



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: July 29, 2009
TO: Balboa Park Committee Members
FROM: Susan Lowery – Mendoza, District Manager
SUBJECT: Proposed Donation of a Sándor Márai Memorial Plaque

SUMMARY

Issue - Should the Balboa Park Committee recommend that the City of San Diego (City) accept the proposed donation of a Sándor Márai memorial plaque by the artist Marta Csikai and approve of the installation of the proposed donation at any of the four proposed locations in Balboa Park?

Staff Recommendation – The House of Hungary donation proposal which specifies installation of the Sándor Márai memorial plaque on or adjacent to their facility, or on the West side of the Park is not consistent with Park and Recreation Board Policy No. 1002; however placement within the facility is not within the purview of these policies.

Fiscal Impact – The House of Hungary has funded the cost of the memorial plaque. Additionally, they have indicated that they will cover costs for installation.

Environmental – This activity is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 (b), Minor Alteration to Land.

BACKGROUND

The criteria and procedures to be utilized by the City of San Diego in evaluating and accepting donations is outlined in Council Policy 100-02 and its companion document *Guidelines for the Donation of Works of Art to the City of San Diego*, which stipulate that proposed donations of artworks be reviewed by the City department which may ultimately display the artwork, the Commission for Arts and Culture (Commission) and the City Council. The final decision on whether to accept the donation lies with the City Council.

The House of Hungary is a member of the House of Pacific Relations in Balboa Park. Sándor Márai was one of the most influential Hungarian writers of the 20th century. He was born in Kassa, (Kosice, now in the Slovak Republic) in 1900, lived in many different countries in Europe, immigrated to the United States in 1951, moved to San Diego in 1979, resided in an apartment on Sixth Avenue and died on February 21, 1989. His work consisted of poems, novels and diaries. He loved Balboa Park and often spent his time around the Houses of Pacific Relations.

The bronze memorial plaque, measuring 60 cm tall x 40 cm wide, depicts a bas-relief portrait of the author Sándor Márai in the upper register. The lower register has an inscription “Sándor Márai / 1900 Kassa – 1989 San Diego / One of the most influential / Hungarian writers of the 20th century.” With funds from the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Sándor Márai Foundation of Hungary commissioned Marta Csikai, a contemporary Hungarian artist, to create the memorial plaque. Upon completion of the plaque, and following standard protocol in Hungary for public artwork, the Hungarian Institute of Art and Culture recommended the completed work for acceptance by the commissioner and for installation.

Park and Recreation Department staff received written correspondence from Mr. Gidofalvi, President of the House of Hungary on January 5, 2009, stating that funds had been raised for the Sándor Márai memorial and requested a permit to place the plaque mounted on a boulder, in a planter area in front of the House of Hungary. Staff learned that the dedication ceremony had already been planned for February 22; to mark the 20th anniversary of his passing, and those invitations had been sent. While researching the subject, staff discovered a letter sent to Mr. Gidofalvi on February 14, 2003 which outlined the review process for memorial plaques in parks, and that he was provided a copy of the Park and Recreation Board Policy No. 1002, Gifts of Architectural Features, Works of Art and Commemorative Plaques for Public Parks or Other City Owned Land and Council Policy 100-02, City Receipt of Donations. Park and Recreation Department staff held a meeting with Mr. Gidofalvi on February 4, 2009 and had email correspondence informing him of the review process and the pertinent policies. Park and Recreation Department staff allowed the ceremony to take place with the stipulation that the memorial plaque and boulder be removed the following day until the donation review process had taken place. The House of Hungary complied with the request to remove the memorial.

A donation application was submitted to Commission staff on April 10, 2009, per the Council Policy 100-02, City Receipt of Donations.

DISCUSSION

The Council Policy 100-02 states that the City department which has jurisdiction over the proposed site of the work of art shall refer the donation proposal to the advisory board which shall in turn make recommendations to the department. Balboa Park Committee is the advisory board for Balboa Park and the Park and Recreation Department is seeking your recommendation.

Park and Recreation Board Policy 1002 (PRBP 1002) addresses “Gifts of Architectural Features, Works of Art and Commemorative Plaques for Public Parks or Other City Owned Land.” A copy of

the policy is attached for your reference. It is staff's opinion that the proposed donation of the Sándor Márai memorial plaque installed at any of the four proposed locations in Balboa Park does not meet the requirements of the PRBP 1002.

PRBP 1002 Policy item #8 identifies nine specific points by which each individual memorial shall be evaluated. The following are ways in which the proposed donation does not meet the criteria:

- Does it add to the attractiveness and or usefulness of the park?

Park and Recreation Department staff believes that while the proposed donation is attractive it does not add to the usefulness of the park.

- Does it commemorate an individual group or event of general interest to citizens and tourists?

Park and Recreation Department staff believes that Sándor Márai is of great interest to the Hungarian community and to those who have read his literature.

- Is the individual, group, or event worthy of commemoration to future citizens?

Park and Recreation Department staff believes that some of Sándor Márai's work was translated to English in the mid 1990s. It is unknown at this time how popular his literature will become in the future. There are memorials at his birth place and former home.

- Does a proposal for a tribute to a living person meet all criteria, and will "time" substantiate the memorial?

This criterion does not apply.

- If the "feature" provides a service, are City funds needed for installation, and are they available?

This criterion does not apply.

- Will proper maintenance be feasible?

Ordinary artwork maintenance of artworks, which means the routine oversight of the operation and cleaning of and around artworks, is the responsibility of the City department, at which the artwork is sited and shall be undertaken at the direction of Commission staff.

- Will the feature withstand vandalism and can its design be altered either to deter vandalism or make the cleanup of vandalism easier?

If vandalism should occur, cleaning and repairs shall be undertaken at the direction of Commission staff and shall be performed in a manner that is consistent with maintenance schedules and any maintenance plans supplied by Commission staff.

- To what extent has the person, group, or event been commemorated in other locations in the metropolitan area?

To the best of Park and Recreation Department staff's knowledge, there are no other memorials within the metropolitan area.

- Does the location proposed add significance to the memorial?

Park and Recreation Department staff believes that the Hungarian community is proud of the work done by Sándor Márai; however, the only connection to Balboa Park is that he lived nearby and frequented the Park.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Recommend that the City accept the proposed donation of the Sándor Márai memorial plaque and approve the installation of the memorial plaque, at any of the four proposed locations in Balboa Park.
2. Recommend that the City accept the proposed donation of the Sándor Márai memorial plaque and approve the installation of the memorial plaque, at one of the four proposed locations in Balboa Park.
3. Recommend that the City reject the proposed donation of the Sándor Márai memorial plaque on the basis that the installation of the proposed donation of the Sándor Márai memorial plaque, at any of the four proposed locations in Balboa Park, is not consistent with Park and Recreation Board Policy 1002.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowery-Mendoza,
District Manager

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Sándor Márai Memorial

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- Attachments:
1. Request from the House of Hungary, December 30, 2008
 2. Correspondence from staff to Mr. Gidofalvi , February 14, 2003
 3. Biography of Sándor Márai
 4. Photo of memorial at dedication ceremony
 5. City Council Policy 100-02 and *Guidelines for the Donation of Works of Art to the City of San Diego*
 6. Park and Recreation Board Policy No. 1002

cc:

Council District 3 Office

Kathleen S. Hasenauer, Developed Regional Parks Deputy Director

Victoria L. Hamilton, Executive Director, Commission for Arts and Culture