

MINUTES

**City of San Diego Park and Recreation Board
BALBOA PARK COMMITTEE
March 5, 2026**

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
Chris Eddy
Patty Riddle
Michael Robinson
Tim Shields
Michael Singleton
Kathy Vandenheuver

Members Absent

Makeda Cheatom

Staff Present

Jon Richards
Tyler Canales
Anthony Harrington

1. CALL TO ORDER

Allison Soares called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Tyler Canales called roll.

3. APPROVE MINUTES FROM February 5, 2026, MEETING

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

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Mr. Eddy to approve the February 5, 2026, meeting minutes. The motion carried (8-0-0).

4. NON- AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

Web Form:

None

In-Person:

Charlene Autolino – Chair/CEO of San Diego Committee On Employment of People With Disabilities. City of San Diego has donated the Balboa Park Club Ballroom for the job fair for the past 27 years. This year's job fair will be in October. Have had over 1200 job seekers in the past. Most are on SSI benefits. They seek jobs to try and supplement their income. Paid parking will be detrimental to attendees. Free

parking is only for City residents. The cost for County residents is a lot. Expecting to have over 1500 participants this year. Folks look forward to this every year. Had about 37 employers last year and hoping to have over 75 this year. Hoping there might be a concession to waive parking fees this year.

Daniele Laman – Zoo is not able to build parking garages. What happened to the previous parking garage project? 6-Month Calendar did not have the Rummage Sale or Science Fair on it. Had a question about a person seen in the park who wear a Grinch costume. He panhandles and has been aggressive. Call 911 if he is aggressive. House of Iran hired additional security. House of Czech will reopen this weekend.

5. **CHAIR'S REPORT**

Thanked Jon and Emily and City staff for all the hard work they had to put in over the last year.

6. **STAFF REPORTS**

Council District 3 – None

78th District – Michael Bravo – Finished legislative packet for the year. It encompasses 15 bills on various issues. Hosted annual civics reception inviting many students from across the City. Submitted a letter to the Governor about Cultural Districts and what they mean to support cultural institutions.

SDPD – None

Mayor's Office – Emily Piatanesi – Mayor celebrated the Museum of Art's 100-year anniversary. Monday the Zoo lease extension will be brought to Council. Mayor announced changes to paid parking on 2/6. Changes include verified San Diego residents can park for free in Level 2 and 3 lots, enforcement now ends at 6pm, and ADA placards are valid in any parking spot for free. Changes took effect on 3/2. Staff have been at all the lots to communicate changes and assist with the kiosks. Implemented a digital navigation update to assist with online verification. Enforcement will begin on 3/16. Definition of employees and volunteers was sent to CAO to get clarification as to what would be considered a benefit to the park. Have been working directly with leaseholders and SUPs about parking passes.

Jon Richards, Deputy Director, Parks & Recreation – Municipal Gym reopened on 2/17. It was left in good condition. Had a vendor come out and sanitize prior to opening. Hall of Nations abatement has been completed. Most of the wood replacement has been completed as well. Plasterers will come out after that and then the windows. Lily Pond cleaning has been completed and koi fish have been returned. Rummage Sale is 3/7-3/8. St. Patrick's Day Parade is 3/14. Cherry Blossom Festival is 3/12-3/15. Science Fair will be 3/18.

7. **BALBOA PARK NON-PROFIT PARTNER UPDATES**

Forever Balboa Park – Katy McDonald – Botanical Building and Gardens Phase 2 will open on 4/10. Had a tree planting on 2/19 with students from Chula Vista. There was an article about a ballot initiative for Balboa Park but it did not move forward. San Diego Wave FC celebrated the launch of their Balboa Park kit. Have a very busy time of year coming up.

Balboa Park Cultural Partnership – Peter Comiskey – Institutions are still not supportive of paid parking but continue to help work on improvements. Data continues to show the negative impact of paid parking. Data for February shows a 20% decrease in attendance. Understand that the new changes to paid parking will not be reflected in this data. Need to fix as much as we can. These are considered first steps. Need a

regional solution. Appreciate the staff that have been at the kiosks and the changing of the signage. There should be a strategic approach to communications to get people to attend. Next ballot initiative is looking to move forward. More details will come.

Balboa Park Committee of 100 – Kevin Carpenter – Thanks for naming of the parking lots after the Committee of 100 founder Bea Evenson. Rummage Sale is coming back this weekend. Proud to announce that the mural molds for the Muni Gym project have been made. The next step will be to pour and create the artwork. Hope to have the work completed by Memorial Day. Plan to sandblast 8 light poles in the Pan American Plaza. One piece fell off the Automotive Museum. Working to get it repaired.

Save Starlight – Vincent Puma – Thanked Parks and Recreation staff on SUP. Will be having an event at Balboa Park Club on April 26th to honor Pete DeLuke. Will have educational and community partners in attendance.

Village Arts & Education Foundation – Natasha Papousek – Classes are continuing on the weekends. Summer camps are now open, and one session has sold out. One artist manager is retiring, and their studio will be turned into a classroom. Live art demonstrations will take place in the Summer.

8. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Patty Riddle – I am submitting this written comment to the Committee because I am frustrated that the Committee is today not discussing the Paid Parking Program at Balboa Park. I requested staff to put it on the agenda and was told it will be included in the Mayor’s Office update section. Our committee really must discuss today whether the Mayor’s changes are sufficient, whether they should be made permanent (Mayor Gloria can always change his Feb. 6 administrative decision about free parking for City residents), if the public is adequately informed – especially those without an Instagram account, and how much attendance and revenue is being lost now at museums. Included in this discussion, we must discuss the problem that, in order to obtain free parking or discounted parking in the Park’s lots, applicants must give waivers to the third-party vendor, IPS Group, and give them their identity, address, vehicle information (and real-time vehicle location within the Park) and agree to the following IPS Group’s terms: “We may share your information as required by law, in the interest of public safety, or in the interest or protecting or exercising our or others’ legal rights, e.g., without limitation, in connection with requests from law enforcement officials and in connection with court proceedings.” (Emphasis added.)

I have asked the Mayor’s office and Parks and Rec to please read IPS Group’s Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy; I have heard nothing back. As I discussed in the previous Committee meeting, the City should not be requiring its residents or anyone else to agree that IPS Group may disclose our personal information to federal law enforcement officials. After reviewing City’s contract with IPS Group, I am informed it should protect our information from disclosure to federal law enforcement officials without a court order, but in the context of current actions by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, we should all fear that IPS Group could be pressured by Homeland Security to disclose our information; actions by the City or in a court to enforce the City’s contract would be faced with arguments that we have given IPS Group our individual waivers that allow disclosure—and such actions would be too late anyway.)

I am upset that the City has done nothing to eliminate this risk to the public, and I wanted the Committee to consider today a recommendation to the Mayor and City Council that the risk should be eliminated by simple verification of city residence by City Police use of DMV data when they enforce parking in the Park.

Chris Eddy – Would like to reinforce to regard Balboa Park as a regional asset. It’s important for other county entities to put a line item in their budget to help support Balboa Park.

Mandy Brown – Would like to acknowledge all the staff in the park.

9. REQUEST FOR ITEMS TO BE PLACED ON CONSENT AGENDA

None

10. CONSENT AGENDA

None

11. INFORMATION ITEMS

Item 1: Balboa Park Safe Sleeping Sites Update

Presenter: Katie Keach, Deputy Director, Homeless Strategies & Solutions Department

Public Comment:

None

Committee Comment:

Kathy Vandenheuvell – Thanks for giving an update. Have had a consistent problem at the end of the 26th St trail. There is a large hole in the fence and a lot of off leash dogs. Any way to increase security would be appreciated. Site was initially labeled as temporary. What is current plan for how long it will be in place?

Katie Keach (Responded) – There is a constant review of the program. Cannot project as to how long it will be there.

Kathy Vandenheuvell – Will you need budget for FY27?

Katie Keach (Responded) – Not assuming that it is going away. Have discussed scaling back things to operations. Can come back later when budget is allocated.

12. ACTION ITEMS

Item 2: Forever Balboa Park Garden Party

Presenter: Kelly Ford, Forever Balboa Park

Public Comment:

None

Committee Comment:

Tim Shields – Form was checked to say the Old Globe did not have performances, but there are performances that night.

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

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Ms. Vandenheuvell to approve the Forever Balboa Park Garden Party event. The motion carried unanimously (12-0-0).

Item 3: National Carousel Day
Presenter: Kelly Ford, Forever Balboa Park

Public Comment:
None

Committee Comment:
Tim Shields – Form was checked to say they were unsure if there was an Old Globe performance that night, but there is a performance. The calendar is online to review.

Chris Eddy – At last meeting made note of the unsure box. Hard to tell the difference between a run and a performance. Can be confusing.

MOTION: MOVED/SECONDED Mr. Singleton/ Mr. Banfield-Weir

A motion was made by Mr. Singleton and seconded by Mr. Banfield-Weir to approve the National Carousel Day event. The motion carried unanimously (12-0-0).

Item 4: Rock ‘n’ Roll San Diego 5k
Presenter: Max Little, Southwest Region Operations Director

Public Comment:
None

Committee Comment:
Patty Riddle – When will signs start going up? BPAC users utilize that parking lot.

Max Little (Responded) – No parks will be out the week before.

Patty Riddle – How long are people at the beer garden?

Max Little (Responded) – Last call is at 10am.

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

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Ms. Blackson to approve the Rock ‘n’ Roll San Diego 5k event. The motion carried unanimously (12-0-0).

Item 5: 2026 Esri User Conference Party
Presenter: Michele Cole, Esri

Public Comment:
None

Committee Comment:
Howard Blackson – Plan has 2 shuttle loading/unloading areas.

Michele Cole (Responded) – Worked with SETCs to make sure there is a rerouting for bikes.

Tim Shields – There is a performance at the Old Globe that day.

Kathy Vandenneuvel – There is a big impact. Noted that there will not be a donation to the park. Would like to see one.

Chris Eddy – What does line 7a say?

Michele Cole – That line notes all the park entities working with Esri on the event.

MOTION: MOVED/SECONDED Mr. Eddy/ Ms. Brown

A motion was made by Mr. Eddy and seconded by Ms. Brown to approve the 2026 Esri User Conference Party event. The motion carried unanimously (12-0-0).

Item 6: HPR Ethnic Food Fair & 90th Anniversary Closing Celebration

Presenter: Joe Mazares, President, House of Pacific Relations

Public Comment:

None

Committee Comment:

Patty Riddle – Do you coordinate with County Health?

Joe Mazares (Responded) – Yes. Houses are certified and have temporary food handlers and all food trucks are required to have permits.

Tim Shields – The Old Globe does have a performance that day. The form does say no. There are effects on parking.

Joe Mazares (Responded) – Always stress to use public transportation with patrons.

Chris Eddy – Is there admission?

Joe Mazares (Responded) – No. Has always been free.

MOTION: MOVED/SECONDED Mr. Singleton/ Mr. Robinson

A motion was made by Mr. Singleton and seconded by Mr. Robinson to approve the HPR Ethnic Food Fair & 90th Anniversary Closing Ceremony event. The motion carried unanimously (12-0-0).

13. WORKSHOP ITEMS

Item 7: Japanese Friendship Garden & Museum Proposed GDP Amendment

Presenter: Stephanie Green, Landscape Architect, Parks and Recreation Department; Dennis Otsuji, President, Japanese Friendship Garden & Museum; Luanne Kanzawa, Executive Director/CEO, Japanese Friendship Garden & Museum; Keiji Uesugi, Landscape Architect, Assistant Professor, Cal Poly Pomona; Kelly Sutherlin McLeod, Architect; Marcela Escobar, President/CEO, Atlantis Group

Public Comment:

Michael Warburton – In total awe of this vision. Want to congratulate Japanese Friendship Garden. Very excited that this will possibly increase visitation. In total support of this.

Peter Comiskey – Balboa Park Cultural Partnership is fully supportive of this plan. This will radically improve this section of the park.

Committee Comment:

Mike Singleton – Think what the garden is now is a testament to the future. The building construction techniques are beautiful and the plant material is very well maintained. It is important for the Committee to review this in detail. Standards for Department of Interior doesn't necessarily mean it has to look radically different.

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – Most of interior is subject to design review or DOI. Have received good feedback regarding the materials to be used.

Kelly Sutherlin McLeod (Responded) – Will be using natural materials and more modern architecture.

Dennis Otsuji (Responded) – Currently working on 3 structures that are located in Japan and will be delivered later in the year. They come under the classification of a museum exhibit.

Jake Banfield-Weir – Will this be over viewshed of Organ Pavilion?

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – It is not over the tree line. It is blocked off by bamboo hedge.

Chris Eddy – Do you have a sense of accessibility of where it is now and what it will be?

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – It will all meet ADA standards. It will open up a lot more of the garden to patrons.

Howard Blackson – Unfortunately you don't have a Master Plan update yet. How are you dealing with the setback on Paseo Del Oro?

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – Paseo Del Oro is mostly vehicular traffic. No intention of creating an ADA road.

Howard Blackson – In the precise plan it is intended as restricted use?

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – All improvements are within the leasehold and within the rights.

David Baron – Will you be going for a LEED certification?

Kelly Sutherlin McLeod (Responded) – That has not been discussed at this time.

Dennis Otsuji (Responded) – The Garden is currently LEED certified.

Chris Eddy – Does the lease expire in 2036 and are you renegotiating this as part of the lease?

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – Lease expires in 2034 and no.

Michael Robinson – Like the water element. Will it be self-regenerating?

Dennis Otsuji (Responded) – All features in the Garden are recirculated and currently have 3 reservoirs.

Item 7: Balboa Park Master Plan

Tabled

14. ADJOURNMENT – 6:19 pm

Notice of Next Balboa Park Meeting:

April 9, 2026
4:00 P.M.
In-Person

Respectfully submitted,

Tyler Canales
District Manager