



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 3, 2025

TO: Balboa Park Committee
Agenda of July 10, 2025

FROM: Jon Richards, Deputy Director, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Timken Museum of Art Underground Expansion

SUMMARY

Issues – Should the Balboa Park Committee:

1. Advise the proposed Project for the Timken Museum of Art Underground Expansion is consistent with the Balboa Park Master Plan (BPMP) and Central Mesa Precise Plan (CMPP); and
2. Recommend approval of the proposed Project for the Timken Museum of Art Underground Expansion?

Department Recommendations

1. Advise the proposed Project for the Timken Museum of Art Expansion is consistent with the BPMP and CMPP; and
2. Recommend approval of the proposed Project.

Other Recommendations - None

Fiscal Statement - There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

Environmental Review – The proposed Project will be submitted to the City of San Diego Development Services Department for ministerial review and permitting. The City of San Diego, as lead agency, will review the Project and prepare any required California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documentation per State CEQA guidelines.

Code Enforcement Impact - None

Housing Impact - None

BACKGROUND

Balboa Park is located immediately north of downtown San Diego and is surrounded by the communities of Golden Hill, North Park, Uptown, and Centre City. At 1,172 acres, it is one of the City's largest developed parks and supports a wide variety of passive and active recreational uses, cultural and educational institutions, and special events. The Park attracts more than 14 million visitors annually who come to enjoy its diverse amenities.

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

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 (R-299666); 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. The Timken Museum of Art is located in the "East Prado" section of t

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 Timken Museum of Art was constructed in 1965 on the site of the former Home Economy Building—originally built for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition. Designed by Frank L. Hope & Associates, the Timken building is a five-room, mid-century modern structure. Like all facilities on the Central Mesa, the building is owned by the City of San Diego and leased to a nonprofit organization.

In 2024, the Timken Museum lease was amended to include additional landscape and plaza areas. The amended leasehold includes the building, west plaza, and the surrounding landscaped areas to the north, east and south. The Timken Museum will assume responsibility for maintenance of improvements within their leasehold. The Timken is working with Forever Balboa Park on updates to the landscape and irrigation around the Museum and Botanical Building.

DISCUSSION

Project Definition

The Timken Museum of Art proposes the following improvements to the Museum:

- Renovation of the existing west ground floor, including removal of back-of-house spaces and the boardroom and exterior refurbishment to match existing building materials.
- Expansion of the basement level by approximately 14,000 square feet to accommodate galleries and workspaces.
- Installation of a new connecting elevator and stair to the lower level.
- Re-landscaping within the leasehold and in select adjacent areas.
- Replacement of the west entry plaza between the Museum and the Plaza de Panama (necessary for underground expansion).

The proposed Timken Museum of Art Expansion Project was presented to the Balboa Park Committee (BPC) as an Information Item on May 1, 2025. During the meeting, public comment in support of the Project was provided by the Save Our Heritage Organization (SOHO). As reflected in the minutes, the BPC discussed the Project, and questions from the committee were addressed by a representative of the Timken.

No above-ground expansion is proposed beyond the existing building footprint. A permanent shoring system will be used to achieve the below-grade expansion while maintaining and protecting the existing historic facades at the ground level. The Project will address exterior building materials in disrepair by either refinishing or replacing them with like materials. The goal is to ensure all repairs are seamless and visually consistent with the original building.

The expanded basement will extend beyond the current building footprint, reaching beneath the museum's west entry and adjacent landscaped areas, up to its lease boundary at the Plaza de Panama and Botanical Building gardens. The expanded space will house:

- Rotating exhibition galleries
- An immersive digital art experience
- A flexible educational space
- Additional offices and storage

The expansion will support the Museum's ability to centralize operations, broaden its programming, and host community outreach initiatives such as the "School in the Park" program for City Heights students.

Consistency with the BPMP

The proposed expansion aligns with the BPMP's goals by improving existing buildings and landscapes while maintaining the balance of cultural, active, and passive recreational uses in the park. The Project supports equitable access to Balboa Park, as the Timken Museum will continue to offer free admission to the public.

Consistency with the CMPP

Expansion of the Timken Museum is not expressly contemplated in the CMPP. However, the expansion will take place within the leasehold area, and all expansion will occur underground. There will be no substantial loss of free and open park land:

- The west plaza will be reconstructed as required for excavation and construction of the museum underground expansion. The re-design of the plaza eliminates the current ADA ramp that does not truly comply with current code requirements. Accessibility will be provided to the north via the ramps/walkways that were reconstructed for the Botanical Building project.
- The west plaza will include two reflective water features, one at either side of the main entry steps. These are considered desirable park features that are visually accessible to the public.
- Each reflective water feature will contain a skylight to provide sunlight to the basement level. The skylights are not significant in size and are within the reflective water features. Staff does not consider this a significant loss of free and open park land.

The CMPP encourages cultural and recreational uses in the Central Mesa and the proposed expansion furthers the precise plans goals by enhancing the facility's cultural programming and usability. The Project is also sensitive to the historic district and avoids expansion at ground level.

The Project proposes an enclosure to screen roof-mounted mechanical equipment and eliminate the existing non-conforming exposed HVAC units. Timken shall work with P&R staff to confirm the final details and materials of the enclosure.

Architectural guidelines for expansion of existing structures states; *"Additions to non-historic buildings will be visually compatible with surrounding historic architecture and will preserve or restore original Exposition site relationships."* Architectural guidelines also state; *"All design proposals for new structures or modifications to existing structures within the historic landmark should closely adhere to the established historic design themes."* Staff does not believe these requirements are applicable as the expansion is below grade and will not be visible.

The CMPP Architectural Guidelines state; *"All building modifications should reflect the fact that there is no "back yard" to the Central Mesa. Equal care for all design detail, ornamentation and space articulation should be taken with all exterior elevations."* Guidelines also state; *"All loading docks, maintenance areas, and refuse dumpsters should be located within buildings or screened from public view."* Utility appurtenances proposed around the building's perimeter, particularly on the highly visible southern elevation adjacent to El Prado, shall be screened appropriately.

The proposed Project appears to be consistent with the Timken Museum's lease and mission.

Historic Resource Review

While old enough to be eligible for historic designation, the Timken Museum building is not designated as such, nor is it considered a contributing element to the Historic District. It is, however, located within the Park's National Historic Landmark District. Historic Resources staff has reviewed the proposed Project scope and deemed it consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and would not adversely impact the building's eligibility as a historic resource. The Development Services Department (DSD) administers this section of the Municipal Code in conjunction with and prior to permit requests. Historic Resources staff requires review and approval of all revisions to the Project scope.

CONCLUSION

While the expansion of the Timken Museum was not a specific recommendation in the CMPP, that document is now over 30 years old. The proposed improvements reflect current needs, visitor expectations, and resource demands while adhering to the general design and preservation guidelines of the CMPP.

The Project proposes underground expansion with minimal visual impact and minimal to no loss of free and open park land. Proposed improvements appear to be consistent with the design guidelines and intent of the CMPP. Landscaping improvements will enhance all building frontages, and previously non-conforming utilities will be screened or brought into compliance as part of the Project.

The Project has been deemed consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, and any changes to the scope will be reviewed by Historic Resources staff to ensure continued compliance.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Recommend approval of the Department Recommendations with conditions; or
2. Do not recommend approval of the Department Recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,



Jon Richards
Deputy Director

JR/scg

Attachment: PowerPoint Presentation

Parks and Recreation Department

Timken Museum of Art Underground Expansion

Balboa Park Committee
Agenda of July 10, 2025

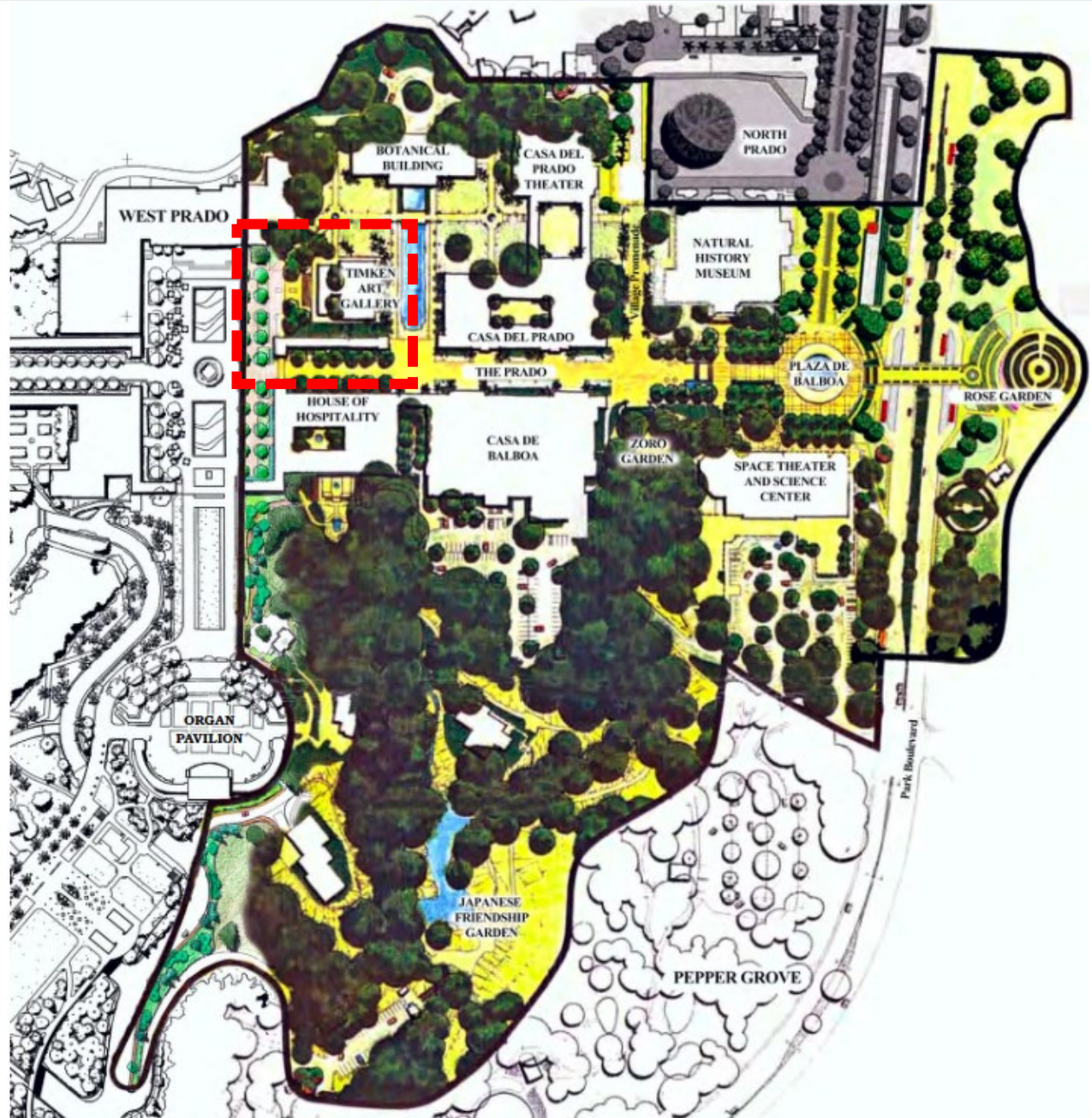
Requested Actions

Should the Balboa Park Committee:

- Advise the proposed Project for the Timken Museum of Art Underground Expansion is consistent with the Balboa Park Master Plan and Central Mesa Precise Plan; and
- Recommend approval of the proposed Project?

Location

- Central Mesa
 - East Prado
- Adjacencies
 - Plaza de Panama
 - El Prado
 - Lily Pond
 - Botanical Building Gardens



[illegible]

Leasehold Boundary

Consistency

Staff advises the proposed Project is consistent with:

- Master Plan Goals
- Land use (free and open park land)
- East Prado sub-area precise plan
- Architectural design guidelines
- Historic preservation standards
- Timken Museum lease

Project Highlights

- 14,000 SF underground expansion
- Repair and renovation of the existing building
- Screening of HVAC equipment
- Reconstruction of west entry plaza
- Refreshed landscaping



Project Presentation

Megan Pogue
Executive Director
Timken Museum of Art

&

David Kinney
Board Member
Timken Museum of Art



TIMKEN MUSEUM OF ART

UNDERGROUND EXPANSION PROJECT



REASONS FOR EXPANSION

Administrative offices located offsite

No classroom space / inability to participate in “School in the Park”

No onsite storage

Currently only 650 square feet of temporary exhibition space

No object intake/outtake space

No library space

Existing gift shop only 88 square feet (no F & B will be added)

No event space unless Museum is closed

No kitchen / event prep area

Only two event restrooms

PREPARATION FOR PROJECT

Hired Gensler Architects, working with Los Angeles Museum Division

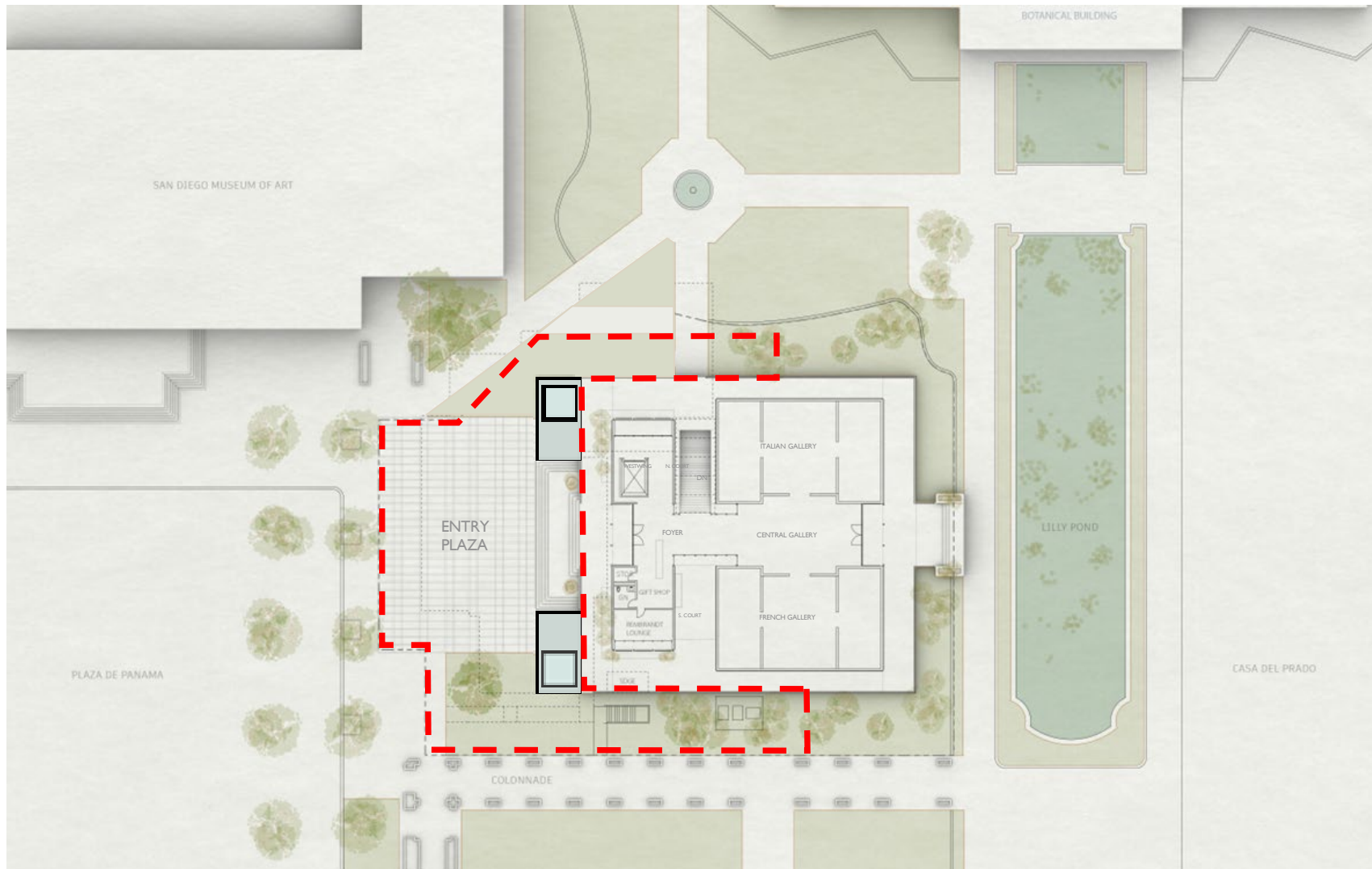
Commissioned Brian Smith & Associates to perform a 275-page historical report to inform the design and ensure it conformed to historic district

Renewed long term lease with City to include the pre-approval of underground expansion project (pending appropriate building permits)

Refined lease line to accommodate underground expansion area

Ensured Timken permanent collection will remain free to the public

TIMKEN EXPANSION AREA



BELOW GRADE AREA OF FOCUS

TIMKEN PLAZA IN 1965



TIMKEN PLAZA

CURRENT after 1980's ADA PROJECT



FUTURE



TIMKEN PLAZA AFTER EXPANSION

(close-up)



TIMKEN NORTH GARDEN VIEW

CURRENT



FUTURE



EXISTING VIEW OF SOUTH SIDE OF TIMKEN



SOUTH GARDEN AFTER EXPANSION

(concept to be further developed)



Department Recommendation

- Advise the proposed Project for the Timken Museum of Art Underground Expansion is consistent with the Balboa Park Master Plan and Central Mesa Precise Plan; and
- Recommend approval of the proposed Project.