

FAQs/Information

What is the Hidden Garden Steps Project?

The Hidden Garden Steps Project is a volunteer and community-based public art project to create mosaic steps, a public garden and a wall mural on 16th Avenue extending uphill from Kirkham to Lawton in the Golden Gate Heights/Inner Sunset neighborhood. Formal partners include the San Francisco Parks Alliance, the San Francisco Department of Public Works Street Parks program, and artists Colette Crutcher and Aileen Barr who designed the Moraga Mosaic Steps. Other collaborations include the SF Department of Public Works, Inner Sunset Park Neighbors, the Golden Gate Heights Neighborhood Association, S.H.A.R.P, Woodside International School, volunteers from Nature in the City's Green Hairstreak (Butterfly) Ecosystem Corridor project, and individual local merchants. A "gratitude element" on the steps on both sides of the dog-leg landing thanks our major collaborators.

How did this project come to be?

This project was developed out of community interest in enhancing and protecting the stairway and the surrounding area so that it could become a beautiful gathering place consistent with the nature and spirit of our neighborhood. The project addressed the graffiti and litter problem of this secluded and aging staircase.

What tasks were involved in this project?

The planning committee oversaw these tasks:

- get artists Colette Crutcher and Aileen Barr to agree to design and make the mosaic
- secure the San Francisco Parks Alliance as partner and fiscal agent
- establish a project budget and a timeline for project completion
- consult with City of San Francisco Department of Public Works to determine required structural changes
- publicize the neighborhood project
- obtain approval and commitment from Department of Public Works for proposed structural plans
- raise funds from individuals, businesses and grant-giving foundations
- plan, execute and staff marketing events to promote the project
- design and maintain website: hiddengardensteps.org to inform community and facilitate on-line donations
- involve social media in publicizing the project
- organize volunteers for the 2nd Saturday 1-3 PM monthly clean-up of the steps
- cope with the innumerable crises that arose

What is the starting and ending budget for the project?

Our starting budget for the project was \$300,000. We raised over \$183,000 from over 600 donors, plus receiving a \$32,500 grant from the City's Community Challenge Grant. The Department of Public Works put in a total of \$250,000 of city funds in structural fixes, terracing, and erosion control. An abundance of in-kind services reduced our expenses.

Of this total, \$102,000 represented payment to the artists for their design and project management, \$38,000 covered administrative costs (including city and fiscal agent fees), over \$37,000 went to installation of tiles, \$20,000 was put aside for the maintenance fund, and the rest for incidental expenses.

How did we raise funds for the project?

Over 600 donors gave to the steps, mostly from the community and California, but also from fifteen other states and the District of Columbia, and as far away as France, England, Belgium, and Germany. These wonderful folks made donations for single tiles or larger multi-tiled elements. Single tiles were priced at \$150, \$350 & \$1,000. Multi-tiled elements were priced from \$5,000-\$15,000. Donations for tiles included the option of placing characters (i.e., names, etc.) on tiles. Higher priced tiles allowed for more characters. We wrote many grants, and got one (Community Challenge Grant) from the City for \$32,500.

SFPA. SFPA charged the project a management fee of 5% for all expenses paid out and an additional 2.5% for use of their on-line credit-card vendor.

When was the mosaic installed?

Our organizing and fundraising went on for four years (2010-2013). The artists worked about a year-and-a-half to make the tiles and place them with surrounding tile pieces on the risers. However, the installation of the tread tiles and riser took only three weeks. We had a wonderful ribbon-cutting ceremony and street party on December 7, 2013.

What are your plans for the gardens beside the steps?

The easement gardens feature California native plants, succulents, and other drought-tolerant species, which attract birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. Most of the plants were in-kind donations from SFDPW and neighborhood gardens. Tree Shapers, LLC and steps neighbors made substantial tree-trimming free of charge to enhance the views toward and from the stairway. Since inception, community volunteers have met on the second Saturday of every month to weed and plant the easement and to remove graffiti (see photos on our website). Added now is the sweeping of the steps. Members of our community have expanded their view of the steps beyond “getting from here to there”, as a place to commune with nature and each other.

What are your plans for the walls by the steps?

The Woodside International School volunteers painted a mural and bench at the foot of the steps to help with the fundraising and to signal the effort to beautify the neighborhood. The planning committee is considering signage, and how we will enhance the walls at the bottom, by the side and at the top of the steps.