

MINUTES

**City of San Diego Park and Recreation Board
BALBOA PARK COMMITTEE
May 7, 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
Howard Blackson
Makeda Cheatom
Patty Riddle
Michael Robinson
Michael Singleton
Kathy Vandenheuvel

Members Absent

Jake Banfield-Weir
Mandy Brown
Chris Eddy

Staff Present

Jon Richards
Tyler Canales
Anthony Harrington

1. CALL TO ORDER

Allison Soares called the meeting to order at 4:13 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Tyler Canales called roll.

3. APPROVE MINUTES FROM April 9, 2026, MEETING

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

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Ms. Vandenheuvel to approve the April 9, 2026, meeting minutes with amendments. The motion carried (7-0-0).

4. NON- AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

Web Form:

None

In-Person:

Michael Warburton – Representing the Electric Building Tenet Committee. Have a clogged clean out on the east side of the building. There has been attention to an a/c unit. Four major roof leaks. BACC without functional a/c since September. Issues with the fig tree next to the San Diego History Center. Flooding and sewer issues at the Model Railroad Museum.

Daniele Laman – Will be handing out free roses at the Organ Pavilion for the organ concert. Listed upcoming Lawn Programs. Will be a class held for de-escalation tactics. 2 vacant Park Ranger positions

will be lost in next budget. Bright lights have been installed behind Air & Space museum. Have contacted the transient that has been dressed like the Grinch, and he has been offered services. Might lose several positions due to the budget.

5. **CHAIR'S REPORT**

None

6. **STAFF REPORTS**

Council District 3 – None

78th District – None

SDPD – None

Mayor's Office – None

Jon Richards, Deputy Director, Parks & Recreation – Thanks to everyone who went to Council and made comments at the Budget Review Committee. Mayor released the draft budget on 4/15 that presented a \$120 million budget deficit. The budget reflected trying to maintain core services. On 5/5 Parks & Recreation and Libraries budget review hearing was held. Mayor will release revised budget on 5/13. Next budget hearing will be 5/18 for public comment. 6/5 will be final budget hearing. Council will vote on the budget on 6/9. Currently it has a loss of 94 positions within the proposed budget for FY27 for Parks and Recreation. Most of these positions are currently filled. Balboa Park makes up 7.32 of these proposed cut positions. 3 of the cuts were to the Unclassified positions with Parks and Recreation. The Balboa Park positions are mostly maintenance positions which would impact restrooms. Parking as of 5/5 has generated \$2.56 million in revenue and expenses, which are mostly one time, has been over \$1 million. The Mall and Plaza de Panama fountain have been replanted. The update from the Planning Department regarding the Master Plan Update: “Issued RFP for Master Plan to the consultants. City is reviewing them and expecting to onboard them in the next couple months.” Graduation season is coming up. Upcoming events: 5/16 – March for Babies, 5/17- Tennis Fest, 5/30-5/31- Rock & Roll Marathon, 6/6 – FBP Garden Party.

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

Forever Balboa Park – Ellie Gaffo – Pergola reveal was on 4/10 and was a major milestone. California Conservation Corp are conducting trail maintenance on several trails in the park. Rose Garden Pergola plans are under review with DSD and hope to begin construction in late summer. 4/24 – Arbor Day – planted 10 trees at Morley Field. Plante 11 more trees on 5/8 at Morley Field. The Volunteer Recognition Dinner on 4/30 was a success. Each volunteer received a sweatshirt. The Garden Party event will be on 6/6.

Balboa Park Cultural Partnership – Peter Comiskey – Emily has been delivering a terrible message. The community still continues to support Parks and Recreation. Cuts are proposed to Arts & Culture in the new budget. December Nights is on the chopping block. Mayor has made decisions that are limiting access to and hurting the park. The parking district on 6th Avenue has only brought in \$4.5 million. The true cost of paid parking is harming the City. Could see job losses and possible closure of museums. Annual Explorer Pass sales are down and usage dopped 20% in January, 30% in February and 40% in March. Continues to be a year over year decline. We need the Mayor and Council to listen and work with us. There are messages being communicated to the Council. Need to be involved in the budget discussions. There is an effort to gather signatures to repeal paid parking.

Balboa Park Committee of 100 – Ross Porter – This is a tragedy we are witnessing. Moving forward to complete Municipal Gym work. Hope to install it in the next 30 days. Will have a tentative ribbon cutting on 7/13.

Save Starlight – Vincent Puma – Seems to be a new gang causing graffiti. Will explain the importance of the place and send pictures to PD. Twilight Concerts are coming up. Just started advertising them. Hope the community will come. Had a great event on 4/29. Several people showed up to support. Received over 100 people that wanted to come but didn't due to paid parking. Still working on the lease with the City.

Village Arts & Education Foundation – New classroom is up and running. Renewals just passed and are 98% complete. Have a glass guild show coming up. High Tech Elementary students will be coming on 5/18 for demos. 5/23 – Senior artwork show. Demos are scheduled several times a month. Potters show will be happening in June. Adult camps filling up. Youth camps are going a little slower.

8. **COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Disappointed on the cuts to Balboa Park and the reduced funding for recreation centers, reductions in Park Rangers and Arts & Culture. See there are 17 additional parking enforcement officers. Why is no one here from D3 or the Mayor's office?

Patty Riddle – Agree with Kathy on Mayor's office not caring. City has decided to extend the Zoo lease to 2078 and receive \$3 million annually while the Zoo CEO makes \$1.8 million per year. City will continue paid parking permanently. Need more directions to the tram. People are really confused at Inspiration Point. Map there needs to be corrected. Signs at Lower Inspiration do not say the first 3 hours are free. Lights at Morley Field being redone.

Makeda Cheatom – Earth Day was great. Meter maid had a really good time. Reminded people of the old days. Might be our last Earth Day. Kwanzaa is free and probably will be the last one. MLK Day might be cut. Black Comic Day might be cut. Juneteenth may be cut. Have been doing this for the community for a long time. Have always wanted to do good things for my City. All these events being cancelled is devastating to the BIPOC community. Have to stand together to save our City.

9. **REQUEST FOR ITEMS TO BE PLACED ON CONSENT AGENDA**

None

10. **CONSENT AGENDA**

None

11. **INFORMATION ITEMS**

None

12. **ACTION ITEMS**

**Item 1: San Diego Pride – Credentialing Area
Presenter: Chris Carrington, San Diego Pride**

Public Comment:

None

Committee Comment:

None

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

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Mr. Blackson to approve the credentialing area for San Diego Pride. The motion carried (8-0-0).

13. WORKSHOP ITEMS

Item 2: Japanese Friendship Garden & Museum – Proposed GDP Amendment – Workshop 2

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, FAIA, Architect, Kelly Sutherlin McLeod Architecture, Inc.; Marcela Escobar, President/CEO, Atlantis Group

Public Comment:

Michael Warburton – Want to commend the team working on this. This is very mission driven. This is not designed just to generate revenue. Absolutely in support.

Committee Comment:

Michael Robinson – They appear to have responded to the questions that were raised before. Beautiful concept and project. Seemed to really have addressed the accessibility.

Howard Blackson – Why is there no set back of Paseo de Oro? Why are you hiding and screening the new building?

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – It is not a primary road. Looked at it initially but it is complicated and left it alone. The building is hidden/screened because if we didn't, we would be asked why we didn't. Have to be deferential to the other historic buildings.

David Baron – Are you looking for LEED status? How long will construction take? Where will the heavy equipment get access?

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – Probably but don't know yet. Do not have a timeline for construction yet. The equipment will access from the staging area.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Looks like a beautiful design. Appreciate the children's area. What is the increase of impervious areas? What would be the reduction in trees? Will the fees be increased to enter the Garden?

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – Fees are unknown at this time. The cultural center will be where the current nursery is. The number of trees will be increasing in this project.

Dennis Otsuji (Responded) – Almost everything existing is pervious. There will be more pervious than not.

Michael Singleton – This is very positive. Creating a split building. The amphitheater on top makes I feel less massive. The waterfall will draw more people in. A lot is about unveiling and exploring. Appreciate the structural materials. Think the entrance experience help guide vistas. Does a view shed analysis come later? Have not seen those yet and think they are critically important. Wonder about the back side of the Prado.

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – View share was done. That’s not a submittal requirement. Trying to meet National Park standards. All view points were done for different purposes. Context as to why they were chosen is they were chosen by Historic Resources and Parks & Recreation staff. Hearing you asking for one additional view from the Organ Pavilion.

Michael Singleton – Yes. Overall this will be a wonderful project.

Item 3: Balboa Park Master Plan

Presenter: Howard Blackson

Public Comment:

Michael Warburton – Been around the park for 30 years. Have seen it act as a political football. Should not be working with such an old master plan. Public engagement is so important to way where we are doing certain things. That is very critical.

Michael Stepner – Want to support what Howard said. If City had grasp of the park park we would not be speaking about the budget. Really need a robust public engagement. Need to develop constituents to get support. Don’t want to start from scratch but use what we already have. This is not a community plan. This park is special and needs to be treated that way.

Daniele Laman – Thank you for the slides. Want to remind all community members that priorities in the park are health and safety. Electrical study for the cottages has just been released. At 30% design for the electrical upgrades and it will be \$3 million. Will be speaking to Chris Ward to try and get funding.

Committee Comment:

Allsion Soares – Appreciate Howard’s passion. Not an expert on master plans but am on money. We just paid the consultant for the framework, and they did a great job. We don’t have any money. Need to have somebody to put that together.

Howard Blackson (Responded) – Sign an MOU with Forever Balboa Park to lead this. Follow the four steps presented. FBP has more resources that are available to do this.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Thank for taking leadership on this. Was the RFP ever made public?

Howard Blackson (Responded) – Yes. It’s out there.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Had a slide with all the old places. That’s the frustration. There have been so many plans. Access to Balboa Park from Golden Hill has always been important. Outlying areas get the least attention. Have been championing an East Mesa Precise Plan for years but nothing has happened. Hope we can do better. So frustrated we have continuous budget issues. Have seen significant revenue but have not seen where expenses go.

Michael Singleton – Believe this is very important. There is money currently. Haves some basic structural problems with the park. Best time to do this is when development is down to solve some

of these problems. Each one of these things have important elements. The governance and funding are the most important things. Who, what, when, and how need to be answered. Now really is the time to do it. The County should be brought into this.

14. ADJOURNMENT – 6:33 pm

Notice of Next Balboa Park Meeting:

June 4, 2026
4:00 P.M.
In-Person

Respectfully submitted,

Tyler Canales
District Manager