



Downtown Community Planning Council San Diego

*Planning a Vibrant Downtown for All*

## **Downtown Community Planning Council Meeting Minutes**

**May 20, 2026, 5:30 PM**

**12th Floor Committee Room, City Hall,  
202 C Street, San Diego, CA, 92101**

### **I. Call to Order & Roll Call**

Meeting was called to order at 5:31 PM.

**In Attendance:** Hewitt (Chair), Helmer (Vice Chair), Wagner, Schwarz, Mahoney, Arenas (arrived late), Palmer, Sweeney, Baham, Hustrulid, and Avitia. Quorum met with 11 of 13 members in attendance.

**Absent:** Bargman, Salas

### **II. Non-Agenda Public Comment**

No non-agenda public comment was offered at the opening of the meeting.

### **III. Community Reports**

#### **A. Christina Gaffney, Office of Council Member Steven Whitburn**

- Council Member Whitburn negotiated an agreement to end paid parking in Balboa Park and reduce the city's trash fees for residents. Free parking in Balboa Park will return no later than December 31 of this year. As part of this settlement, litigation over the city's trash fees will be discontinued.
- Following the City Council's October 27 vote to allocate \$1.8 million in Community Parking District (CPD) meter revenue to the Transportation Department, the city has performed several maintenance tasks and upgraded street infrastructure.

#### **Board Discussion:**

- A board member asked whether the trash fee settlement still includes an independent audit - confirmed yes, scheduled for FY2028.

- A board member asked about the revenue impact to Balboa Park operations from the repeal of paid parking. The council office noted an anticipated \$2.2 million revenue impact in FY2027; approximately \$3 million per year had been projected from the meters, but as these were new revenues not previously in Balboa's budget, the repeal does not create a structural hole — park maintenance will return to general fund support as before meters were installed.
- A board member noted ongoing issues with malfunctioning parking meters generating erroneous tickets and asked about a timeline for software updates. No completion date was available; the Transportation Department and City Attorney's office are working on the issue. Meter expansion to San Ysidro is planned.
- A board member requested a future update on the Neil Day Center. The council office noted that the Council Member is prioritizing shelter beds and is opposed to reductions in homeless funding, but no decisions have been made.

#### **B. Randy Reyes, Office of Mayor Todd Gloria**

- The Mayor released the FY2027 May Revise last week. Changes to the original budget proposal include:
  - Protection of recreation center and library hours in Council Districts 4, 8, and 9
  - Protection of Monday hours at Carmel Valley Library
  - Protection of the North Clairemont Library branch from closure
  - \$500,000 for youth drop-in centers
  - \$100,000 additional investment in the "No Shots Fired" violence prevention program
  - Protection of staffing support for December Nights planning and operations
  - Protection of shoreline park bathroom maintenance staffing
  - Partial protection of the Library Matching Program (\$250,000)
  - Allocation of opioid settlement funds to UCSD Health and San Diego LGBT Community Center
  - Funding for the Dennis V. Allen Comfort Station project in Mount Hope and Mission Heights Dog Park improvements in Linda Vista
- These changes are funded by a slight increase in tourism occupancy tax and a \$4.3 million transfer from the Golf Enterprise Fund, based on a new legal interpretation authorizing the city to recover ground rent from the Fund for public land on which municipal golf courses operate.
- The Mayor joined the San Diego Community College District and the Prebys Foundation to sign an MOU for the redevelopment of Golden Hall. The proposal includes classrooms and education space for the community college, an art center, and housing.

**Board Discussion:**

- A board member asked about the status of restroom renovations near the Civic Theatre. Temporary portable restrooms have been installed on the opposite side of the block at Civic Center Plaza; renovations by the Department of General Services are underway with completion expected this summer.

**C. Danny Avitia, Office of County Supervisor Paloma Aguirre**

- The Board of Supervisors held a full-day meeting today. A significant outcome was the approval of a \$22 million investment in the Innovative Housing Trust Fund, which provides gap financing for affordable housing development. The state has ceased funding this program; the county is now assuming that role.

**Board Discussion:**

- A board member asked about a rental assistance program to prevent homelessness before eviction. Avitia confirmed that a program exists but is underfunded; the application portal is currently closed. The county's trend is toward pre-eviction assistance to prevent downstream costs, but current funding is depleted.

**IV. Action Items**

**A. April Regular Meeting Minutes**

No board comments were raised.

**Motion** to approve the April regular meeting minutes by board member Helmer; seconded by Avitia. Approved without objection.

**B. Conditional Use Permit — Live Entertainment, 7th Avenue & C Street**

The board considered a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) application for live entertainment at a building at approximately 7th Avenue and C Street. The applicant's team presented the project.

Key project details:

- The applicant is both the property owner and operator and owns an adjacent building on C Street currently being rehabilitated.

- The second floor will be used as an event space for weddings, conferences, cultural events, and meetings; the first floor is a restaurant.
- No live entertainment is proposed on the rooftop; the rooftop is intended as a break area accessible by elevator and enclosed stairwells.
- The windows on the second floor do not open; the single east-facing window will be replaced with new glazing meeting the required decibel standard.
- Sound mitigation measures are outlined in an RNS acoustic study (May 11, 2026), which projects compliance with the 65 dB mixed-use limit at the property line.
- The applicant holds a letter of support from the Downtown Partnership.

**Public Comment:**

- A member of the public reminded the board that a CUP will apply to a property even if it transfers to a different owner. Noted the proximity of the Diega apartment building (approximately 100 feet away), making this a mixed-use context, not a Gaslamp entertainment corridor. Outside the Gaslamp, the standard practice limits live entertainment to 10 PM Sunday–Thursday and 11 PM Friday, Saturday, and pre-holiday evenings. Recommends approval with hours conforming to those standards; warned that an exception here sets a precedent for other establishments.

**Board Discussion:**

- The board clarified that the CUP is limited to the second floor; the rooftop NUP does not authorize live entertainment. Sound is contained to the second floor; rooftop access is via enclosed elevator and stairwells with closed doors at both ends.
- A board member asked about the former SRO at 6th & B Street; the applicant confirmed that SRO has closed.
- The board confirmed that the mitigation measures in the RNS acoustic study — including sound monitoring systems and speaker attenuation — are incorporated into the city permit plans.
- A board member welcomed the investment, noting the long-standing blight in the area, and expressed comfort with the noise levels given prior residential experience nearby.

**Motion** to approve the CUP as presented by board member Avitia; seconded by Baham.

**Amendment** proposed by Hewitt: require the applicant to meet all mitigation measures specified in the May 11, 2026 RNS acoustic study prior to or concurrent with operation. The motion maker accepted this amendment.

A second amendment was proposed to limit entertainment hours to 10 PM on weeknights and 11 PM on weekends and pre-holidays, consistent with downtown mixed-use norms outside the Gaslamp. The motion maker did not accept this amendment.

Vote on the motion as amended (approval with mitigation measures; original requested hours):

**Approve:** Helmer, Wagner, Schwarz, Mahoney, Arenas, Palmer, Sweeney, Baham, Hustrulid, Avitia

**No:** Hewitt

Motion **approved 10–1**.

### **C. DCPC Annual Report**

The Chair presented the draft annual report, required by the city following the March meeting.

**Motion** to approve the annual report as presented by board member Wagner; seconded by board member Mahoney. **Approved without objection.**

### **D. Land Development Code Update — Proposed Noise Ordinance Change**

The Chair presented a PowerPoint overview of a proposed change embedded in the city's annual land development code (LDC) update. Of the approximately 140 proposed ordinance changes, item 11 modifies the noise ordinance as follows: it adds a provision stating that noise exceeding applicable limits is lawful if "otherwise authorized by a special permit, development permit, or other permit or agreement approved by the city manager or designee."

#### **Public Comment:**

Six members of the public spoke in support of removing item 11, and the board received 12 written comments, all in support of the proposed action. Commenters included downtown residents, a property owner involved in ongoing litigation over Gallagher Square concert noise levels, and a professional acoustic engineer.

- Noise enforcement is currently ineffective: code enforcement directs complaints to non-emergency police, which deprioritizes noise calls; there is no functioning nighttime enforcement mechanism.
- A few instances of noise enforcement have been achieved when residents document repeated violations at their own expense and report through formal channels.
- The proposed change would effectively codify non-enforcement by allowing the city manager to waive limits without any ceiling, duration restriction, public notice, or appeals process.
- Several speakers noted that the staff summary's description of the change as "temporary" and limited to "specific situations" is not reflected in the actual ordinance text.

**Board Discussion:**

- A board member asked whether the change favors nightlife/commercial interests or residents. The Chair responded that it is more likely to harm residents and some businesses; both downtown and beach communities would be affected.
- A board member expressed strong opposition to the discretionary exemption component, which allows the city to effectively waive enforcement unilaterally.
- Board members and the public noted that the staff summary is misleading relative to the actual ordinance change, which may be intentional.
- A board member raised concern that the city council has become less responsive to planning groups; suggested that the board's letter include not just a removal request but also a list of specific concerns, so that the board's position is on record if item 11 is not removed.
- The chair noted that a council member would need to pull item 11 from the consent calendar for it to be amended; full removal is possible but may be unlikely. Two letters were discussed: one requesting removal, a second enumerating concerns to be included if the city proceeds.
- The Chair confirmed he would make the same presentation to the Community Planners Committee (CPC) the following week and request that the CPC take a position.

**Motion** by Avitia to authorize the Chair to submit a letter to the City Council requesting removal of item 11 from the current LDC update, and to include a list of specific concerns in the event the council proceeds with adoption; seconded by Palmer. **Approved unanimously.**

**V. Informational Items**

**A. City Trash and Recycling Services Update**

**Alexander Belasso** (Program Manager, Waste Reduction Division) and **Leah Jackson** (Associate Management Analyst), City of San Diego Environmental Services Department, presented an overview of Measure B implementation and the current state of residential waste services.

**Board Discussion:**

- A board member asked whether a property owner can create a secondary portal account for a tenant. Yes; the owner grants one-time authorization, after which the tenant can manage service levels as a secondary user.
- Green bins (2022 vintage) are still being collected; they were not included in the current replacement cycle because they are newer and have RFID tags.
- A board member asked about compliance for downtown private haulers who are not yet offering organic waste collection to multifamily buildings. Haulers are

contractually required to provide this service. Complaints should be submitted through GetItDone; the city has a 10-day response requirement for general hauler complaints and a 5-day requirement for organic waste complaints. ESD enforcement is currently reactive rather than proactive; a complaint triggers the enforcement process.

## **VI. Committee Reports**

### **A. Community Planners Committee (CPC)**

The Chair attended his first CPC meeting and will return the following week to present on the noise ordinance item (see Item IV.D). Citywide CPC discussion focused on community opposition to cell tower installations under new permitting rules, and on SB 79 implementation. SB 79's density provisions have limited impact on downtown, as the existing code already allows greater density than what the bill requires, and the downtown area is broadly covered by trolley service.

### **B. Annual Goals — Board Survey**

The Chair presented a draft list of potential priority issues for the board to adopt as annual goals. The process will be two-stage: (1) members review the draft list and submit additions within the next week; (2) the Chair sends a rating survey to rank the issues, with results compiled for the June meeting.

Board members suggested the following additions to the draft list:

- Vehicle noise enforcement
- Traffic and moving violation enforcement
- Increased park ranger staffing for county parks
- Outreach and communications infrastructure — improving routine input from the Port, railroad, airport, MTS, and SDPD, entities whose projects affect downtown but rarely appear before the board

Avitia provided the new SDPD community liaison contact: **Krystle Jordan**. The Chair will forward this to the board.

### **C. Elections Committee**

No update. Sweeney and Avitia confirmed they will coordinate on outreach and communications for filling vacant board seats.

### **D. Chair Updates**

- The Chair has reached out to the applicant for the 444 Beech Street project (30-story mixed-use building in Little Italy) to invite an optional presentation; no response yet.
- Annual Brown Act training is upcoming (approximately two hours, city-provided, online). All board members are required to complete training annually; the Chair will circulate details. The training includes a Q&A opportunity.
- The board was reminded to continue recruiting for vacant seats (four business seats and two community organization seats).
- The board confirmed that **John Paul Schwarz** will join the Design Review Subcommittee, filling the seat that had been held pending confirmation.

#### **E. Absent Member Threshold — Upcoming Agenda Item**

The Chair noted that as of this meeting, **Brendan Bargman** (Columbia Business seat) and **Alejanda Salas** (East Village South Business seat) has exceeded the four-absence threshold for a rolling 12-month period. The Chair will place official action to open both seats on the June agenda. In the interim, these two vacancies, combined with existing unfilled seats, will reduce the board's active membership and lower the quorum threshold accordingly.

#### **VII. Remainder Non-Agenda Public Comment**

No additional public comment was offered.

#### **VIII. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM.

*Next meeting: June 17, 2026 5:30 PM, City Hall 12th Floor Room A*