

MINUTES

**City of San Diego Park and Recreation Board
BALBOA PARK COMMITTEE
July 9, 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
Michael Robinson
Michael Singleton
Kathy Vandenheuvel

Members Absent

Jake Banfield-Weir
Mandy Brown
Chris Eddy
Matt Jawlik
Patty Riddle

Staff Present

Jon Richards
Tyler Canales
Anthony Harrington

1. CALL TO ORDER

Allison Soares called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Tyler Canales called roll.

3. APPROVE MINUTES FROM June 4, 2026, MEETING

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

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Ms. Vandenheuvel to approve the June 4, 2026, meeting minutes. The motion carried (5-0-2. A. Soares and M. Robinson abstained).

4. NON- AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

Web Form:

None

In-Person:

Daniele Laman – The water heater in the House of Czech & Slovak blew up and caused flooding. Is there a schedule to inspect the water heaters in the International Cottages? Will there be an update on which bathrooms will be closed. How will the Ranger situation be with the loss of 3 positions? Met with Chris Ward's office to request \$3 million for the electrical study for the Cottages. Talking to Councilmember Whitburn's office about Muni Code updates. Announced the upcoming lawn programs.

Michael Warburton – Representing the Electric Building Tenet Committee. HVAC for Fine Arts Center has movement. Still have a roof drain issue that needs to be addressed before El Nino.

Marty Poirer – Representing Banker’s Hill Project Review Committee. Asking to have the 6th Ave and Juniper Roundabout as an action item at the next Balboa Park Committee meeting. The project encroaches onto Balboa Park land, but was moved forward as a right of way project. There was not enough public input given. Input was taken but no alternatives were presented for this project. Ask that proper scrutiny is given to the project.

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 – El Nino is coming. Be prepared. Emily apologizes for not being able to make the meeting as she had a conflicting meeting she needed to attend. The Planning Department will come to the September meeting to give an update on the Master Plan. There is no Committee meeting in August. Forever Balboa Park’s new Special Use Permit has been signed and executed. It gives them access to some of the grounds that generally are not permittable to the public. The approved FY27 budget should be posted now. 3 unclassified positions were cut, 3 Park Ranger positions were cut, 6 Grounds Maintenance Workers were cut, 1 ½ time Custodian was cut and 4 Recreation Leaders were cut. RIF process will occur over the next couple of months. 6 comfort stations will be closed in the park. Upcoming events: July 16 – ESRI, July 18-19 – PRIDE, July 25 – National Carousel Day, August 1 – Balboa Park 8 Miler.

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

Forever Balboa Park – Katy McDonald – Had a celebration of the completion of Phase 2 of the Botanical Building on June 6th. There were people there who said they hadn’t seen the park look so good in a long time. Signed another Special Use Permit to facilitate programming within the park. Any money raised from these events will stay within the park. The need for an accurate 6-month calendar remains and hope to add to the accuracy of it. National Carousel Day will be July 25th. Have received all permits to construct the Rose Garden Pergola. Construction will start in August. Spark Awards is on September 18th. Each winner will receive \$5,000. Nominate people on the website.

Balboa Park Cultural Partnership – Gillian Rizza – Introduced herself. Thanked Forever Balboa Park for working with them on Forever’s upcoming event.

Balboa Park Committee of 100 – Ross Porter – Refer to C100’s March 19th letter regarding the Juniper Roundabout. It is a dumb move by the City. The Forever Balboa Park SUP had a nice rollout. Felt included in the process. Activation is part of ideation of how the park can improve. Municipal Gym project is moving forward slowly. Hope to have it installed before the end of summer and have a dedication on September 14. City has decided not to appeal the vending ordinance ruling.

Save Starlight – Steve Stopper – Twilight in the Park will be after the meeting. Thanked Forever Balboa Park and Jon for obtaining the permit. Need to get a lease some point soon. Talks are ongoing Hope to get something.

Village Arts & Education Foundation – Ongoing camps for kids and teens. 7/11 and 7/18-19 – Potter’s Guild is involved in National Hand Work 2026. Potters will be throwing on patio. Opera Neo will be 7/24-25. Hired an Education Coordinator and a new person on the board is handling permits.

8. **COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

Howard Blackson – Can Marty explain the Juniper Roundabout to Balboa Park?

Marty Poirier (Responded) – The project did not mention work in Balboa Park. Juniper Road is a park asset. Error seems to be project was being presented as only impacting the public right of way. City was allowed to make its own determination on impacts. Don’t believe there was enough public outreach or alternatives presented.

Michael Robinson – What is the City’s strategy to inform citizens about the possible impacts of the upcoming El Nino?

Jon Richards (Responded) – Meetings have just begun. Will share communications as they come out.

David Baron – Could we get the County involved with street vending?

Jon Richards (Responded) – They were asked but have not received a response yet.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Some potentials impacts would be the drainage channels in the wooded areas of the park. There’s a potential for a lot of clogging. The Ops Yard is prone to flooding. Have a lot of erosion on the trails in Florida Canyon.

Makeda Cheatom – Will the institutions be receiving sandbags?

Jon Richards (Responded) – The City is working on a plan for that.

Allison Soares – We all appreciate you Jon, Anthony and Tyler. Thank you for all you do.

Michael Singleton – Have expressed some concerns about 6th Ave. Thanked the City for the adjustments that were made. The parking district was supposed to pay for the Juniper roundabout, but that money went elsewhere. Have been trying to get a 5-mph reduction on 6th Ave.

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

None

10. **CONSENT AGENDA**

None

11. **INFORMATION ITEMS**

None

12. ACTION ITEMS

Item 1: 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; Kelly Sutherlin McLeod, FAIA, Architect, Kelly Sutherlin McLeod Architecture, Inc.; Marcela Escobar, President/CEO, Atlantis Group

Public Comment:

Michael Warburton – We fully support the GDP amendment.

Jay Shumacher – There were thoughts for a parking garage behind the Organ Pavilion. The roof would have been a garden. The canyon would have been ideal.

Committee Comment:

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Asked what the increase in pervious area would be at the last meeting.

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – Apologize for not having the exact number. We are meeting Regional Quality Board requirements.

Makeda Cheatom – We really support this. Where is the bridge to the World Beat Center?

Michael Singleton – Did make the adjustments requested previously. This simulation shows that it is less impactful than the last one. Have a great deal of confidence in the project. Always helps seeing the visuals for how everything comes together.

Marcela Escobar (Responded) – Appreciate the feedback.

Howard Blackson – Had to compare this to the 1989 Master Plan and you used the goals. Can you explain the process to meet conformance?

Stephanie Green (Responded) – Looked at the original goals of the site. This is a restricted site and noted it was not getting larger size wise. Looked at the project over time as well. Was a mix of being overall and development over time.

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

A motion was made by Mr. Baron and seconded by Mr. Singleton to approve the Japanese Friendship Garden GDP Amendment per the staff recommendation. The motion carried unanimously (7-0-0).

Item 2: America 250 Celebration Presented by Southwestern Airlines & Coca Cola

Presenter: Kelly Ford, Forever Balboa Park

Public Comment:

Michael Warburton – Excited to see events in the park. Fully supportive of doing this. There is discussion of bringing artists. Include the people in the park. Want to be cognizant of the park and it needs to be expanded around the Balboa Park community.

Committee Comment:

Howard Blackson – Why are you coming for a permit if you have an SUP?

Jon Richards (Responded) – SUP allows them to access the space, but they still have to go through the regular special events process.

Kathy Vandenneuvel – Think it's great you're working with all the institutions. It looks like a great event. Hesitant to approve without a date. Will it be after the initial date?

Kelly Ford (Responded) – Looking for some time in October. Still need to verify it works for everyone.

Allison Soares – What is the time and why is it a special event?

Kelly Ford (Responded) – This will be a day event. Having the food trucks triggered the special event permit requirement. Want to work other institutions in the park.

Allison Soares – How does this benefit the park financially?

Jackie Higgins (Responded) – Working with Jon and the team about Plaza de Panama improvements. Southwest has committed to a multi-year grant.

Allison Soares – Are there going to be logos in the area?

Jackie Higgins (Responded) – Southwest has agreed to the grant without having logos on anything.

Michael Singleton – What is this all about? Good to hear about a financial benefit. Didn't really see anything about celebrating the Country's 250 or the park's history. Why do it if it doesn't relate to history or the park? Seems boring.

Jackie Higgins (Responded) – Appreciate the comments. This is just the start. Looking forward to making it more historic and working with the institutions.

Kathy Vandenneuvel – Noticed you were planning on having a DJ. Was there consideration for live music? Having different American music over time?

Kelly Ford (Responded) – Agree with that. This was the first draft of this event.

Makeda Cheatom – If you need with culture the World Beat Center will help.

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

A motion was made by Mr. Blackson and seconded by Mr. Baron to approve the America 250 event per the staff recommendation. The motion carried unanimously (7-0-0).

13. WORKSHOP ITEMS

Item 3: Balboa Park Master Plan

Presenter: Howard Blackson

Public Comment:

Michael Warburton – Keep seeing the same faces around the same table. Need to not be a top-down approach. Needs to include people from the community.

Committee Comment:

Howard Blackson – Not intended to be a top-down approach. Meant to help inform what we do here. BPC is a formal body. If we can get this info to the public that is the point.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Part of the concern is not meant to be directed at the Burnham Center but at the City. Want to talk to City officials but feel like they have moved away from that. Concerned about commercialization of open space and parks.

14. ADJOURNMENT – 5:47 pm

Notice of Next Balboa Park Meeting:

September 3, 2026
4:00 P.M.
In-Person

Respectfully submitted,

Tyler Canales
District Manager