

MINUTES

**City of San Diego Park and Recreation Board
BALBOA PARK COMMITTEE
November 6, 2025**

Meeting Location:

Balboa Park Club Santa Fe Room
2150 Pan American Road West\
San Diego, CA 92101

Mailing Address:

Balboa Park Administration Building
2125 Park Boulevard
San Diego, CA 92101-4792

ATTENDANCE:

Members Present

Allison Soares
David Baron
Jake Banfield-Weir
Howard Blackson
Mandy Brown
Makeda Cheatom
Chris Eddy
Patty Riddle
Michael Robinson
Tim Shields
Michael Singleton
Kathy Vandenheuvel

Members Absent

Staff Present

Jon Richards
Tyler Canales
Anthony Harrington

CALL TO ORDER

Allison Soares called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES October 2, 2025

MOTION: MOVED/SECONDED Mr. Baron/ Ms. Vandenheuvel

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Ms. Vandenheuvel to approve the September 4, 2025, meeting minutes. The motion carried unanimously (8-0-0).

NON- AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

Web Form:

In-Person:

Andrea Zirko – The Puppet Theater has had a loss of 40% of income. Asked if any of the Committee members come to the park.

Daniel Laman – Had a scaled down version of an active shooter training at the Safety and Security meeting. HPR elections took place and Joe Manzares was reelected to be president. House of Somalia will be having a lawn program and will be the first African nation represented in the history of the International Cottages.

Jose Eduardo Coelho – Introduced himself. Has “Field of Dreams” concept for the Morley Field area that would include a skatepark and soccer fields.

CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT

None.

STAFF REPORT

Council District 3 – None

78th District – None

SDPD – None

Mayor’s Office - None

Jon Richards, Deputy Director, Parks & Recreation – Appreciates the Puppet Theatre and have taken family there in the past. Attended City Council on Tuesday to get a 2-year extension for tram operations approved. Major repairs have been completed at the House of Czech/Slovakia and house has been released. Abatement work is needed at the Hall of Nations. HVAC not working at Casa Del Prado and the Del Prado Theatre. There is a plan to install chillers and to replace the controllers. Organ Pavilion restrooms are currently being refurbished and will be open for December Nights. It will be closed again after December Nights to have the flooring replaced. Spanish Village Men’s Restroom will be renovated next. ESD will come back before December Nights to sanitize walkways again. Thanks Forever Balboa Park for providing the poinsettias for the Botanical Building. 11/9 – Dream of NIWA Wedding Expo at the Japanese Friendship Garden, 11/9 - The Grinch Opening Night at the Old Globe, 11/27 – Father Joe’s Thanksgiving 5K in the Plaza De Panama, 12/5-6 – December Nights, 12/13 – Cross Country Championships at Morley Field.

BALBOA PARK NON-PROFIT PARTNER UPDATES

Forever Balboa Park – Jackie Higgins – 60 12th graders from High Tech High planted trees on the West Mesa as part of the Plant It Forward program. Thanked the committee their service and Parks and Recreation staff. Worked with RSVP for the annual Parks and Recreation picnic on 10/28. Phase 2 construction is ongoing and the footing for the pergola will be poured next week. New planting will be done the week after. Partnering with Parks and Recreation for the poinsettia displays at the Botanical Building. Had 150 volunteers for December Nights last year. Demolition of the pillars in the Rose Garden is tentatively scheduled for 12/10.

Balboa Park Cultural Partnership – Peter Comiskey – Don’t lose site of the Cultural District to be a Cultural District. Events and activations should not use the park as a backdrop. ESRI is an ideal example of an event in the park. Events should fully integrate the Cultural District by engaging multiple museums. This enhances the park’s profile. Events can coexist without impeding operations.

Committee of 100 – Kevin Carpenter – Municipal Gymnasium work continues. Will pull everything out before December Nights. A couple of things will be completed after January 1. Other projects are on the horizon and will be brought to future meetings. People looking for design guidance should be pointed towards C100. Still have some concerns about paid park and will monitor impacts.

Save Starlight –Steve Stopper – Doing monthly activations. Showing people the noise cancelling headphones and how those will work. In negotiations of the SUP and lease.

Village Arts & Education Foundation – Thanked everyone for their support. Lost of classes have been going on. Will have booths/artists and activities for December Nights. Next round of jurying will be in January.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENT

Howard Blackson – Starting Balboa Park Master Plan Update with the City of San Diego. Wants Committee to be up front with it and discuss how to kick it off. Mobility should not lead the way. Would like to bring it bac as a monthly workshop item.

Jon Richards (Responded) – Waiting for SANDAG to vote on the award for the grant.

Katy Vandenheuevel – Has seen an increase in homeless along 26th Street trail. Put in several Get It Done tickets regarding it. Noted a lack of lighting in the park and around trail.

Jon Richards (Responded) – Working with Transportation Department on lighting issues. Will report back on that.

Mike Singleton – Asked about standing committees last time and was following up on that.

Allison Soares (Responded) – Can’t have subcommittees. Can suggest a workshop item prior to the meeting.

Patty Riddle – There will be a Turkey Trot Tennis Tournament on Thanksgiving at the Balboa Tennis Center. 2 member of the Badminton Club met with LA Olympic Committee to use BPAC for countries to train there.

CONSENT ITEMS

None

INFORMATION ITEMS

None

ACTION ITEMS

Item 1: 2026 Balboa Park Committee Meeting Calendar

MOTION: MOVED/SECONDED Ms. Vandenheuevel/ Mr. Shields

A motion was made by Ms. Vandenheuevel and seconded by Mr. Shields to approve the 2026 Balboa Park Committee Calendar. The motion carried unanimously (12-0-0).

**Item 2: Honorary Name of Steve Hill Way in Balboa Park
Presenter: Emily Piatanesi, Mayor’s Office**

Public Comment:

None

Committee Comment:

Patty Riddle – Thanked Steve Hill for letting her know that BPAC was being considered as a homeless shelter. It was used as a temporary shelter last year due to the storms.

Howard Blackson – Steve Hill should be made an honorary member of the Committee.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Thrilled the City is doing this. Interacted with him for 20 years. He was always responsive and supportive of the community.

Allison Soares – Recalled that Steve Hill asked her to be chair. He was always a warm and caring person.

MOTION: MOVED/SECONDED Mr. Baron/ Mr. Blackson

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Mr. Blackson to approve the honorary naming of Steve Hill Way in Balboa Park. The motion carried unanimously (12-0-0).

Item 3: Balboa Park Paid Parking

Presenter: Emily Piatanesi, Mayor's Office

Public Comment:

Ignacio De La Torre – Representing the San Diego Bonsai Club. Largest club in the US with 600 members. Part of the San Diego Garden Botanic Foundation who meets at the Casa Del Prado. Council has approved paid parking. How do we ensure volunteers continue participation. Volunteer/employee parking pass is being considered. All organizations in Balboa Park should be able to use it. Believes BPC's voice would be important. Need to maintain investment the volunteers have made. Have been meeting in Balboa Park for 40 years and have had many shows in the park.

David Walters – Disagrees with the way policy is being rolled out. Does not address issues at West Mesa. Is too expensive for many of the members. As permit price rise, it decreases participation. West Mesa serves mostly residents. Should be a different rate for the West Mesa and a senior rate. Construction workers take up most of the spaces on the West Mesa. Why would members pay in they cannot find parking spots. Restrict parking to park users only.

Daniele Laman – Will there be EVs in all three levels of parking lots? Have the license plates readers passed through the privacy board?

Terry Dutton – Lot of work on planning. Would be here later if meeting was better known. \$300 is too much for seniors, and BPAC and Muni Gym users. Perceive that Parks and Recreation staff was blackmailed into coming up with amount to come up with money for parking.

Andrea Zirko – Puppet Guild has had a loss of 40% in revenue because people believe paid parking has already started. Many parking spots are empty until 1pm. Fields a lot of calls about ADA parking. Don't want to have schools come if there is a bus fee. Would like clarification if school busses would have to pay to park.

Peter Comiskey – The Balboa Park Cultural Partnership does not support paid parking. Impacts will be severe. Like to thank City staff for their considered review of this. Should consider a repurchase

or consignment program. Annual pass would a little too expensive. Coupon/voucher system would be good for users. Special Events would continue to go through Parks and Recreation. Does not believe shorter events should be allowed.

Paul Gunn – Is a member of the San Diego Beekeeping Society. Has 350 members with some from as far a Valley Center. Proposes a validation system. Would be too expensive for members. Would like a waiver for members.

Committee Comment:

Allison Soares: Where do participants and members fall in the parking rates?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): They are considered visitors to the park. There was a large turnout of visitors to the Council meeting. Intent of the annual/quarterly pass was to give a discounted rate.

Allison Soares: Would not consider tourists as visitors. \$300 is a lot for people to be involved in the community. This is discouraging people from being a part of the community. Is there a senior rate?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Not at this time, but it is being considered.

Allison Soares: What about EVs?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Nothing has been finalized at this time.

Allison Soares: What about buses?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Bus would have to pay if they will be using the parking lot.

Jon Richards (Responded): Buses would be able to use spots in the Inspiration Point parking lot.

Allison Soares: Has there been consideration of a prepurchase option?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Would have those conversations in the future.

Howard Blackson: Why are we being asked to vote on this now?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): This item was not on the agenda as an action item last time.

Kathy Vandenhevel: What's the plan for San Diego High School students?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Working with SDUSD on a plan for them.

Chris Eddy: What is meant by frequency/frequent in the presentation? How does that relate? Pricing does not change. Everyone is being forced in an all or nothing. That word does not belong.

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Intent is to help people who come often. Otherwise, they would have to pay a daily rate.

Allison Soares: This penalizes people who can't pay large amounts.

Mike Singleton: Staff from Whitburn's office came to the Uptown Community Planning Group. Does resident parking permit for the nearby neighborhood work for the park?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Would work on 6th Avenue but would not work within the park. Balboa Drive is considered a park road.

Michael Singleton: Can people with ADA placards park for free on park roads? Don't have to offer on park roads but would want to mimic.

Jon Richards (Responded): Marked stalls are different.

Michael Singleton: Might want to clarify that to the public. In support of the difference in resident/non-resident rates. Would like to see difference between participants and members. Are board members considered volunteers? Shocked about the additional cost. It will have an effect on participation in the park. Have to look at flexibility. Trying to have a place to have meetings is difficult. Balboa Park has come up as a possible place in the past. Uptown has no community center. These spaces are important.

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Budget was assumed with revenue from Balboa Park. When this went to the Council in September it was pushed back to January. Proposal was trying to meet revenue targets, or their will be future cuts to the budget.

Allison Soares: Frustrated that we are punishing citizens with paid parking. Charging for tourism is one thing versus charging participants and residents. Everything that happens in Balboa Park is beneficial to people.

Patty Riddle: Continues to be upset Parks and Recreation has been forced to develop the parking fee. Don't want the fees to affect the great programs they have developed. Bill Walton would be furious that people would have to pay to play in the gym. The kids that come to the centers stay off the streets and keeps them out of trouble. Want kids to stay more than 3 hours a day. Kids cannot afford \$300. Many table tennis players cannot afford it. Hard to get to BPAC from public transit. Where will volunteers and staff park?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): They will park in Level 2 and Level 3 lots.

Patty Riddle: Will tell kids to park in Inspiration Point South Lot. They fill Balboa Park over vacations and Summer. Will Navy be paying the same rates?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Yes.

Patty Riddle: Hope annual fee will be publicized so people will come to Cit Council. Only people know of the Committee meeting was because I told them. Who are considered volunteers?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Someone who is benefitting the park is considered a volunteer.

Patty Riddle: They are only allowed free parking during the hours they are volunteering?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Yes.

Jon Richards (Responded): Park based organizations are considered volunteers as well as organizations with an SUP.

Patty Riddle: Any organization that has an SUP?

Jon Richards (Responded): As long as they are considered a park-based organization.

Patty Riddle: Will board members get free parking?

Allison Soares: Yes. But participants will not. Why doesn't the annual pass rate be reduced to \$100? Can raise the rate at a later time. Most people will be paying an annual rate.

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Can take that recommendation back to Council.

Jon Richards (Responded): Also have to ensure there is not a violation of a gift of public funds.

Allison Soares: The point of raising money is to get more people to but into it. Need to come up with a better solution. Jon will work with SUPs regarding volunteers.

Makeda Cheatom: People do not have money. People are not coming to Kwanzaa and Earth Day. People of color cannot afford this. We need to be there for our community. People are very upset. This is a disaster. Tourist have the money but this will kill the community.

Molly Brown: Fee should be \$25 per year for active participants. Tourist will come and they should pay.

Kathy Vandenheuvell: Golden Hill does not have any other parkland. No other parkland is being forced to pay for parking. \$300/year for residents is not fair. Heard that Mission Bay was no longer being considered for paid parking. Heard that Council does not want to charge residents to be there. There are constant fee increases access the City. Balboa Park budget has not had an increase in many years. Assuming revenue from paid parking will cover that budget is wrong. \$99/year is reasonable. Low-income and military should receive a discount. Educational special events should be considered for a different fee. Thanks to Councilmember La Cave for attending.

Tim Shields: The park represents a varied ecosystem. The proposal did not consider all parts of that. Community/stakeholder feedback would impact paid parking.

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Committed to coming back to the Committee. Would seek advice on how to best get that.

Tim Shields: If an impact is caused by paid parking, would hope that they City would reach out actively about what they would do.

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Would reach out to Balboa Park Cultural Partnership and Forever Balboa Park frequently about what the impacts were.

Tim Shields: How do people get passes?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Through the app.

Tim Shields: What is the \$5 charge?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): That is only for resident verification.

Tim Shields: See implementation start date is January 5th. Will there be a planned grace period for those who do not know?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Yes, but don't know how long that will be.

Tim Shields: Appreciate the partial fix of the lanes on Park Blvd. Would ask the traffic signal timing to be looked at as well.

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): We can look into that.

Jon Richards (Responded): Transportation Department had made some adjustment to the lights.

Tim Shields: Would ask the morning rate for special events expire at 10am versus 11am due to organizations opening at 10am.

Jon Richards (Responded): Idea for that is to accommodate breakdown as there are already clear times that the bridge has to be opened by.

David Baron: Disappointed that if all ADA spots are taken, they would have to pay for another regular spot. Threatening this like trying to make a profit. Would someone have to buy multiple permits if they have multiple cars?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Permits would be tied to a single license plate.

David Baron: That needs to be revisited and should be tied to the person to not have to pay for multiple passes. It's a lot of money to ask a participant to pay. Is unfair to Muni Gym and BPAC users.

Chris Eddy: ADA placard can be used anytime. Why not have placards for individual versus paying by car. What is the relationship between anticipate revenue and budget?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): \$14 million is coming for the General Fund for Balboa Park. \$12 million revenue was considered for Balboa Park. Hard to say what actual revenue would come in. If revenue is not met the difference would determine what would have to be cut.

Chris Eddy: Money generated has to stay in the park. No money should come out of the budget of Balboa Park.

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): The intent is to not have Balboa Park dependent on the General Fund. It should have its own management fund and not have to compete with other General Fund Departments.

Chris Eddy: If this fails, this will hurt the park in the long run. No money should come out of the Balboa Park budget.

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Was asked to bring a staff recommendation that would meet the \$12.5 million projection but with multiple changes it is hard to ensure that is met.

Kathy Vandenhevel: Which would essentially mean removing money for Balboa Park. Should not have to generate revenue to cover the park budget.

Howard Blackson: When you build toward social and cultural value, you will generate economic value. Need a revenue goal which should sunset. Are adjustments going to be made annually?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Depends on behavioral changes.

Howard Blackson: They should be adjusted annually. This hurts low-income individuals. Have an annual report to help make the adjustment. What is the process to measure success versus failure?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Can only speak to this Fiscal Year.

Michael Robinson: Would think parking in the park should be free. What business model was used?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Worked with Transportation Department for model for \$11 million.

Michael Robinson: It has to be based on something that was done in the past. What model was used?

Emily Piatanesi (Responded): Would have to ask the Department of Finance.

Jake Banfield-Weir: The survey used on 6th avenue was only 1-day long. That is 2 lanes of just apartment parking on that street. That will spill over into all of District 3. 83 different groups get insurance through the Botanical Garden Foundation. Many of those groups do not have agreements. Will see a downturn in occupancy now. The people who use the park the most will be the most affected. Feel it would negatively affect them. Should be some kind of bailout for the museums if this negatively affects them. Don't believe anyone will pay \$300. Do not see how revenue will be met.

Jon Richards (Responded): New SUPs will allow for sublicenses. Those should help those groups.

Jake Banfield-Weir: Assuming a lot of revenue will be offset by volunteers. Seems like there will be a lot.

Jon Richards: Used the parking study to determine how any spaces were used by volunteers and staff.

Howard Blackson: A prioritization framework was completed for the park. Have not used that yet. There are several projects that should not be done now. Can we move funding for old projects and use that for Balboa Park?

Jon Richards (Responded): There are 2 projects on Golf Course drive. One is being funded by the enterprise fund. The framework was not in effect when this project started. Can only be used when funding is already available to determine which project is prioritized.

Kathy Vandenheuvel: Golden Hill has been asking for that for 30 years. More important for golfers to park. There is a topography issue with Golden Hill. It is a greater burden to walk to the Central Mesa. It is unfair there is no direct public transit to the Central Mesa.

Jake Banfield-Weir – There is an article about San Luis Obispo implementing paid parking and how it killed their Downtown area.

Patty Riddle: Has anything been done with the Zoo? San Diego should get a part of the revenue from the Zoo and Safari Park. If it is a politically sensitive issue let me know.

