

MONEY

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Bakersfield should consider the micro park

I was in San Francisco a few years ago, and after walking up a few steep hilly streets with a friend, we sat down on a small bench, surrounded by potted plants in a tiny, meticulously designed miniature park.

The bench, just where we needed it — occupying two parking spots on a lovely street with lush greenery surrounding and patches of deck-like flooring and artificial turf underfoot — was a welcome respite from the stroll we'd just completed in what felt like a wind tunnel. (Oh, chilly, breezy San Francisco!)

I loved that we could remain a part of the street scene, watch passersby, peer into shop windows,

sip our hot teas for a few moments, and then venture back out. I had no idea at the time, but I had just experienced my first "parklet."

Cities around the world are coming up with creative ways to add green space to city centers. The concept of the parklet (sometimes called pop-up parks) — the conversion of a couple of curbside parking spots or other underused public space into a tiny park, complete with greenery and seating — got its start in San Francisco about 10 years ago.

This is similar to the older idea of "pocket parks" (often larger than a parklet), which brings plants and usable public space together

in overlooked city corners.

Together, parklets and pocket parks are transforming the landscape of urban areas.

Serving similar functions as larger parks on a smaller scale, they create manageable and highly utilized spaces that can help with air quality, improve blighted areas, and provide restful natural escapes in previously underutilized places. Creative parklets and pocket parks respond to the surrounding community's needs and can incorporate children's play equipment, small pet spaces, bicycle parking, tables and chairs, art installations, and soothing water features.

Examples of (and opportunities for) micro parks are everywhere. You may have heard of the High Line in New York City, a public park built on a historic freight rail line elevated above the

streets on Manhattan's West Side. I

t's an excellent example of a successful meandering pocket park in what was once unused space. Dozens of mini parks have popped up in Philadelphia parking spots in buzzing neighborhoods. Los Angeles has parklets throughout the downtown area, including one with a foosball table on Spring Street. And San Francisco has so many parklets and pocket parks around the city that reports have trouble keeping up with the total count.

Patricia's Green, a pocket park in Hayes Valley where a freeway once was, has even been credited with turning around the neighborhood.

Bakersfield has a few pocket parks, but the concept is still new.

A small park currently in the design stage is the East Bakersfield Pocket Park, a triangular space at the corner of Niles and Monterey streets.

This park is the dream of Councilmember Andrae Gonzales, through his work with non-profit Children's First.

It will be located on what is now an unused, oddly shaped dirt lot that collects litter and attracts illegal dumping in a residential neighborhood utterly devoid of public parks. The park will incorporate family-friendly spaces for events and gatherings with a stage, lawn area, and a small citrus tree orchard.

The Sister City Gardens is another local pocket park in a corner of land across from Mill Creek Park; it includes an event space with shade structures and a path through themed gardens commemorating Bakersfield's relationships with its sister cities.

As Bakersfield's downtown further develops, we should consider and support new ways to incorporate parklets and pocket parks in our more walkable core.

A parking spot or two here and even a slice of wide sidewalk there could be transformed into a space many of us can enjoy. As downtown's popularity grows, more pedestrians and bicyclists are using



CATER DESIGN GROUP

An artist's rendering of the proposed East Bakersfield pocket park.



Source: Cater Design Group

the area, and land values rise, parklets and pocket parts become even more attractive.

In most places, parklets are maintained by local non-profit organizations or surrounding businesses. Pocket parks are usually managed and maintained by municipal parks and recreation departments. Unfortunately, the City of Bakersfield Parks and Recreation Department has a policy that it will not maintain city parks that are smaller than five acres. Perhaps this practice should change with the times.

The idea behind parklets and pocket parks is to bring city dwellers together. They help build community by adding plant life and usable space in unexpected places. Smaller parks dotting an urban landscape add to residents' quality-of-life. They could help brand our city as forward-thinking and creative.

Parklets in other cities have proven to increase property values and drive up revenues for nearby businesses. The benefits are endless, and the price so small — they take up merely a postage-stamp sized space. They can be tucked anywhere there's a few extra square feet or an empty lot. Wouldn't it be

wonderful to turn downtown Bakersfield into a place dotted with parks, and make other cities green with envy?

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After Hours Mixer: The Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce is hosting a mixer Thursday from 5:30 -7:30 p.m. at Highgate at Seven Oaks.

Challenge Your Business to Thrive: The National Association of Women Business Owners is organizing a learning session at Krush Wine Bar this Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Bakersfield Startup — Meet Bakersfield Entrepreneurs: Mesh Cowork is hosting a startup networking event at their space, 2005 Eye Street, Suite 4, this Thursday at 6 p.m.

Downtown Cleanup Day: Join Councilmember Andrae Gonzales on Saturday, Oct. 7, from 8- 10 a.m. for a cleanup in downtown Bakersfield. Meet at the Fox Theater.

Street Party: The Bakersfield Young Professionals Street Party will take place Oct. 13 at 6 p.m. in Wall Street Alley downtown.

Anna Smith writes a weekly column about Bakersfield business. She can be reached at anna@sagebakfield.com.

PEOPLE in BUSINESS



TANYA D. ALSHEIKH
NEW ATTORNEY

Tanya D. Alsheikh has joined Chain | Cohn | Stiles as an associate attorney, focusing on personal injury cases. Tanya was raised in Bakersfield, graduating from Bakersfield Christian High School. She received her bachelor's degree from Loyola Marymount, and her Juris Doctorate from University of San Diego School of Law. She is fluent in Arabic. For more on Tanya, go to chainlaw.com.



RAY PRUITT
NEW INVESTIGATOR

Ray Pruitt is a new investigator with Chain | Cohn | Stiles, where he assists in case development and management, and gathering vital evidence and information for personal injury cases. Ray has nearly 25 years of experience in local law enforcement and investigative experience. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice administration, a worker's compensation law certificate, and has taught criminal justice classes at both the college and law enforcement academy level.



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