Richmond initiative converts blighted alley to community garden

By Sarah Tan, stan@bayareanewsgroup.com

RICHMOND -- The city is looking to give new life to its alleyways with a new initiative intended to turn blighted areas into community green space. In partnership with nonprofit groups Pogo Park, the Trust for Public Land and the Watershed Project, in addition to the Iron Triangle Neighborhood Council, the city has completed its first prototype project, the Matthieu Court Alley.

Matthieu Court between Barrett and Ripley avenues is about 25 feet wide and 640 feet long and had been a blighted area and frequent site for illegal dumping.

Contractors, city agencies and neighborhood volunteers worked to refurbish the area by converting it from a two-way to a one-way alley and landscaping it into a garden for the community.

Work included creating seating areas at each entryway and installing habitat and edible gardens, and stormwater bioswale gardens to collect and filter rain runoff.

"While people want these alleys closed off in frustration, they actually brought value to the neighborhoods," Mayor Tom Butt said. "We thought that if we could illustrate how these alleys could be used to become an amenity rather than a problem, it might inspire other neighborhoods to look at finding ways to rehabilitate their alleys."

The project was funded through a $300,000 urban greening grant from the California Natural Resources Agency and $1,000 from the Rosie the Riveter Trust.

Ghilotti Bros. was the contractor for the project.

The city will be holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new space at 2 p.m. Friday

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