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A few years ago, it was home to knapweed and dog waste. Today, the 8th Street Pocket Park is a thriving community park and native plant garden. This lively pocket park claims land bounded by an irrigation ditch, 8th Street and Grant Street in the Franklin to the Fort neighborhood. Garden coordinators David Schmetterling and Marilyn Marler have loaned their expertise to this neighborhood oasis in a number of ways. Together, they have planned the space, organized volunteers, educated and worked with Flagship students, created interpretive signs, and applied for this small pocket park to be listed as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat, complete with chickadee nest. The 8th Street Pocket Park is just one of seven projects funded in 2009 by Neighborhood Project Funds.

Any industrious Missoulians can gather a group of volunteers, apply for funding and do something just as noteworthy in their part of town. The upcoming grant cycle for Neighborhood Project Funds is quickly approaching. Community members may submit grant applications for up to \$3,000. Applications are reviewed by neighborhoods, City Council representatives and City staff and are awarded on a competitive basis. Funds are approved by the Community Forum, which is the representative body of Neighborhood Councils, and the City Council.

Neighborhood Project Funds are set aside to build a sense of community and pride through neighborhood improvement, neighborhood planning, and neighborhood outreach. While the 8th Street Pocket Park is an example of neighborhood improvement because it seeks to improve the physical dynamics of the neighborhood, other funded projects have taken on city inventories, such as identifying areas without complete sidewalks or much land for parks. These inventories may then be used in larger city plans.

"Neighborhood Grants provide citizens an opportunity to add to larger or ongoing projects in their neighborhood," said Donna Gaukler, Director of Parks and Recreation. "This builds a sense of ownership and pride which lasts well beyond the capital improvement installation itself."

This year's grant cycle for Neighborhood Project Funds will begin with a Pre-Application Workshop on Wednesday, April 28, from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. in the Jack Reidy Conference Room at 140 W. Pine St. Citizens interested in applying for funds are strongly encouraged to attend. Application guidelines will be posted at www.missoula-neighborhoods.org.