



YANAGUANA GARDEN AT HEMISFAIR

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, UNITED STATES

Finalist: 2020 Urban Open Space Award



Yanaguana Garden is a 4.1-acre community gathering place that honors the history, environment, and constantly evolving arts and culture of San Antonio. Located within the site of the 1968 World's Fair (Hemisfair), Yanaguana Garden is the first of three new park developments that are transforming Hemisfair and the city of San Antonio at large.

Owners: Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation; City of San Antonio

Designer: MIG Inc.

Additional team members: JOERIS General Contractors; HDR Inc.; Bender Wells Clark Design; CNG Engineering PLLC; Duende Design Architects Inc.; Intelligent Engineering Services; Oscar Alvarado; City of San Antonio Public Works; Ximenes & Associates Inc.; Overland Partners

Size: 4.1 acres (1.7 ha)

Cover: With lighting and watchful parents, kids can play into the night! (Billy Hustace Photography)



Families play Ping-Pong in the Games Plaza. (Billy Hustace Photography)

Park Overview

Yanaguana Garden is a park and play area located within the former 1968 World's Fair site in downtown San Antonio. The park's name and core design theme pay homage to the original stewards of the land, the local Payaya tribe, who built seasonal villages along the banks of the San Antonio River. Later, a culturally and economically diverse neighborhood existed on the site but was demolished to make way for fair exhibition halls and monuments.

In the years following the World's Fair, various groups proposed plans for different uses of the site, but none was adopted. Finally, in 2012, the San Antonio City Council approved a new Hemisfair Area Master Plan, with a mission to restore and reactivate a thriving, walkable district centered on three main parks: Yanaguana Garden, Civic Park, and Tower Park.

As the first Hemisfair park to be developed, Yanaguana Garden makes a bold statement with its vivid art installations and inclusive play spaces for children and adults of all ages and abilities. Featuring a wide array of interactive elements and flexible outdoor spaces connected by a trellis-covered promenade, the park encourages both programmed and

impromptu activities, ranging from movie nights and lawn games to theater performances and live music.

Yanaguana Garden has lived up to the Hemisfair tagline, "Where San Antonio Meets," hosting 3.8 million visitors since opening in 2015 and becoming the second-most-visited park per acre in Texas, with more than 80 percent of visitors coming from the greater San Antonio metropolitan area. The resulting economic activity has been significant: from 2013 to 2017, median property tax revenue increased by 182 percent in the surrounding census tracts, compared with Bexar County as a whole.

The district was void of any housing after the World's Fair, so displacement issues have not affected the area. Instead, the Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation (HPARC) is leveraging the higher property values and private housing development interests to deliver affordability, as per a self-imposed workforce housing policy. Every residential development at Hemisfair must deliver at least 10 percent, and no more than 50 percent, of the units to be affordable by tenants who fall between 50 percent and 80 percent of the area median income (AMI).

Social Equity and Community Engagement

A robust, six-month-long public engagement process informed the greater Hemisfair Park Area Master Plan, which identified an active children’s park as an essential element of the Hemisfair concept. Three public workshops attended by a total of 1,500 stakeholders and members of the public helped identify unique characteristics about San Antonio and possibilities for the site, which included parks and open space, arts and culture, history, education, and 24/7 living. A conceptual framework for Hemisfair emerged with three distinct park areas that would later become Yanaguana Garden, Civic Park, and Tower Park.

For Yanaguana Garden, one of the key design goals was to highlight “play” as a universal language and create an equitable space that would welcome, engage, and challenge all children, families, and individuals—regardless of cultural heritage, socioeconomic status, age, or physical ability. The entire park is designed for a “pre-K to gray” audience, is ADA accessible, and incorporates thoughtful lighting elements that promote a feeling of safety for families well into the evening. In addition, customizable elements, like movable furnishings, allow visitors to create their own seating areas within different areas of the park.

Beyond accessible infrastructure, the park promotes inclusivity through events that serve people of all abilities. On a Saturday each month, Yanaguana Garden hosts inclusion programming featuring an array of arts and crafts, music, movement,



Evening strollers activate the area. *(Billy Hustace Photography)*

literacy, health and wellness, and support for caregivers. In total, Hemisfair hosted more than 3,000 events in the first five years of the park being open to the public, celebrating the diversity and richness of San Antonio.

Sustainability and Resilience

Sustainability is one of the seven fundamental guiding principles in the Hemisfair Area Master Plan, and a key element of the design of Yanaguana Garden. Shade structures, such as the trellis-covered promenade, as well as the preservation of mature tree canopy, significantly reduce the average air temperature throughout the park and mitigate the urban heat island effect.

Various native planted areas, bioswales, and permeable play surfaces capture, filtrate, and evaporate an estimated 34 percent of annual rainfall, mitigating the negative impacts of stormwater during rain events. The park's native plants provide habitat for birds and insects, including monarch butterflies, which migrate through San Antonio on their way to the mountains in Mexico each fall. As an Official Monarch Waystation, Yanaguana Garden provides crucial nectar sources to sustain monarchs on their journey.

Funding

The Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation was established in 2009 to redevelop the area and provide an operating and financing vehicle. The redevelopment was made possible primarily through a municipal capital bond approved by the community in 2012 to provide construction funds for the first phase of development. In addition, private entities and philanthropists played an essential role with donations of time and money.

Designated developable parcels adjacent to the park have become the economic engine for the district, eventually covering roughly \$6 million in annual operations and maintenance costs. Philanthropies, including the Hemisfair Conservancy, a separate 501(c)3 with its own board of directors, raises, manages, and allocates funding for park improvement projects.

Yanaguana Garden contributed to a 50 percent average increase in assessed property value for 74 randomly selected parcels within a two-block radius from 2015 to 2019 and helped catalyze the establishment of dozens of new businesses and minority-owned businesses within the district.