



JERRY SANDERS
MAYOR

June 30, 2011

Dear Friend of Balboa Park,

As you know, Balboa Park is San Diego's greatest civic treasure, a gift from previous generations that will never be equaled.

Millions visit the Park each year for its natural beauty, its cultural institutions and the diverse opportunities it provides to all San Diegans.

I love Balboa Park as much as anyone.

Which is why I am writing.

We are at an important crossroads in our Park's history, one that will determine whether it will flourish in the years ahead, or continue on its current path.

And, for too long, that path has taken us in the wrong direction.

Every year, Balboa Park's backlog of deferred maintenance grows longer. Plans for needed improvements gather dust for lack of funding. And the heart of the park becomes further clogged with automobiles engaged in a never-ending search for scarce parking spaces.

Without new investment and fresh perspectives, it seemed nothing would change.

Then along came the Plaza de Panama Committee.

This group of public-spirited citizens, led by Dr. Irwin Jacobs, the founder of Qualcomm, stepped forward to help solve one of Balboa Park's most troubling problems – the takeover of the historic Plaza de Panama by automobiles and traffic congestion.

Restoring the Plaza de Panama has been a goal of the City's for many years, but until this year it never had a civic champion with the vision to make it happen.

Through extensive study of Balboa Park's history, traffic circulation and topography, Dr. Jacobs' non-profit Committee devised a plan to reroute traffic around the Plaza de Panama so it can be

restored to its original intent -- a pedestrian-oriented, family-friendly gathering space where visitors can take in the architecture and landscape in a peaceful setting.

By routing traffic away from the Park's core, their plan also allows for the restoration of the Plaza de California, West El Prado and Esplanade, and directs vehicles to a long-planned parking structure south of the Spreckels Organ Pavilion that will have a green rooftop park of lawns and gardens.

These two long-planned amenities -- a convenient new parking structure and the restored Plaza de Panama -- would be connected by a new tram system that, unlike the current trolleys, would be energy-efficient and ADA-compliant.

The Committee set an ambitious schedule for its work, with completion in time for the 2015 Centennial Celebration of the 1915 Panama-California Exposition.

This proposal is the most exciting thing to happen in Balboa Park in my lifetime.

It will transform the Balboa Park visitor experience.

It will restore the vision of the Park's founders by creating pedestrian-oriented plazas, gardens and parkland on 6.3 acres that subsequent generations have surrendered to asphalt roads and parking lots.

It will create a system of safe and walkable paths, eliminate conflicts between pedestrians and cars, and add hundreds of additional parking spaces in a convenient location.

And, as icing on the cake, most of the work will be funded with contributions from philanthropists and foundations.

The Plaza de Panama Committee has pledged to raise \$25 million in private funding to pay for the majority of the project, while the parking structure would be largely funded by a self-supporting bond repaid through parking fees.

This project represents the largest investment in Balboa Park in nearly 80 years.

But its need your help to keep on track.

On July 19, the City Council will consider the adoption of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Plaza de Panama Committee. This action will not approve the project. It will, however, demonstrate support for the vision of completely removing cars from the core of the park. It also sets out the terms for how the project will be implemented, but only if it is approved in a separate action after a thorough environmental review.

With a show of support for the vision of the project, the Plaza de Panama committee can begin fundraising now, allowing the project to stay on schedule for completion in 2015.

Without this vote of support, the project will not happen.

And that could have a detrimental impact on Balboa Park for years to come.

The Plaza de Panama project is going to be a catalyst for further investment and philanthropy in Balboa Park, setting the stage for the 2015 Centennial Celebration and for the important fund-raising efforts of the non-profit Balboa Park Conservancy.

We do not want to see this incredible philanthropic opportunity pass us by.

The traffic situation in Balboa Park gets worse by the day.

Yet you only need to look to the pedestrian-only East El Prado to see the transformation that is possible once cars are removed.

For decades, cars could access the Plaza de Panama from the east, driving along the East El Prado, between the Bea Evenson Fountain and the House of Hospitality. When that route was closed to vehicles, there was the predictable opposition from the predictable sources – folks who fear change and specialize in spreading their fears to others.

Yet today, that former roadway is one of the most loved walkable spaces in San Diego, alive with families, musicians and artists. They mingle in a safe and friendly atmosphere that reflects the Balboa Park experience that the Plaza de Panama Committee wants to bring to the rest of the Park's core.

Please help me keep this vision alive.

If you agree that removing cars from the core of the Park is a priority, and want to ensure that the project continues to move forward, **I ask that you join me in supporting the Plaza de Panama project.**

There are two things you can do today to help:

1. To send an email to members of the City Council indicating that you want them to approve the MOU and support removing cars from Balboa Park's historic plazas, go to this page: <http://www.balboapark.org/plaza-de-panama/get-involved/support>
2. Visit the project website at www.plazadepanama.org (link directly to endorsement sign-up) and sign up to endorse the project.

Thank you for your commitment to our City and Balboa Park.

Sincerely,

JERRY SANDERS
Mayor