



BALBOA PARK COMMITTEE OF 100

Working to preserve Balboa Park's historic architecture, gardens, and public spaces since 1967

1649 El Prado, Suite 2 • San Diego CA 92101

Date: February 1, 2025

To: The Balboa Park Committee
City of San Diego

From: Kevin Carpenter, President
Balboa Park Committee of 100
kcarpenter@c100.org

Re: Request to Re-docket the Continued Discussion on the Proposal from the Balboa Park Design Review Exploratory Committee on a Design Review process for the park

In a Memorandum dated April 1, 2022 from Christina Chadwick and Andy Field of the city's Park and Recreation Department, the re-establishment of an official "Design Review Assistance Subcommittee" of the city's Balboa Park Committee (BPC) was articulated and encouraged. At its meeting of April 7, 2022, the BPC discussed the staff report and the recommendations of the Balboa Park Design Review and Assistance Exploratory Committee (EC) and continued the item to be rescheduled for additional information and further discussion. It is in this spirit of questions raised in that Balboa Park EC's initial hearing that the Committee of 100 would like to formally request this important issue be revisited.

It is especially timely as the Balboa Park Committee will be discussing the Design Review proposals from the consulting firm AEA in their Prioritization Framework report. The recommendations in the AEA report parallel and compliment the suggestions and recommendations in the Exploratory Committee report and vice versa.

The Exploratory Committee (EC) was chaired by Mike Stepner, former City Architect and included former members of the Balboa Park Committee Connie Matsui of Forever Balboa Park and Rene Smith of the Committee of 100. The EC also included representatives of park interest groups, design consultants who have done work in the park, former Design Review committee members and staff from the Parks and Recreation Department.

Recommendations from the EC include the formation of a Balboa Park Committee standing design review and assistance subcommittee. This subcommittee would be modeled after a similar standing committee of the Historic Resources Commission. Also included is a process for early review of park projects. The Committee of 100 believes that design review and assistance offers one of the most effective ways of constructively managing feedback from the community about projects that are connected to Balboa Park, facilitating a path to consensus.

The Board of the C100 specifically requests an agenda item be created at the earliest possible date to return the Balboa Park Committee's attention to the issue of Design Review Assistance.

Up until 2016, the City of San Diego's Park and Recreation Board staffed a "Design Review Committee" which played a vital public role in the park's evolution. Staffed by a number of volunteer planning and design professionals, the DR committee offered early-stage feedback and useful recommendations essential for any given project's success. Moreover, by incorporating design review as part of routine project oversight and evolution, it leads to enhanced community buy-in and ultimately better outcomes for the constituents of Balboa Park.

However, in an effort to create a more "efficient" regulatory environment, the city undervalued the committee's role in the design/development process and dissolved the Design Review Committee. Subsequently, proposed projects have advanced without the benefit of a transparent and objective voice from the community-at-large. As a result, some worthy projects have not always been embraced enthusiastically while other ill-advised outcomes might have been avoided.

The Committee of 100 believes, as a thoughtful and engaged community devoted to Balboa Park's future, that we can do better together.

In the interest of thoughtful growth, the Committee of 100 advocates renewing a long-standing commitment to collaboration and cooperation through Design Review Assistance for all major projects planned for the park by the creation of a standing subcommittee of the Balboa Park Committee of the City of San Diego.

Founded in 1967, The Balboa Park Committee of 100 works collaboratively to activate a welcoming place for visitors to enjoy and soften the inherently harsh urban environment of the San Diego region. In its 100 plus years of existence, Balboa Park has evolved, sometimes organically and sometimes impulsively, in response to an ever changing environment.

We respectfully await the Balboa Park Committee members' feedback and look forward to the opportunity to participate fully in the future of Balboa Park. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or Mike Stepner, Chair of the Design Review Exploratory Committee (stepner2@gmail.com).

Links to documents:

1. VOSD article
2. Balboa Park Exploratory Committee Report
3. Parks and recreation Department staff report to the Balboa Park Committee on the Exploratory Committee report
4. BPC meeting minutes
5. C100: Design of New Buildings on the Prado
6. Friends of Balboa Park position paper on the Design Review Process
7. Ross Porter June 18 Notes of the C100 Design Review process