



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
**Historical Resources Board**

DATE ISSUED: October 11, 2012 REPORT NO. HRB-12-057

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of October 25, 2012

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – Chicano Park**

APPLICANT: Josie Talamantez  
Owner: City of San Diego

LOCATION: National Ave. at Dewey Street, Barrio Logan Community, Council  
District 3

DESCRIPTION: Review the National Register Nomination of Chicano Park

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommend the listing of Chicano Park to the Office of Historic Preservation. The 7.4 acre park was established in 1970 and is located in the Barrio Logan neighborhood beneath the east-west approach ramps of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge. The site is bound by Interstate 5 to the east and National Avenue to the west.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board pursuant to the Office of Historic Preservation requirement that the local jurisdiction be provided 60 days to review and comment on a National Register of Historic Places nomination. Chicano Park is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, C, and Criterion Consideration G as a significant historical resource for its critical association with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, its significance to the City of San Diego's political and social history and for its assemblage of murals created by masters of the Chicano Movement. The City's Historical Resources Board designated Chicano Park and its large murals as a local landmark in 1980 (HRB #143).

## ANALYSIS

A National Register of Historic Places Nomination Report was prepared by Josie Talamantez, which concludes that the resource is significant under National Register Criteria A, C and Criterion Consideration G. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under National Historic Register Criteria A, C and Criterion Consideration G as follows.

*CRITERION A – Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.*

Chicano Park is located within the Barrio Logan community, one of San Diego's oldest and longest established Mexican-American or Chicano communities. Chicano Park is linked with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement both locally and nationally and the community's takeover of the land on which Chicano Park sits has contributed significantly to the broad patterns of our history.

From the early part of the twentieth century, Barrio Logan established a distinctive identity that came to represent a major center for Chicano culture and activities. The area originally provided low cost housing for local workers in fish canneries, lumber, shipbuilding and the railroad industry spurring considerable growth in its population. By World War II, Barrio Logan had the second largest Chicano population on the west coast behind Los Angeles.

Originally a part of the Logan Heights community, Barrio Logan exists as it does today as the result of the construction of Interstate 5 in 1963 and the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge in 1969. The construction split the neighborhood in two and the area to the southwest of Interstate 5 became known as Barrio Logan. The name Barrio Logan evolved from the Spanish speaking residents referring to Logan Heights as the *barrio* (neighborhood). The City officially adopted the name to describe the area in the 1970's.

Barrio Logan's physical makeup began to change in the 1950's when the predominantly residential area was rezoned as mixed use allowing a flood of automotive scrap yards and industrial businesses to the area. The mixed use classification and the construction of Interstate 5 and the Coronado Bay Bridge resulted in the displacement of many families and businesses. Between 1969 and 1979, Barrio Logan's population dropped from 20,000 to 5,000. The drastic population decline and physical change in the area during this time is responsible for igniting the local Chicano Movement that advocated for the rights of the community's residents and inspired a renaissance in Chicano art, music, literature, and theater.

In April of 1960, the Chicano Movement reached a new high with the takeover of the land beneath the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge. The takeover propelled the Chicano Movement into the consciousness of the larger San Diego and national community. On April 22, 1960, Barrio Logan residents were warned of the construction of a California Highway Patrol Substation beneath the bridge on the land which City officials had promised residents a park. This was viewed as an insult to the residents who had by now experienced many negative changes to their community. Protestors successfully stopped the ground breaking when 200-500 people occupied the park for twelve days. On the third day of the occupation the prominent Cacho family of San Diego lent protestors tractors, bulldozers and other farming tools to assist

the community in creating their park. After twelve days the City agreed to grant the land totaling 7.4 acres to the Barrio Logan community. The takeover influenced a series of community and political organizations to support and provide social services to the Chicano community.

The creation of the park was a major defining moment in the history of Barrio Logan and San Diego as a whole and today the park serves as a cultural center for the Chicano community of San Diego and the region. Every year the neighborhood celebrates the anniversary of the park takeover and on April 21, 2012, Chicano park celebrated its 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary.

*CRITERION C – Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.*

Chicano Park is an urban park made up of recreational facilities, a dance pavilion kiosk in the shape of an Aztec temple, gardens, sculptures and over one hundred colorful murals painted by local and national Chicano artists. The murals possess high artistic value and deep meaning to the Chicano community. The site includes two contributing structures including the dance pavilion and a statue, and fifty contributing murals with a total of fifty-two contributing resources and thirty-two noncontributing resources within the park.

The Park has gained a great deal of local, national and international recognition. The Historical Survey of the Barrio Logan Community states that Chicano Park “contains one of the finest and largest collections of Chicano murals in the country and serves as a gathering place for the region’s Mexican-American populations.” The City’s Historical Resources Board designated Chicano Park including its large murals as a local landmark in 1980 (HRB #143). At that time, the Board stated:

“Chicano Park is a significant representation of an era in the development of San Diego. It is also associated and identified with important events in the main currents of local history. It exemplifies the broad cultural, political, economic and social history of the community. The artistic representation depicts the thinking, the background, the neighborhood, the Chicano people and their struggles.”

The Chicano political activism of the 1960’s through 1989 initiated the creation and inspired the designs of the murals in Chicano Park. The Chicano Civil Rights Movement throughout urban United States emphasized graphics, including mural painting, to disseminate information and to communicate demands with both the literate and illiterate population. According to the report, artists “vowed that Chicano artists and sculptors of the community would turn the gloomy gray columns of the bridge into things of beauty, ‘an outdoor museum,’ reflecting the Mexican-American Culture.”

The Chicano Park murals are located on five bridge approach structures and the other contributing resources are associated with these structures. The bridge structures include:

- Westbound Approach Ramp (Bridge #57-939H). Resources 1-8
- Northwest Connector Overcrossing (Bridge #57-912G). Resources 9-30
- Logan Avenue Undercrossing (Bridge #57-847G). Resources 31-51
- Southwest Connector Overcrossing (Bridge #57-846G). Resources 52-64

- Dewey Street Pedestrian Overcrossing (Bridge #57-856). Resources 65-77

The bulk of the murals were painted within the 1973-1989 proposed period of significance and this 27 year period is broken up into three phases. The murals depict images of pre-Columbian gods, myths and legendary icons, botanical elements, animal imagery, the Mexican colonial experience, revolutionary struggles, Chicano achievements, cultural heroes, and scenes based on contemporary Chicano civil rights history.

Phase 1- Lasting from 1973 to 1974, the first phase began on March 23, 1973 when two groups of Chicano artists including the *Los Toltecas en Aztlán* and *El Congreso de Artistas Chicanos en Aztlán* began to paint the murals on the concrete pillars of the bridge approaches. The first phase represented the park takeover and murals from this period emphasized community and cultural history.

Phase 2 – Lasting from 1974 to 1975, Chicano artists from communities throughout California and the Southwest were invited to contribute to the murals in Chicano Park. Murals were greatly influenced by these visiting artists and represent more national and regional themes of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement.

Phase 3 – Lasting from 1977 through the end of the 1980's, the third phase celebrated a resurgence of community pride. Murals from this period question the physical surroundings and the large number of junkyards and their impact on quality of life. This is exemplified in one of the most well known murals at the Park, “Varrio Si, Yonkes No!” from 1977. In 1978, influential Chicano Muralist Victor Ochoa organized a 20 day Mural Marathon with an emphasis on educational and historical themes.

The two additional contributing resources were constructed in the Park during this time period. The Park's dance pavilion called “Kiosko-Tenochtitlán” designed by architect Alfredo Larin and painted by muralists Vidal Aguirre and Felipe Adame was added in 1978. The contributing statue titled “Anguila en Aztlan” was added in 1986.

Murals continue to be painted in Chicano Park today. In 2002, Caltrans applied and was awarded 1.6 million in funding from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) for the restoration of the murals which was completed by many of the original artists and their teams in August 2012. The assemblage of murals created by masters of the Chicano Movement possess high artistic value and represent exceptionally significant works of public art from their period of significance of 1973-1989.

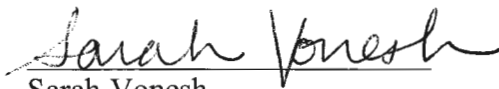
*CRITERION CONSIDERATION G – less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.*

Chicano Park meets requirements for Criteria Consideration G for its exceptional significance. Chicano Park is well established as a part of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement both locally and nationally. It also has been recognized for its significance in development of San Diego. The Park was listed as a historic site locally in 1980, only ten years after its establishment. In 1996, the California State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the *State Historic Research Education Report for the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge* which expressed that Chicano Park

and its murals met the exceptional significance criterion for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register for Historical Resources. Additionally, the 1.8 million dollar restoration project completed in August 2012 demonstrates the recognized significance to the larger community. Chicano Park and its murals have clearly established significance at the local, national and international level within the past 50 years and therefore should be recommended for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted, it is recommended that the Historic Resources Board forward a positive recommendation for Chicano Park to be listed on the National Register of Historical Places under Criteria A, C and Criterion Consideration G with a period of significance of 1970-1989.

  
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Planning Intern

  
Cathy Winterrowd  
Assistant Deputy Director/HRB Liaison

SV/jb/cw

Attachment: Applicant's National Register of Historical Resources Nomination Report under separate cover