



# REPORT

## THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

---

DATE ISSUED: October 6, 2017

REPORT NO: 101

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board  
Agenda of October 19, 2017

SUBJECT: House of Charm General Development Plan

### SUMMARY

Issue – Should the Park and Recreation Board recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan for the House of Charm project in Balboa Park?

Department Recommendation – Recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan for the House of Charm project in Balboa Park.

Other Recommendations – On September 1, 2016 the Balboa Park Committee voted unanimously (6-0-1) to advise the proposed project is consistent with the Balboa Park Master Plan and Central Mesa Precise Plan, and to recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan with the condition of support for the Staff recommendation to retain all arcade railings.

On October 5, 2017 the Balboa Park Committee voted (5-3-0) to recommend approval of the proposed change in security fencing for the sculpture courtyard at the House of Charm.

Fiscal Impact – There is no fiscal impact associated with this action. The Mingei International Museum will be responsible for all design and construction costs associated with this project.

Water and Energy Conservation Status – The proposed project complies with all water and energy conservation guidelines contained in Council Policy 200-14.

Environmental – The Mingei International Museum Improvements Project (No. 504096) is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) and Section 15331 (Historical Resources Restoration/Rehabilitation). A Notice of Right to Appeal Environmental Determination (NORA) was posted on August 7, 2017 for 10-business days, and no appeals were filed; a Notice of Exemption (NOE) dated August 3, 2017 was filed in the Office of the County Clerk on August 22, 2017 and returned on September 25, 2017 completing the CEQA process.

## **BACKGROUND**

Balboa Park is located immediately north of downtown San Diego. The Park is surrounded by the communities of Golden Hill, North Park, Uptown and Centre City. Balboa Park is one of the City's largest developed parks at 1,172 acres and is host to numerous passive and active recreational activities, cultural and educational institutions, and special events. Over 12 million visitors come to Balboa Park each year to enjoy the diversity of activities the Park has to offer.

Development, maintenance and management of Balboa Park are governed by the BPMP, the CMPP, the East Mesa Precise Plan and subsequent amendments to those documents. The BPMP is a part of the City's General Plan, and implements land use policies for Balboa Park. Therefore, amendments to the Master Plan and its Precise Plans must follow the Land Use and Community Planning Element of the General Plan.

The BPMP was adopted by City Council on July 25, 1989 (Resolution No. R-274090). Subsequent amendments to the BPMP have been adopted by City Council on December 9, 1997 (R-289537); on May 4, 1998 (R-290039-1); on April 13, 2004 (R-299084-1); on September 21, 2004 (R299666); and on July 9, 2012 (R-307555-1). The Master Plan addresses the entirety of Balboa Park and provides general guidelines for development, maintenance and management.

The CMPP was adopted by City Council on October 20, 1992 (Resolution R-280920). Subsequent amendments to the CMPP have been adopted by City Council on May 4, 1998 (R-290031-2); on March 19, 1992 (R-296206); on April 13, 2004 (R-299084-2); and on July 9, 2012 (R-307555-2). The CMPP addresses the central portion of Balboa Park in greater detail than does the BPMP.

A large portion of Balboa Park's Central Mesa is included in the federally designated National Historic Landmark District (District). As such, any improvements within the District must meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Determination of compliance is made by the City of San Diego Historic Resources staff and the Historic Resources Board.

The House of Charm was originally constructed for the 1915 Panama-California International Exposition, and was originally named the Mining Building. The building was adapted for new use, as well as a name change, for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition.

Many of the exposition buildings in the park were intended to be temporary. The House of Charm is no exception, and was reconstructed by the City in 1996. During the reconstruction the building was modified on the interior for new and modern uses; however, the exterior of the building was reconstructed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

Reconstruction of the House of Charm building included a loading dock area on the south side, with a driveway connecting to the access road leading to the Alcazar Lot. This loading dock was not indicated in the graphics for the West Prado area of the CMPP but was constructed by the City as a part of the new building. The loading dock area is difficult to access and is rarely used by the Mingei Museum or San Diego Art Institute. It is typically used for parking and is, in general, an unattractive view from Palm Canyon.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Mingei Museum in conjunction with the San Diego Art Institute and Old Globe Theatre are proposing improvements to the House of Charm. These improvements include the following:

- Enclose the loading dock area and incorporate the space into the building
- Provide a sculpture courtyard atop the enclosed loading dock
- Remove non-historic skylights from the arcade and install historic pendant lights
- Replace the non-historic heavy glass main entry door with a lighter glass door
- Replace fixed stucco arches with stucco finished pocket doors/panels
- Provide new glass panels behind the stucco finished pocket doors/panels
- Replace certain existing non-historic doors with new doors as approved by Historic Resources staff
- Provide a paver system on arcade rooftops for public access, including non-reflective glass safety panels
- Re-landscape the area south of the building

The existing loading dock would be enclosed and incorporated into the existing building footprint. The area would not expand beyond its existing footprint. Enclosure of the loading dock will require the relocation of the existing electrical transformer as well as the drainage system currently located in this area. A new emergency egress route would be located on the south side of the building and would lead to the Alcazar Lot area.

A new sculpture courtyard would be located atop the enclosed loading dock. The sculpture courtyard would be paved with stone pavers and surrounded by an ornamental iron fence for security. The courtyard would be open to the public for free, and accessible from the south arcade or from the building.

The reconstruction of the House of Charm included non-historic skylights, and these skylights do little to illuminate the arcades. The proposed project would remove these skylights and install new historic replica lights to match existing.

The proposed project would reconfigure two stucco covered arches located along the eastern side of the building. The walls within these two arches would be removed and replaced with stucco covered pocket panels/doors. These panels would be closed at night, giving the appearance of a stucco wall. During museum hours these panels would be slid into the wall pockets and glass panels would be visible.

Certain doors located throughout the building would be replaced with new doors acceptable to Historic Resources staff. These doors are not historic in nature.

The Mingei Museum would like to make better use of the arcade rooftops. These rooftops are accessed from the second floor exhibit space of the museum. After removal of the skylights, the roofing would be replaced. A new paver system would be installed as would a glass safety rail to meet building code. The rooftop would be available to museum patrons and for special events, and would provide views of the Plaza de Panama.

The Mingei International Museum previously processed a General Development Plan that included removal of certain railings in the arcade archways. The intent was to make the arcades and museum more accessible both visually and physically. The Balboa Park Committee recommended approval of that GDP on February 26, 2009. However, the Plaza de Panama Project was approved by the Balboa Park Committee, and subsequently City Council, that returns the landscape in the Plaza de Panama to its historic configuration. The removal of the arcade railings is not compatible with the current design of the Plaza de Panama and staff therefore recommends retaining the railings as a condition of approval of the proposed GDP. The Balboa Park Committee supported this recommendation.

### **CONCLUSION**

While the loading dock area is not shown in the West Prado area of the CMPP, it was constructed by the City in accordance with Secretary of the Interior Standards. The loading dock area is currently considered restricted park land similar to other leased spaces within the park, and currently serves no benefit to the public.

Enclosure of the loading dock would eliminate a visual eyesore on the south side of the House of Charm. New and additional landscaping will enhance the south side of the building and allow visual screening. In addition, the space atop the enclosed loading dock would be accessible to the public, providing an additional benefit to park patrons.

Proposed modifications to the building have been reviewed by Historic Resources staff as a part of a Public Project Assessment to assure compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. This review is reflected in the environmental exemption identified in this staff report.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS**

Recommendations from staff to the Balboa Park Committee were supported by the Committee in their recommendation. The plans submitted with this staff report reflect those recommendations. Therefore, staff recommends support of the General Development Plan as submitted.

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. Recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan with conditions.
2. Do not recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan.

Respectfully submitted,



Bruce E. Martinez  
Deputy Director  
Developed Regional Parks Division



Charles Daniels  
Park Designer  
Administrative Services Division

BEM/cd

Attachment: General Development Plan  
PowerPoint Presentation

cc: Council District 3 Office