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Historic Funding Secures Magical Bridge Pocket Park in North Fair Oaks

County of San Mateo, Philanthropic Leaders, and Community Donors Join Forces to Create an Inclusive Space for All

Redwood City, CA: March 25, 2026 — Thanks to \$400,000 from the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors and broad community support, a fully inclusive Magical Bridge Pocket Park will break ground later this year in North Fair Oaks.

The funding will help turn a vacant lot on Buckingham Avenue into a vibrant, accessible space for children and families of all abilities.

The County's \$400,000 investment — led by Supervisor Lisa Gauthier — is matched by major philanthropic and community gifts that include:

- \$250,000 from Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan
- \$100,000 from The Schmidt Family Foundation
- \$100,000 from Sequoia Healthcare District and Dignity Health Sequoia Hospital
- Generous donations from local families and neighbors.

The project is now fully funded at \$1.1 million, securing the 5,500-square-foot park on Buckingham Avenue, next to the Casa de Sobrato apartments near 5th Avenue, for construction later this year.

"This park represents the very best of our community," said Supervisor Lisa Gauthier. We are proud to support a project that will benefit so many families. When public leadership and private philanthropy come together, we can create spaces that reflect our shared commitment to equity, accessibility, and opportunity for all."

Elisa Espinoza, Senior Program Officer at the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, added, "We believe thriving communities are built through investments in vibrant, community-driven spaces where everyone belongs. We're honored to support the Magical Bridge Pocket Park in North Fair Oaks, and we look forward to seeing this park bring joy and connection to families and neighbors of all abilities.

The Pocket Park project is a partnership between St. Francis Center and the Magical Bridge Foundation. Designed to welcome children, families, seniors, and individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and social-emotional differences, the park will transform this underutilized lot into a vibrant, accessible space where everyone can experience the joy of play and connection.

"We are witnessing a powerful wave of generosity bringing the Magical Bridge Pocket Park to our community, said Kate Young, Executive Director of St. Francis Center. "It's a true testament to what is possible when donors unite around a shared vision of belonging."

Olenka Villarreal, founder of the Magical Bridge Foundation, shared, "We could not be more excited to create our very first Pocket Park for this neighborhood. To have so many people come in support of this unincorporated and often overlooked part of Redwood City is truly magical!"

Magical Bridge parks are known for going beyond ADA standards to intentionally remove physical and social barriers. Thoughtful design features, from accessible pathways and inclusive play elements to sensory-friendly quiet areas, ensure that people of all abilities feel seen, valued, and invited to participate.

"Working together, we built the first Magical Bridge Playground in Palo Alto," said Case Swenson of Swenson Development and Construction, which will build the park. "It brought joy to kids and their families and helped unite a community toward a common goal: connection, kindness, and belonging for people of all ages and abilities."

According to the Trust for Public Land, one in three U.S. residents—100 million people, including 28 million children—do not have access to a park within a 10-minute walk from home.

North Fair Oaks currently has no park within walking distance of the neighborhood surrounding the St. Francis Center. This new playground will help close that gap, offering not just a place to play, but a place to belong.

A section of the park will also honor the memory of beloved St. Francis Center staff member Tess Rowell Weber, whose compassion and service embodied the spirit of inclusion this project represents.

To learn more, please visit: <https://www.magicalbridge.org/stfrancis>

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About St. Francis Center of Redwood City: Celebrating 40 years strong and guided by the community, St. Francis Center of Redwood City is a multifaceted social service center providing food, clothing, education, and other essential services to underserved families. The Center's mission has expanded over the years to include affordable housing and comprehensive support services that build community connections so that all can thrive. For more information about the St. Francis Center, visit: <https://stfrancisrwc.org/>

About Magical Bridge Foundation: Celebrating its 10th Anniversary, the Magical Bridge Foundation, a non-profit organization based in Palo Alto, California, creates accessible, multigenerational playgrounds, parks, and programs that foster more inclusive communities. Drawing from decades of research and universal design expertise, Magical Bridge removes the physical and social barriers of typical playgrounds so that all ages and abilities can experience the many benefits of play and community connections. With 12 award-winning playgrounds open, and more projects underway worldwide, Magical Bridge proudly champions the vision that when it comes to vital community spaces, "inclusive" means everyone. Learn more at magicalbridge.org.