



After the Eaton Fire, an Expanded Vision for a Neighborhood Park

TOP LEFT
Opened in June 2024, a merry-go-round was part of a new playscape for Charles White Park.

TOP RIGHT
The entire playground was destroyed in the 2025 Eaton Fire.

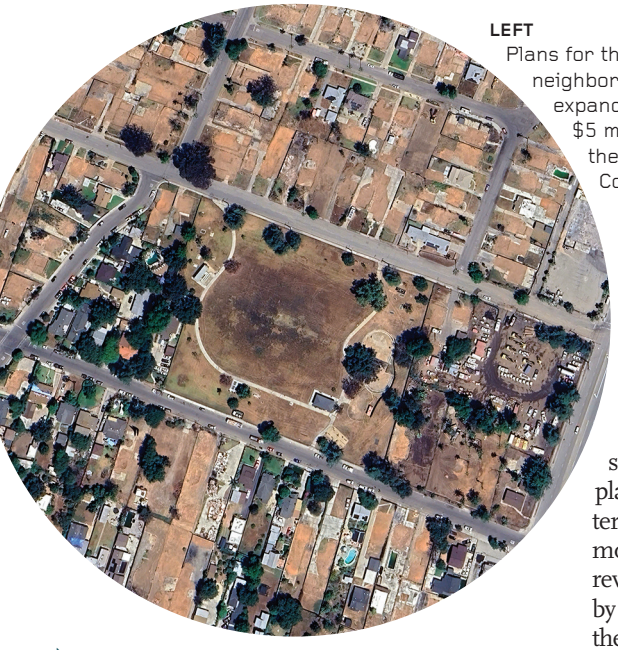
Charles White Park in Altadena, California, exemplifies the idea of a neighborhood park. Single-family homes back up to the five-acre green space, where an open field and newly redesigned playground serve as a community gathering place for soccer, picnics, and art festivals. Or at least they did until January 2025, when the park, including its brand-new playground, was consumed by the Eaton Fire.

SALT Landscape Architects, based in Los Angeles, had started rethinking the park in 2023 after the county embarked on a program to upgrade playgrounds and local parks. The first part of the redesign, the addition of modern playground equipment and shade structures, opened in June 2024. Work was about to start on the rest of the master plan when the fire erupted. For the past year, the park has sat in a state of limbo, protected by a chain-link fence and awaiting another larger revamp.

The disaster and its aftermath have challenged SALT to work at extraordinary speed to redesign the park as funding and plans are finalized.

PARKS

SALT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS



LEFT
Plans for the scorched neighborhood park have expanded owing to a $5 million grant from the Walt Disney Company.

PARKS

There is momentum behind it. In November, Los Angeles County announced a $5 million donation from the Walt Disney Company, bringing the total secured for the park's reconstruction to $10.5 million, with expected groundbreaking in the spring of 2026. Disney Imagineers and community design firm KDI are collaborating with SALT's team on a new playground.

In the first iteration of SALT's master plan, the park's simple layout was augmented with a walking path, a pickleball court, a small amphitheater, and a demonstration garden. The original $10 million plan called for more shade trees and native plants such as white alder, California black walnut, western willow, bee's bliss sage, and California sagebrush to improve fire resilience and cut water usage. The county also commissioned a bronze sculpture celebrating the park's namesake, Charles White, an African American painter and graphic artist from Altadena.

The fire hasn't changed the overall vision and plant palette for the park; it's expanded it. The private funding will allow for more extensive plantings, a more elaborate playground, and higher-quality materials, as well as a splash pad and more gathering spaces. The entire revamped park is expected to reopen by the end of 2026. Daniel Abratte, the section head of the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department's capital projects group, says a half dozen soil tests show that no additional remediation is needed (the Army Corps of Engineers initially scraped away the restroom and playground structures but left the field intact).

"The goal was to pick up and get back to where we were," says SALT principal Allen Compton, ASLA. The massive live oak, which shows new growth despite some burn scars, shades the charred playground while offering a vision of resilience for the design team. SALT senior associate Annie Pai says that the "frozen" state of the park—now a bright green lawn dotted with white clover—offers a poignant example of how nature bounces back, often stronger.

—PATRICK SISSON

GLOBE

"We urgently need to reduce the production of discarded fill upstream. But also there is a need for larger design involvement downstream."

—Chiara Geroldi,
Landezine, March 2026

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