



SECURITY ELEMENT

Balboa Park is often perceived as unsafe for visitors, especially after dark. This is created by the perception that Balboa Park is a high crime area. Although, when compared to the surrounding communities, this "high crime" perception is not true. This "fear" factor affects the users of the park. Statistically, the majority of crime occurs in the central mesa area, generally involving crimes such as auto theft, car burglaries and bicycle thefts. Crimes of violence most frequently occur in the west mesa area west of Highway 163 east of Sixth Avenue.

In 1991, there were 1,080 reported crimes in the Balboa Park area. Of these reported crimes, 951 or about 88%, were property related thefts. This primarily included auto theft and auto burglary, predominantly property taken from automobiles, and stolen bicycles. The remainder were crimes against persons, occurring primarily in the heavily wooded areas and canyons of the west and east sides of the Park.

While the number and frequency of these crimes are low when compared to the surrounding communities, the impact creates a negative image for the Park. Many people consider the Park to be unsafe. A survey taken in 1989 showed that 22% of the people contacted felt intimidated in certain areas of the Park and 38% said that they had witnessed undesirable activity within the Park. Only 6%, however, felt that they needed police assistance. This underscores the issue of perception and lends credence to the concept that a great deal may be accomplished by everyone working together to create a sense of "presence".

A need exists to alter the perception that Balboa Park is an unsafe or dangerous place to visit. Statistics indicate that a majority of the crime takes place in the public parking lots and open areas where the public gathers. Experience has shown that public education, combined with a joint effort of law enforcement and volunteers, promotes safety and reduces crime. To accomplish this, the following programs and guidelines for improved security should be met:

- Retain and promote the San Diego Police Community Relations storefront office and retain Balboa Park as a separate patrol beat;
- Expand the Park Ranger Program;
- Institute a Park Watch Program;
- Continue the Eyes on the Park Program;
- Create a Civilian Volunteer Program sponsored by the Park and Recreation Department;
- Increase lighting and safety features;
- Use the Balboa Park Travelers Advisory (1610 AM) radio transmission to the extent allowed by FCC regulations;



- Incorporate the tram operation into the overall Park security program;
- Promote cooperative efforts with Naval Hospital Security;
- Increase evening activities;
- Incorporate safety concerns into Park design and maintenance;
- Relocate homeless feeding programs;
- Eliminate transient camps.

1. Retain and Promote the San Diego Police Community Relations Storefront Office.

The Police Department has maintained a Community Relations Storefront office in Balboa Park since December, 1988. Originally housed in the Balboa Park Club in the Palisades area, the office is now located in the House of Hospitality on the Prado. This office needs increased visibility.

Recommendations:

- Improve signage.
- Adjust hours to accommodate maximum attendance periods.
- Tie into Park Watch Program, Park Ranger Program, Civilian Volunteer Program.
- Function as overall coordinator of security;
- Serve as a base station for uniformed Police Officers on duty and patrolling the park.

2. Expand the Park Ranger Program.

The Park Ranger Program was implemented with a single ranger in 1991. Currently, there are three rangers in the program. In addition to the Central Mesa, the Park Rangers' areas of responsibility include Golden Hill, Morley Field, Grape Street, Florida Canyon, Marston Addition and the Sixth Avenue side of Balboa Park (between I-5 and Upas Street), Presidio Park and Mission Hills (Pioneer) Park. The three rangers are assigned to cover these areas seven days a week. Due to the limited number of rangers and the activities to be monitored, staff scheduling is based on Park attendance, peak hours and special events.

Balboa Park Rangers do not carry weapons. Rangers wear uniforms and badges and, as public officers, they may issue parking and misdemeanor citations. They are not sworn peace officers and their authority is confined to City parks and open space areas. The Balboa Park Rangers have the capability to immediately communicate with the Police Department Dispatcher.



Recommendations:

- Tie the Park Ranger Program in with the Police Storefront, Park Watch Program and Citizen Volunteer Program.
- Ensure effective communication between all elements of the security program.
- Maximize the contribution of each element through judicious assignment of responsibility.
- Adopt a 5-year plan to increase the program level to 17 Park Rangers by 1996.

3. Institute a Park Watch Program.

A Park Watch Program, similar to the successful Neighborhood Watch Program, would be a valued addition to the Park's security program. Employees of Park institutions, residents of neighboring communities and Park visitors would all be encouraged to participate.

Recommendation:

- Take all necessary steps to implement this program immediately.

4. Continue the Eyes on the Park Program.

Employees of the Park and Recreation Department, such as grounds maintenance workers, building custodians, etc., perform their duties throughout Balboa Park on a daily basis, seven days per week. Approximately 24 months ago, these employees went through an awareness and reporting training program sponsored by the Police Department. The program was very successful. A follow-up program was conducted in April, 1992.

Recommendation:

- Establish the training program as mandatory training to be conducted once each year. Consider the feasibility of a video taped training program for all new employees.

5. Create a Civilian Volunteer Program Sponsored by the Park and Recreation Department.

The proposed FY 1993 operating budget for the Park and Recreation Department includes a position at the Assistant Deputy Director level which would have as its primary duties: 1) fund raising for the Park system and for recreational programs; and 2) structuring and coordinating a volunteer program. The volunteer program would be multi-faceted and would include an element focused on security. The



simple presence of volunteers has been shown to be an effective tool in reducing crime. This has been evidenced by recent experience of the Aerospace Museum which has seen a dramatic reduction in car prowls, break-ins and thefts in its parking lot since its volunteers began patrolling the lot.

Recommendation:

- Upon approval of the budget for FY 1993, the Park and Recreation Department should proceed immediately to fill the position. The goal should be to have a fledgling volunteer program in place in Balboa Park for the summer of 1993. This volunteer effort should be closely coordinated with similar programs sponsored by various Park institutions and the Central Balboa Park Association.

6. Increase Lighting and Safety Features.

The Implementation Element of the adopted Balboa Park Master Plan identifies a project to increase lighting levels in Balboa Park. The Financing Plan includes \$1,238,000 for this project in the 1991 - 1997 timeframe. A consultant has been hired to undertake the first phase of the plan which is an inventory and evaluation of the existing electrical infrastructure. This phase of the work is scheduled to be completed in May, 1992. Future phases of the plan provide for analysis of all Precise Plans and future Park projects for lighting needs, recommendations regarding required safety lighting levels, architectural and landscape enhancement lighting, preliminary cost estimates and project priorities.

Recommendation:

- Proceed with Phase II of the plan in an expeditious manner. Also, as building projects such as House of Charm and House of Hospitality come on line, an upgraded level of lighting around the buildings should be included in the scope of work.

7. Use the Balboa Park Travelers Advisory (1610 AM) Radio Transmission to Advise Park Visitors Regarding Locking Their Cars, Security Belongings in Trunk, Etc.

This low power radio system is licensed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to provide travelers information within a 1.5 mile radius of Balboa Park. Messages from City staff are recorded daily. They provide information on anticipated traffic, parking demands and special Park events. The content of the messages is strictly controlled by the FCC.



Recommendation:

- If allowed by FCC regulations, include in the daily message, a reminder of usual precautions that visitors should take to ensure a positive Park experience, e.g., lock your car, place valuables in the trunk, etc. This message needs to be worded in a manner that does not unduly arouse fear or doubt in the visitor's mind.

8. Incorporate the Tram Operation Into the Overall Park Security Plan.

The Balboa Park tram operates 365 days per year; 6 hours per day in the winter and 8 hours per day in the summer. The drivers are sitting up high in the vehicle with a good view of the surroundings and they carry radios.

Recommendation:

- Coordinate with Old Town Trolley, the tram contractor, to increase the drivers' awareness of security issues and to make them proactive in reporting criminal activity.

9. Promote Cooperative Efforts with Naval Hospital Security.

The Naval Hospital facility attracts 4,000-6,000 vehicles each week day. Many of these vehicles park curbside on Park Boulevard, in the two City owned lots at the intersection of Park Boulevard and Presidents Way, and in various other locations throughout the Park. These vehicles are as subject to break-ins or theft as are those of any Park visitor or employee.

Recommendation:

- Work with officials of Naval Hospital to explore a mutual assistance security program. These discussions can begin immediately through the representative from the Naval Hospital who attends monthly meetings with City and Park institution staff.

10. Increase Evening Activities.

At present, museum and theater evening activity in the Park is limited to the Reuben Fleet Space Theater, which stays open regularly on weekdays until midnight and on weekends until 1:00 am., the Old Globe and the Starlight during their seasons, and other institutions on a relatively infrequent basis for special events. City operated facilities, such as Federal Building, Municipal Gym, Recital Hall, Balboa Park



Club and Casa del Prado, are all open in the evenings until approximately 10:00 pm. Special events such as summer concerts also take place in the evening.

Recommendation:

- Several institutions have expressed interest in extending their hours but do not believe it would meet with a satisfactory level of success until the public's perception of the Park as a secure place to be after dark is improved. The upgraded lighting project should be aggressively implemented and other Park institutions should begin planning for extended evening activities.

11. Incorporate Safety Concerns into Park Design and Maintenance.

Safety features can be incorporated into Park improvements that will help to avoid security problems when the facility is put into use. Similarly, maintenance practices can contribute to safety by maintaining views and minimizing hiding places, particularly along heavily used pedestrian routes.

Recommendations:

- All capital improvement projects included in the Central Mesa Precise Plan should consider safety and security. All consultant contracts will include a requirement that Police Department input should be sought before design begins. The Police Department should also be included in the inter-departmental plan check process.
- Central Division maintenance staff should review its policies with a view to making any changes that are necessary and feasible to improve Park safety without significant negative aesthetic impact.

12. Relocate the Homeless Feeding Program Outside of Balboa Park.

Currently, the Salvation Army conducts a feeding program for the homeless in the lower parking lot at Inspiration Point. The program attracts large numbers of transients to the Park every day. A great number of these people are emotionally disturbed. Many have substance abuse problems. Car prowls, break-ins, panhandling and harassment of the people who use the lot for parking, are a regular occurrence. In addition, a growing number of participants in the feeding program have decided to camp out in the lot. Many are living in old cars or vans.



Recommendation:

- The Citizens Advisory Committee for Balboa Park is working on a project to open a homeless feeding facility in a downtown building. The facility would be operated by people from the homeless community. The feeding program in Balboa Park should be discontinued once the new facility comes on-line.

13. Eliminate Transient Camps.

Balboa Park is characterized by its numerous canyons. These canyons have become home to many of the transients who inhabit the Park. This situation leads to the construction of make-sift encampments, contributes to the litter problem, is destructive to the natural environment and has been the direct cause of several fires. Many of these people are hostile and confrontations with bikers, joggers, etc. sometimes occur.

Recommendation:

- The Park and Recreation Department utilizes County probationers, Weekend Public Service workers and General Relief workers in addition to Park staff to work regular sweeps through the canyons. Tons of material are removed and hauled to the landfill each year. This program should continue and be reinforced as necessary to keep ahead of the problem.