



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

DATE ISSUED: May 4, 2012 REPORT NO. HRB-12-036

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of May 18, 2012

SUBJECT: ITEM #1 – Balboa Park Plaza de Panama Circulation and Parking  
Structure Project

APPLICANT: City of San Diego, owner and the Plaza de Panama Committee,  
permittee

LOCATION: Balboa Park, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Review and make a recommendation to the appropriate decision-  
making authority on those aspects of the Site Development Permit  
pertaining to designated historical resources.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

The Historical Resources Board recommend to the Planning Commission approval of the Site Development Permit and associated findings related to designated historical resources, as presented.

**BACKGROUND**

The City's Land Development Code Section 126.0503(b)(2) requires a recommendation from the Historical Resources Board prior to the Planning Commission decision on a Site Development Permit when a historical district or designated historical resource is present. The HRB has adopted the following procedure for making recommendations to decision-makers (Historical Resources Board Procedures, Section II.B):

When the Historical Resources Board is taking action on a recommendation to a decision-maker, the Board shall make a recommendation on only those aspects of the matter that relate to the historical aspects of the project. The Board's recommendation action(s) shall relate to the cultural resources section, recommendations, findings and mitigation measures of the final environmental document, the Site Development Permit findings for historical purposes, and/or the project's compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of

Historic Properties. If the Board desires to recommend the inclusion of additional conditions, the motion should include a request for staff to incorporate permit conditions to capture the Board's recommendations when the project moves forward to the decision maker.

Balboa Park was constructed for the Panama-California Exposition in 1915 and enlarged for the California-Pacific International Exposition in 1935. It is one of America's most important urban parks and home to some of the finest Spanish-Baroque Revival structures in America. The City of San Diego designated the Prado area of Balboa Park as Historical Resources Board Site #1 in September 1967. The Ford Building was designated as HRB Site #60 in 1972. The first National Register listing was also the Ford Building, which was listed in 1973. The California Quadrangle, consisting of the Administration Building, the Fine Arts Building and the California Building, along with the walls connecting these structures, were listed on the National Register the following year in 1974. In 1976 the entire El Prado Complex from the 1915/16 California-Panama Exposition, including the Cabrillo Bridge were added to the National Register. At the heart of Balboa Park is the Central Mesa. Occupying the majority of the Central Mesa are the El Prado/Plaza de Panama and Palisades areas, the cultural heart of Balboa Park and the centerpiece of the National Historic Landmark District, designated in 1977 as one of the nation's most important examples of urban park planning and exposition architecture, including the buildings and landscapes constructed for the 1915 and 1935 Expositions.

The applicant proposes a Balboa Park Master Plan Amendment, Central Mesa Precise Plan Amendment and Site Development Permit to implement the Balboa Park Plaza de Panama Circulation and Parking Structure Project, known as the Balboa Park Plaza de Panama project. The project includes the rehabilitation of the Plaza de Panama consistent with the 1915 through 1935 design of a ceremonial plaza and gathering space by eliminating vehicle traffic from Plaza de California, El Prado, Plaza de Panama, and the Mall. Project components include:

- Plaza de Panama. Elimination of automobile traffic from the Plaza de Panama and adjacent promenades and removal of parking from the Plaza to allow pedestrian use, as well as other improvements to the Plaza de Panama including paving, reflecting pools, and landscaping;
- El Prado and Plaza de California. Pedestrian use of El Prado and Plaza de California by re-routing traffic to the bypass road and bridge, as well as other improvements including paving and landscaping;
- Centennial Bridge and Road. Construction of a new two-way bridge and road starting at the east end of the Cabrillo Bridge and continuing through the eucalyptus grove around the southwest corner of the Museum of Man to the Alcazar Parking Lot, running through the Alcazar Parking Lot, leading to a new parking structure behind the Organ Pavilion, and ending at the connection to President's Way;
- Alcazar Parking Lot and Walkway. Reconfiguration of the Alcazar Parking Lot to provide additional accessible parking as well as passenger drop-off, museum loading, valet services, new stairs to the archery range, replacement of the existing restroom, and a new trash enclosure;

- The Mall (Esplanade) & Pan American Road. Rerouting of vehicle traffic west of Pan American Road to allow pedestrian only access, as well as other improvements to these areas including paving, benches, lighting, and landscaping;
- Organ Pavilion Parking Structure, Roof-Top Park, Tram and Arizona Street Landfill. Construction of a new underground parking structure with a roof-top park and garden at the location of the existing Organ Pavilion surface parking lot. The parking structure will consist of approximately 797 parking spaces on three levels and will be approximately 265,242 square feet. The new rooftop park will be approximately 2.2 acres and have two restrooms, a visitor center, and tram stops. A tram shuttle will link parking in the new structure with the Plaza de Panama. Excess soils from excavation of the parking structure will be exported to the nearby Arizona Street Landfill.

The project also includes planting, irrigation and landscape-related improvements and public and private accessory improvements. A detailed description of each project component is included in the attached Report to the Planning Commission, dated April 26, 2012 (Attachment 1). The proposed Amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan and a full set of the proposed project plans are provided in Attachment 2. Select sheets from the project plans are provided in Attachment 3.

Environmental Impact Report (EIR) No. 233958 (SCH No. 2011031074) was prepared for the project. The EIR concludes that construction of the Centennial Bridge component of the project would result in a significant impact to the National Historic Landmark District. No feasible mitigation is available for this impact; therefore, the impact would remain unmitigable. Alternatives to the project that would reduce or avoid significant historic impacts were analyzed in the EIR. Because significant and unmitigable impacts remain, the City Council will be required to adopt specific findings and overriding considerations in order to approve the proposed project (see Attachment 4 for the Final EIR).

The underlying purpose of the Balboa Park Plaza de Panama, Circulation and Parking Structure Project is to restore pedestrian and park uses to the Central Mesa and alleviate pedestrian/vehicular conflicts (defined as vehicles and pedestrians crossing the same area at potentially the same time). To achieve this underlying purpose, six primary objectives are envisioned:

- Remove vehicles from the Plaza de Panama, El Prado, Plaza de California, the Mall (also called “the Esplanade”), and Pan American Road East while maintaining public and proximate vehicular access to the institutions which are vital to the park’s success and longevity.
- Restore pedestrian and park uses to El Prado, Plaza de Panama, Plaza de California, the Mall, and construct a new rooftop garden and park in the location of the former California Garden behind the Organ Pavilion.
- Improve access to the Central Mesa through the provision of additional parking, while maintaining convenient drop-off, disabled access, valet parking, and a new tram system with the potential for future expansion.
- Improve the pedestrian link between the Central Mesa’s two cultural cores: El Prado and the Palisades.

- Implement a funding plan including bonds that provides for construction of a self-sustaining paid parking structure intended to fund the structure's operation and maintenance, the planned tram operations, and the debt service on the structure only.
- Complete all work prior to January 2015 for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition centennial celebration.

## ANALYSIS

Each component of the project was analyzed for consistency with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (Standards) and the City's Historical Resources Regulations (Regulations), as part of the environmental and permitting review process. The EIR (Attachment 4) and attached Historic Resources Technical Report (Attachment 5) provide this analysis, along with the historic context, project setting, and historic status of the project area.

Four treatments are recognized in the Standards: Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction. The Preservation Standards focus on preservation of the resource in its current state, while the Restoration Standards focus on returning the resource to a particular period in its history. The Rehabilitation Standards acknowledge the need to alter or add to a resource to meet continuing or new uses while retaining the resource's historic character. In determining the appropriate treatment, the National Park Service encourages the use of the Preservation or Restoration Standards for National Historic Landmarks such as Balboa Park; however, this is not mandated, and the Rehabilitation Standard is an acceptable treatment option.

The Rehabilitation Standards focus on preservation and restoration of historic features, as well as introduction of new features which are compatible with the resource and yet differentiated as a non-historic element; and is therefore the selected and appropriate treatment to use for the proposed Balboa Park Plaza de Panama project. Under the City's Land Development Code, a project that is consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards is also consistent with the Regulations and a project that is not consistent with the Standards requires a deviation from the Regulations. A brief summary of the analysis of each project component is provided below.

### **Plaza de Panama**

The historic use of the Plaza de Panama during both the 1915–16 and 1935–36 Expositions was pedestrian open space. During these two periods the Plaza was completely open for pedestrian circulation, marching bands, exhibits, and special events. Parking was initially introduced in the Plaza after the first exposition. During the 1935–36 California Pacific International Exposition, two large reflecting pools and a ceremonial arch were added in the Plaza, parking was eliminated, and the Plaza (at least at the edges) was once again returned to pedestrian use. After 1936, the reflecting pools and arch were removed, and parking and vehicular circulation again returned to the Plaza. In the existing condition, the majority of the Plaza is used for parking (54 cars). Currently, pedestrian access across the Plaza conflicts with vehicular traffic and the center of the Plaza is cut off from pedestrian use by a traffic circle and parking aisles. Under the proposed project, parking and vehicle circulation would be removed from the Plaza de Panama

and the Plaza would be redesigned with non-asphalt specialty paving, shade trees, movable tables and chairs, 1915 replica lighting, and other amenities, such as the shallow reflecting pools, that can be turned off to accommodate large events and festivals. The Museum of Art steps, located along the northern edge of the Plaza, would be re-created using the 1926 layout. The Plaza would incorporate shade trees along the eastern and western sides of the Plaza, with the central portion of the Plaza remaining mostly open for flexibility. The non-historic fountain located in the center of the Plaza would be retained.

The landscape plan for the Plaza de Panama calls for a double row of shade trees along the outer edges of the Plaza. Trees that currently screen adjacent historic buildings would be removed. The new trees would be located further away from the historic façades to shade the edges of the Plaza. The foundation plantings adjacent to the Houses of Charm and Hospitality would be thinned to eliminate historically inappropriate species and supplemented to include low ornamental plantings and bougainvillea in order to provide better views of the architecture. Lawn panels would be implemented around the perimeter of the Plaza in order to match the historic design, and the small plaza in front of the Timken Museum would be incorporated to make it part of the overall plaza composition.

This component of the project would be consistent with the Rehabilitation Standards. It would remove non-character-defining features and materials and would enhance the historic appearance of this very important public plaza while differentiating new work from old. Existing spatial relationships of the plaza would not be changed and the historic size, scale, and proportions of the plaza would be retained. Compatible pavers would be used. New light standards that replicate the 1915 design and new street trees and lawn panels would be added in their approximate historic locations. Two reflecting pools, similar in concept to what existed during the 1935-36 exposition would also be added.

### **El Prado and Plaza de California**

The Plaza de California is a small plaza encircled by the California Building. El Prado is the primary east-west circulation element that runs through the Central Mesa, from Sixth Avenue to the Plaza de Balboa. Historic photographs show visitors strolling along El Prado, framed by long arcades, decorative street lights, and neatly manicured Black Acacia trees. Immediately after the 1915–16 Exposition, vehicular traffic took over El Prado, and traffic has continued to flow from the Cabrillo Bridge east through the Plaza de California and along El Prado ever since. The only exception to this was during the 1935-36 Exposition when only pedestrians and shuttle buses were allowed. In the existing condition, Cabrillo Bridge/El Prado is the only vehicular access to the Park from the west. Automobiles were removed from El Prado east of the Plaza de Panama in the 1970s. The project would allow only pedestrian use along El Prado west of the Plaza de Panama. The proposed landscape design would recall the formal 1915–16 appearance. New trees and landscaping would be installed in their historic locations and the existing asphalt surface would be replaced with specialty paving with a monolithic appearance. The original roadway width would be restored and reinforced with a formal organization of ornamental trees and historic lighting. Foundation plantings along the arcades would be thinned to remove historically inappropriate species and be supplemented to include low ornamental plantings and

Bougainvillea. Ornamental “El Prado Trees” would be evenly spaced along both sides of El Prado, interspersed with pedestrian benches and formal lighting fixtures (historic replicas reproduced in a more durable material) located in their approximate historic locations.

The Plaza de California was historically used as a pedestrian square during the 1915-16 Exposition, and later during the 1935-36 Exposition. Vehicular use of El Prado currently limits this use. Vehicle traffic would be removed from El Prado and the proposed design for the Plaza de California would reuse the historically accurate tree planters recently added by the City in their historic locations. The existing non-historic interlocking pavers would be replaced with specialty paving with a monolithic appearance in order to provide a smooth, unbroken backdrop for Plaza activities.

The El Prado and Plaza de California component of the project would be consistent with all Rehabilitation Standards. It would remove non-character-defining features and materials and enhance the historic appearance of this important pedestrian circulation route by restoring missing features and materials. New compatible pavers would be added. New light standards that replicate the 1915 design would be added where they existed historically, and new street trees would be planted where they existed in 1915 and 1935.

### **Centennial Bridge and Centennial Road**

The Centennial Bridge and Centennial Road are proposed to reconfigure vehicular traffic flow and enable the Plaza de California, west El Prado, Plaza de Panama, and the Mall to be dedicated to pedestrians. The Centennial Bridge would be 44 feet wide (edge-to-edge), with two 14-foot-wide vehicular travel lanes for two-way traffic. There would also be an 8-foot wide walkway on the outer radius for pedestrians, separated from vehicles by a traffic barrier. The Centennial Bridge, as proposed, is 405 feet long from Cabrillo Bridge to the Alcazar parking lot, would span 345 feet between the abutments, and would be supported by six rectangular shaped columns, with approximately 50 feet spacing between columns. It would be constructed of concrete.

The Centennial Bridge would require removal of approximately 70 linear feet of the existing railing and non-historic sidewalk at the east end of the Cabrillo Bridge. An expansion joint would connect to the Cabrillo Bridge making the two structures independent from one another; meaning that no forces would be transferred from one bridge to the other, ensuring that the Centennial Bridge would have no direct structural effect on the Cabrillo Bridge. The Centennial Bridge would continue eastward across Cabrillo Canyon around the southwest corner of the Museum of Man. The bridge would be curved, would span the existing canyon (60 feet in height at the deepest point of the canyon), and then connect to the Alcazar parking lot. At this point, it would be at a slightly higher elevation than the Cabrillo Bridge. The bridge would be separated from the southwest corner of the California Building by 55 feet. Upon completion of the bridge, the disturbed areas would be revegetated with natural and native vegetation. Where possible, existing Eucalyptus trees would be preserved in place and additional plantings would be added along the length of the bridge.

Centennial Road would consist of two lanes measuring 28 feet (14 feet each) in width, and would connect the Alcazar parking lot to the new Organ Pavilion parking structure and continue on to Presidents Way. The proposed alignment would follow the existing drive that connects Pan American Road with the Alcazar parking lot for a portion of its length. The Centennial Road is proposed to drop down and become grade separated in order to allow vehicles to pass below the pedestrianized Pan American Road to access the east side of the new underground parking structure.

To accomplish this, Centennial Road would traverse the edge of Palm Canyon and encroach on the ornamental plantings within this area. Accordingly, the proposed project would realign and extend the 1970s Palm Canyon Walkway which is an existing raised wood pedestrian path that connects the Alcazar parking lot with the Mall. The project would extend the existing walkway from its current terminus to the International Cottages. The new addition would intersect with the existing walkway and would curve through and around the existing palms. The portion of Centennial Road from the eastern side of the Alcazar parking lot to the new Organ Pavilion parking structure would receive the “Palm Canyon” landscaping treatment where revegetation is required. During construction of the Centennial Road and the Palm Canyon Walkway extension, care would be taken to minimize impacts to the existing trees and vegetation. The “City Christmas Tree” near Palm Canyon would be relocated or replaced.

The Centennial Bridge and Road would not be consistent with Rehabilitation Standards 2 and 9. While the physical impacts to Cabrillo Bridge from the addition of the proposed Centennial Bridge are limited, the visual impacts and change in spatial relationships would be adverse. The direct visual connection of the Cabrillo Bridge to the California Quadrangle complex, the most important designed relationship in the Balboa Park Historic District today, would be disrupted. Centennial Bridge would result in the intrusion of a sizeable new element into the District that would change historic character-defining spatial relationships and would have direct physical and visual impacts on the Historic District. Grading within the upper rim of Palm Canyon, the use of several concrete and stacked-stone retaining walls and extensive landform alteration related to the construction of Centennial Road would not be consistent with Rehabilitation Standards. Although not from the historic periods, circulation routes would be impacted, adjacent areas of the park would be bisected and cut-off by the new road, and existing spatial relationships that characterize this part of the district would be altered.

### **Alcazar Parking Lot and Walkway**

The Alcazar parking lot is located immediately south of Alcazar Gardens. The parking lot currently contains 136 total parking spaces including five designated for accessible parking, and a large Heritage Tree, a Moreton Bay Fig (No. 65). This parking lot would be reconfigured to provide drop-off, loading, valet stacking, and disabled access parking. A small valet booth and linear wood log pergola structure associated with the valet services would be located along the eastern edge of the parking lot. The existing sidewalk adjacent to the Alcazar Garden would be widened to provide a more generous entry plaza and the Moreton Bay Fig tree would be retained. In the southwest corner of the parking lot, a new set of stairs would be added to provide access into the archery range, and a small single fixture restroom would replace the existing

restroom/storage building which is to be demolished. A small trash enclosure would be provided adjacent to the restroom.

In addition, the project would include a raised pedestrian bridge and walkway along the rear (south) side of the House of Charm/Mingei Museum. The House of Charm pedestrian bridge/walkway would be a concrete structure with a stucco or light sand finish, in order to be compatible with the House of Charm. The bridge railing would be steel, powder-coated dark olive green similar to the existing arcade railing adjacent to the House of Charm. Landscaping includes new tree plantings along the western, eastern, and southern periphery of the Alcazar parking lot. Where possible, existing trees would be relocated or replanted subsequent to the completion of grading activities at the Alcazar parking lot. The tree types and understory species would be consistent with either the “Cabrillo Canyon” and/or the “Palm Canyon” plant palette. The parking lot would include rows of shade trees set within landscape islands. The outer edges of the parking lot and portions of the interior would include specialty pedestrian paving, of a different type than in the historic core areas (e.g., Plaza de Panama, El Prado). A sidewalk with paving complementary to the Plazas and El Prado would encompass the perimeter of the lot to provide views of the adjacent canyons, accommodate valet users movement, and access into the archery range.

The Alcazar Parking Lot and Walkway would be consistent with all Rehabilitation Standards. Limited physical changes would be made to non-historic elements of the Historic District. Visual impacts to landscape features would be temporary.

### **The Mall and Pan American Promenade**

Pan American Road/Pan American Road East is the segment of street that connects the Plaza de Panama to Presidents Way. The portion of Pan American Road consisting of the roadway and landscaped median between the Plaza de Panama and the Spreckels Organ Pavilion is referred to as “The Mall.” The Mall and Pan American Road East are currently used to provide vehicular connection around the Organ Pavilion to Presidents Way and Park Boulevard.

The project would reroute vehicle traffic to Centennial Road west of the Mall. This would enable the Mall to be re-proportioned to recall the historic design by widening the median lawn, removing non-historic walkways, and re-establishing the historic tree and street light pattern, while accommodating managed vehicle use (tram and emergency or special event vehicles only). Pan American Road East would be converted to a promenade that would provide a tram and pedestrian route connecting the Mall to the Organ Pavilion, the Palisades, and the new park atop the underground parking structure.

The landscaping plan for the Mall would include widening the central landscaped median to more closely resemble its original 1915 design (fire lane width requirements make exact replication infeasible). Consistent with the plan for El Prado, the landscaping plan also includes specialty paving and a formal organization of trees, pedestrian benches, and historic replica lighting fixtures located in their 1915 locations. The east and west edges would be defined by



concrete mow curbs. Beyond the mow curbs the grade and vegetation would reflect the existing landscape themes of Palm Canyon to the west and the Japanese Friendship Garden to the east.

The Mall and Pan American Road would comply with all Rehabilitation Standards. Although a new feature within the District, the walkway is relatively small in size and inconspicuously located along the rear of the House of Charm where there presently is an asphalt driveway. Missing historic light standards and street trees would be added where they were located during the period of significance. Non-historic asphalt would be replaced with contemporary yet compatible paving materials.

## **Organ Pavilion Parking Structure, Rooftop Park, and Tram**

### Organ Pavilion Parking Structure

The existing Organ Pavilion surface parking lot is southwest of the Spreckels Organ Pavilion. The project would construct a new underground parking structure with approximately 797 parking spaces on three levels with a 2.2-acre rooftop park. This proposal would result in a net gain of approximately 262 parking spaces for the Central Mesa. Making use of the sloped site, the southeast elevation of the structure would be open to allow for natural light and ventilation, thereby reducing the need for mechanical ventilation equipment. During construction of the parking structure, three of the four large Torrey Pine trees behind the Organ Pavilion would be protected. The fourth would be evaluated by a certified arborist for structural integrity, as it is currently leaning toward the Organ Pavilion. This tree would not be impacted by the project, but may need to be removed to protect the historic Organ Pavilion and to alleviate safety concerns. Vehicle access would be grade separated from the pedestrian and tram traffic running along the reconfigured Pan American Promenade. The new Centennial Road would continue below grade along the northeast side of the structure, and at grade but below the top level of the parking structure along the southeast side, to Presidents Way and Park Boulevard. A proposed 150-foot-long deck over Centennial Road would provide pedestrian and tram access to the Organ Pavilion and northward to the Mall. Vehicle access to and from the new structure would be provided from two points of entry on the east side of the structure from the new Centennial Road. Users arriving from both the west (via the Cabrillo Bridge) and the east (via Presidents Way) would be able to access the facility.

### Rooftop Park

Where the existing surface parking lot exists, a new rooftop park would include a new garden in the location of the former “California Garden”, and an open lawn. The rooftop park would contain a central elevator courtyard with a large open air trellised pavilion around it. This central courtyard would also contain fixed tables and chairs and small planted areas. The stairwell/elevator core would include two glass elevators clad in water-cut, non-reflective steel panels that utilize a traditional grille pattern, creating a backlit Moorish lantern effect. The southern half of the rooftop park would consist of a large open lawn intended to be a flexible and adaptable open space area suitable for many uses, edged by small informal gardens and ornamental trees to the east. A nine-foot-wide walkway and decorative railing would form the eastern edge of the rooftop park. The area between the southeastern edge of the parking structure and the Centennial Road would be landscaped with “native garden” plantings. This area would

also contain evergreen trees to shield views of the parking structure's open eastern face. The landscaping east of the Centennial Road would be "Australian Canyon Landscape" plantings.

On the northeast corner of the rooftop park would be a new public restroom approximately 1,385 square feet in size, to replace the 1990s restroom being removed near the International Cottages. A second small restroom would be provided adjacent to the new visitor center (1,400 square feet) which would be located on the southwest corner. Tram stops would be located adjacent to the central elevator core and the visitor center. Each stop would include seating for waiting tram users.

### Tram

Trams were introduced in conjunction with both Expositions. The 1915 trams consisted of a small tractor pulling trailers with back-to-back benches. The tram system used in 1935 was motorized, hinged buses. In the existing condition, the Balboa Park tram system, the "red trolleys," is a free intra-park tram system operated by Old Town Trolley Tours of San Diego contracted to the City of San Diego. Passengers board at designated tram stops within the Central Mesa and West Mesa with targeted stops every 5–10 minutes. The current tram route primarily runs along Presidents Way and Pan American Road/Pan American Road East with tram stops at Inspiration Point, The Palisades (two stops), the Organ Pavilion and the Plaza de Panama. Every half hour the tram visits the West Mesa, traveling along El Prado, 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Balboa Drive with stops at Sefton Plaza and the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Upas Street. The actual tram schedule varies by the time of year and day of the week.

The new trams would be low-floor, low-speed vehicles that can share the road with pedestrians and provide access to all park visitors, including disabled visitors. The new tram service would be introduced during the construction phase of the proposed project. Upon completion of the project, the tram route would be modified to run from the Organ Pavilion parking structure along the Mall to the Plaza de Panama. The proposed new tram service is intended to supplement rather than replace the existing system and would be designed such that both integration with existing tram system and future expansion would be possible.

The Organ Pavilion Parking Structure, Rooftop Park, and Tram would be consistent with all Rehabilitation Standards. The Organ Pavilion parking lot is a non-contributing element of the Historic District and is currently incompatible with the district as a whole. The loss of this surface lot would not impact the district. The new below grade parking lot would have limited visibility within the Historic District and would be concealed from views along Park Boulevard. It would be unobtrusive and effects to the historic character of the district setting would be minimized. The Rooftop Park would replace the non-historic asphalt parking lot with landscaped parkland where the California Gardens were located historically. The proposed Tram service would not require overhead lines or other additions or changes within the Historic District.

In summary, the project does not comply with Rehabilitation Standards 2 and 9 because of the visual and physical impacts and adverse change in spatial relationships within the Balboa Park Historic District that would occur as a result of the proposed Centennial Bridge and Road.

Therefore, the proposed project constitutes a substantial alteration and a deviation from the Regulations and requires a Site Development Permit (SDP), consistent with Municipal Code Sections 143.0251 and 143.0260. A draft SDP has been prepared for the project (Attachment 6). The following conditions of approval are included in the permit to address historical resources.

**HISTORIC REQUIREMENTS:**

29. All construction permits (as defined by SDMC 113.0102) must be reviewed and approved by Plan-Historic staff prior to permit issuance. Additionally, any and all future work and other improvements must also be reviewed and approved by Plan-Historic staff prior to approval or construction of those improvements.

30. Final selection of finish materials, including but not limited to pavers, paving, stone/masonry, building materials, light fixtures, etc. must be reviewed and approved by Plan-Historic staff for consistency with Exhibit “A” and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards as part of the construction permit process.

31. Prior to issuance of any demolition or construction permit related to Cabrillo Bridge, the Owner/Permittee must provide Level 1 Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) documentation for the eastern portion of the Cabrillo Bridge within the City’s ownership, to the satisfaction of Plan-Historic staff. Upon approval by Plan-Historic staff, final copies of the HAER documentation shall be submitted for archival storage with the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board (Plan-Historic staff), the Project file, the South Coastal Information Center, the California Room of the City of San Diego Public Library, the San Diego History Center and/or other historical society or group(s).

32. A Historic Preservation Architect who meets the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications must be on site to monitor demolition of the identified section of the Cabrillo Bridge, and shall provide a report to Plan-Historic staff that documents the demolition. Should any unforeseen issues arise that requires any deviation from the approved scope of work, the Owner/Permittee must stop work immediately and contact Plan-Historic staff.

Adoption of Findings (Attachment 7) by the City Council for the substantial alteration of a designated historical resource is required for approval of the permit, consistent with Municipal Code Section 126.0504(i.). The draft findings follow.

**Supplemental Findings – Historical Resources Deviation for Substantial Alteration of a Designated Historical Resource or Within a Historical District (126.0504(i)):**

**1. There are no feasible measures, including a less environmentally damaging alternative, that can further minimize the potential adverse effects on the designated historical resource or historical district.**

The Plaza de Panama, Circulation and Parking Structure project is intended to restore pedestrian and park uses to the core of the Central Mesa area of Balboa Park and alleviate pedestrian/vehicular conflicts. The underlying purpose of the Balboa Park Plaza de Panama Project is to return pedestrian and park uses to the Central Mesa and alleviate pedestrian/vehicular conflicts by removing vehicular circulation and parking from Plaza de Panama, West El Prado, Plaza de California, the Mall, and Pan American Road East. Throughout the course of the proposed project assessment, a number of alternatives were evaluated. Most of the alternatives that achieved the primary project objectives resulted in substantial adverse change to historical resources in the park. Both No Project alternatives (No Development and Central Mesa Precise Plan; Alternatives #1 and #2) would avoid significant impacts to Land Use, Historical Resources, and Visual Quality associated with the proposed project's Centennial Bridge concept. However, these alternatives do not address future traffic queuing conditions which would worsen over time without the improvements proposed by the project.

**2. The deviation is the minimum necessary to afford relief and accommodate the development and all feasible measures to mitigate for loss of any portion of the historical resource have been provided by the applicant.**

The Plaza de Panama, Circulation and Parking Structure project is intended to restore pedestrian and park uses to the core of the Central Mesa area of Balboa Park and alleviate pedestrian/vehicular conflicts. The introduction of the Centennial Bridge into the National Historic Landmark District and the El Prado Historic District is the only component that poses substantial adverse change to the significance of Balboa Park's historical resources. The location, configuration, and visibility of the Centennial Bridge has been refined as much as possible to reduce the impacts including its design to utilize six slender pillars to reflect similar design intent as the Cabrillo Bridge, increased tree plantings within Cabrillo Canyon to minimize views of Centennial Bridge and re-establish historic canopy per CMPP/BPMP goals, a pedestrian sidewalk, increased width to accommodate a shared roadway for bicycles, reduction of the length of Cabrillo Bridge wall to be removed, converting it from a one-way to a two-way structure, and maximizing the distance between the Bridge and the corner of the California Building. Additionally, the loss of historic fabric is limited to approximately 65 feet of Cabrillo Bridge railing, and there would be no loss of historic fabric of the bridge itself.

No mitigation measures are available that would reduce the impact of the new bridge to a less than significant level. However, Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) documentation for the Cabrillo Bridge is a permit condition.

**3. The denial of the proposed development would result in economic hardship to the owner. For purposes of this finding, “economic hardship” means there is no reasonable beneficial use of a property and it is not feasible to derive a reasonable economic return from the property.**

The Plaza de Panama, Circulation and Parking Structure project is intended to restore pedestrian and park uses to the core of the Central Mesa area of Balboa Park, provide a net increase in parking spaces in close proximity to the core of the park, while also alleviating pedestrian/vehicular conflicts.

Denial of the development would not allow the City to take advantage of donations offered to design and construct the project, as well as to fund a substantial portion of the development, which is estimated to cost \$40 million.

While reasonable economic returns are typical considerations for private properties and a variety of publicly-owned properties, the desire and assumption of a reasonable economic return is generally not contemplated when considering uses of public park land, which typically contain few profit-making ventures. Therefore a reasonable economic return in these circumstances, a public improvement in Balboa Park, is a very minimal amount. The adopted plan goals for Balboa Park do not specify the desirability of deriving a reasonable economic return for uses within the park. Rather, the goals are essentially to preserve, enhance, restore, improve and create park features for the citizens of San Diego.

Denial of the development would prevent the City from fulfilling a stated plan goal of providing “new and redeveloped facilities on the Central Mesa that will be designed to accommodate multiple uses, including special events and maximum public access,” due to the continued loss of the Plaza de Panama area to pedestrian use and the lost opportunity for additional park land in the location of the Organ Pavilion parking lot. Denial of the development would also prevent the City from being able to return El Prado, Plaza de Panama, Plaza de California, and the Mall to pedestrian use without conflicts with vehicles, while still providing vehicular access and parking to the Central Mesa, thereby preventing beneficial use of the property. By restoring these areas to pedestrian uses and re-creating a grand ceremonial plaza for recreation and civic activities, the project creates additional park acreage, and ensures the continuing vitality of Balboa Park, which will contribute to the economic well being of the City and the region as it continues to attract tourists and visitors to enjoy the unique public space. As discussed within the Environmental Impact Report prepared for the project (Item 4.4.1.7), the Plaza de Panama experiences significant pedestrian/vehicle conflicts.

In addition, members of the public have commented on seeing frequent pedestrian and car near-miss accidents almost daily in the park. Without the development, the current pedestrian/vehicle conflicts would continue, resulting in an undesirable park experience. There is a national trend toward reducing automobile and pedestrian conflicts in parks. The Urban Land Institute and the Trust for Public Lands have both been studying this topic. The Trust for Public Lands has established analytical measures that include findings regarding vehicle and parking issues in the nation's large parks and has found a trend toward minimizing vehicle/pedestrian conflicts. Central Park and Prospect Park in New York have both made physical improvements in recent years to reduce or eliminate conflicts including removal of roads and pavements, curtailed vehicle hours and pedestrian safety and walkability improvements. Golden Gate Park has made improvements to reduce vehicle/pedestrian conflicts while simultaneously adding expanded museums, a parking garage and parking charges in the core of the park. Chicago's Grant Park is currently in design of major improvements to eliminate vehicle/pedestrian conflicts while maintaining a massive underground parking garage beneath North Grant Park.

It is not likely that there would be public funds available for improvements to resolve Balboa Park's long-standing traffic circulation and pedestrian conflicts. Various studies, such as the 2004 Jones and Jones Study (City of San Diego Planning Commission, November 18, 2004, Resolution No. 3598-PC) and the July 2006 Tilghman/Civitas Inc. Parking Management Action Plan prepared for the City Park and Recreation Department, both identify the existing traffic circulation and parking issues within the core of the park and have had no available funding to implement proposed solutions. The Central Mesa Precise Plan has been in place for 20 years and no funding has been available to pay for the implementation of this component of the Plan. The Balboa Park Plaza de Panama Project is intended to be the catalyst for private investment in the park, enabling the newly created Balboa Park Conservancy to continue such efforts.

Concerns that approval of the proposed Centennial Bridge, as part of the project, would result in removal of the Balboa Park Historic District from the National Register have been raised by members of the public. Removing a listed resource from the Register is a very significant step and merely implementing a project that is not consistent with the Standards is not sufficient grounds to warrant its removal. To remove the Balboa Park National Landmark District from the National Register a determination that "the qualities which caused it to be originally listed have been lost or destroyed" would have to be made by the National Park Service (*Code of Federal Regulations Section 60.15: Removing properties from the National Register*). Implementation of the project, as proposed, would not result in the property ceasing to meet the criteria for listing in the National Register. The qualities which caused it to be originally listed would not have been lost or destroyed as a result of the project.

Overall, siting and design considerations have minimized the potential for significant impacts to the Balboa Park Historic District and individual components within the district. The proposed

improvements to the Plaza de Panama, El Prado and Plaza de California and the Mall and Pan American Promenade would remove vehicles from these historic plazas and pedestrian areas, would restore several historic elements within these areas, would utilize compatible materials, and would return the landscape and hardscape to a more historically appropriate design aesthetic. An increase in parkland and removal of non-historic elements would be realized.

Staff has determined that the supplemental findings for deviation from the historical resources regulations can be supported and the Site Development Permit for historical resources can be approved.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, staff recommends the Historical Resources Board recommend to the Planning Commission approval of the Site Development Permit and associated findings related to designated historical resources, as presented.



Cathy Winterrowd  
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

### Attachments

1. Report to the Planning Commission, dated April 26, 2012
2. Proposed Amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan and Proposed Project Plans – On CD Under Separate Cover
3. Select Sheets from the Project Plans – Printed Under Separate Cover
4. Environmental Impact Report No. 233958 (SCH No. 2011031074) – On CD Under Separate Cover
5. Historic Resources Technical Report – Printed Under Separate Cover
6. Site Development Permit No. 482374 for the Balboa Park – Plaza De Panama Project No. 233958
7. Draft Final Resolution for Site Development Permit No. 482374