very formidable challenge, but that’s not the same as impossible,” said Hansen, a member of Friends of Westwood Hills, recalling work parties that have attracted as many as 70 people pulling noxious plants – sometimes on hilly and muddy terrain studded with poison oak.

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Coates described the creation of more such volunteer groups as an important step in better managing Napa’s sprawling array of recreational areas, and said such efforts will take precedence over increasing the amount of city parkland. “It’s important to fix what’s broken before we add to the park system,” he said.

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