

MINUTES

**City of San Diego Park and Recreation Board
BALBOA PARK COMMITTEE
September 3, 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

David Baron
Howard Blackson
Mandy Brown
Makeda Cheatom
Matt Jawlik
Patty Riddle
Michael Robinson
Michael Singleton
Kathy Vandenheuvel

Members Absent

Jake Banfield-Weir
Chris Eddy

Staff Present

Jon Richards
Tyler Canales
Anthony Harrington

1. CALL TO ORDER

David Baron called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Tyler Canales called roll.

3. APPROVE MINUTES FROM July 9, 2026, MEETING

MOTION: MOVED/SECONDED Mrs. Riddle/Mr. Blackson

A motion was made by Mrs. Riddle and seconded by Mr. Blackson to approve the July 9, 2026, meeting minutes. The motion carried (8-0-1. M. Brown abstained).

4. NON- AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

Web Form:

Michael Warburton - Hello committee! I will be arriving late to the meeting today but wanted to still file a report on behalf of the Electric Building Tenant Committee, also known as the Casa de Balboa organizations. I am happy to share that we recently had a visit from the city plumbing staff to investigate the roof drain leak and how water enters the building when it rains, specifically in the upstairs bathroom area for MOPA and the exhibit space in the basement at the Model RR Museum. With now a 90 percent chance of a "super" El Nino coming, it is important to resolve the leaking now. We'll see how the repairs progress. The Model RR Museum is still waiting for approval from the city to resolve sewage backup potential; as mentioned previously, we have a drain in our exhibit area that has backed up several times over the years, with a large backup in 2025 causing closure and damage with excessive costs. We want to

pay to fix this...we just need approval from the city. For the Balboa Art Conservation Center, the on-again HVAC was off again since the last committee meeting. I did not receive a follow up from BACC in time for this comment as to if the HVAC is working again, and I will report back at the next committee meeting. Finally, a big thank you to the city staff for prioritizing rain and leak-related work in advance of the coming wet weather! It is much appreciated.

In-Person:

Daniele Laman – Safety & Security meeting was in the morning. Balboa Park Rangers lost 3 positions. What is the plan for closing restrooms? 6-month calendar needs updating. HPR Lawn program schedule is online.

Lily Zhou – Looking for a place for a Pandanme zen garden. Looking to work to make it a reality somewhere in the park.

Phi Tran – Hoping to accelerate the process of removing burned tree in Rube Powell Archery Range. Have submitted a Get It Done. Tree is a safety hazard and cannot renovate the target at the location until it gets removed.

Issel Martinez – Want to see the burned tree removed to make it safe.

Jay Shumaker – The new Master Plan has to be a work of art. Professional planning with generic tools doesn't have joy or excite donors. A subcommittee would guide and instruct planners better.

5. **CHAIR'S REPORT**

None

6. **STAFF REPORTS**

Council District 3 – Ryan Darsey - Councilmember Whitburn visited San Diego History Center. Held an urbanist town hall panel for questions about housing and transient issues. Caltrans agreement for abatement and debris removal has been expanded. City has been preparing for El Nino. El Nino impacts could bring heavy rain or flooding. New web page provides resources for storm preparations. Councilmember supported DJ Daniel's Golden Hill performances. Councilmember wants the Committee to look at Summer Moratorium and submit events that should be exempt to his office.

78th District – None

SDPD – None

Mayor's Office – None

San Diego County Supervisor District 4 – Elise Pendoley – San Diego County Board of Supervisors approved a food security component of the Safety Net Bridge Program at June 25th meeting. Will fund several food events across the County. It allocates \$1 million and was a response to cutting of social welfare programs by the Federal government. \$300,000 approved for small businesses across east county.

Jon Richards, Deputy Director, Parks & Recreation – Welcome Matt Jawlik to the Committee. Adopted Budget for FY27 is now online. There are scheduled bathroom closures for Balboa Park in the budget, but they are currently open and will be reevaluated in January 2027. Speed management plan has been adopted

around school zones. Please send our comments regarding it to the contact provided on the handout.
Upcoming events: September 19 – SD Heart & Stroke Walk, September 25-November 1 – Haunted Trail, September 26 – SD Veg Fest. Reminder of Labor Day Closures on 9/7.

7. BALBOA PARK NON-PROFIT PARTNER UPDATES

Forever Balboa Park – Jackie Higgins – Thanks to Parks & Rec for the support of National Carousel Day on July 25th. Sparks Awards will be on September 18th in the Balboa Park Club Ballroom. Have a lot of attendees that will be acknowledged and some activities in the Kate Sessions Cactus Garden. Working on light enhancements for the Plaza De Panama. Working with the nearby stakeholders and City staff on them. The Southwest Airlines grant will go towards them. Resurfacing is desperately needed. Looking at additions of trees, umbrellas, chairs, and security.

Balboa Park Cultural Partnership – Peter Comiskey – Pay close attention to upcoming ballot initiatives. Prop 43 could have impacts on Balboa Park or Arts & Culture. Look through and vote. A new non-profit 501 (c) 4 called A Vibrant San Diego has been established to help with advocacy. They were helpful in the push to get paid parking repealed. They will have their first meeting soon. They will be there to support the Master Plan and needs the community to be involved.

Balboa Park Committee of 100 – Kevin Carpenter – Working on finding a place in the park to name after John Nolan. Will bring that presentation to the Committee soon. This would complete a planning commission action that has been sitting there since 1937. Finished making repairs to the front of the Automotive Museum. Had the pre-construction meeting this morning of the Municipal Gym project. Have a plan and timetable for the project.

Save Starlight – Ashley Gardener – Just concluded the 45th season of Twilight in the Park. 20,000 people attended and raised \$45,000. Next season will be 33 concerts free to the public. Current focus is on Starlight. Have been working to bring it back for 10 years. Did hear from City and submitted 352 documents to the City on August 31st. Still looking for a lease from the City. There's currently a crack in one of the walls and a leak in the ceiling. \$500,000 has been raised and invested in repairs for the venue. Please help bring Starlight back to use for the community. Hoping to get a 3-year lease but are planning to leave on October 1st if we don't hear back from the City.

Village Arts & Education Foundation – Thanks to Parks & Rec for all you do. Summer camps were a success. Fall adult camps will be starting. Updating classroom portal to make it easier to register. Opera was spectacular in July. Have new systems in place to make field trips go smoothly. Expanding outreach with home school group for 6-18 year olds. Sea Lion Society came to bring awareness of marine life. Spanish Village is currently being repainted by volunteers. Have some newly juried artists.

8. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Howard Blackson – All discussion so far has been around governance. Did we ask about helping Starlight?

Jon Richards (Responded) – Parks & Rec is coordinating with Economic Development on lease conversations for Starlight. Financing will be the next part. Want to emphasize all discussions have been about governance and financing. Keep that in mind as discussions about the master plan move forward.

Matt Jawlik – CFO at the Nat. Roof replacement was just completed. Project was \$8-9 million and was funded through donations and State funding. Looking forward to working with the Committee.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Looking forward to how adjacent communities to the park will be engaged during the master plan process.

Makeda Cheatom – Been in the park for 35 years. Looking forward to seeing the master plan. Have been working on it since 1989. Looking forward to seeing good things happen.

Many Brown – Just joined the La Jolla Playhouse Leadership Council. Happy to collaborate with anyone. Reach out if interested in advocacy.

Patty Riddle – Art Bus Express provides transportation for schools in low-income areas to go to art events. Glad City is warning about upcoming El Nino. What has been done to ensure the Alpha Project Shelter will not be damaged during the storms again?

Jon Richards (Responded) – City is meeting monthly about El Nino. Cannot ensure that BPAC and Muni will not be used as emergency shelters. City is looking for alternative shelter options. City is working on a structure to hand out sandbags, but locations have not been identified yet.

Mike Singleton – Have been working with Banker's Hill Planning Group, HOAs and 6th Avenue residents to get a 5mph reduction on 6th Avenue. Cars are going into the parking lane to pass. Like to see if that can come before the Committee. Speed reduction is important. Asked that Juniper roundabout be on the agenda as well.

9. REQUEST FOR ITEMS TO BE PLACED ON CONSENT AGENDA

None

10. CONSENT AGENDA

Item 2: Skechers Hot Chocolate Run

Presenter: Carter Robins, Ventures Endurance, Event Operations Manager

Item 3: Village Arts & Education Foundation – New Artist Approval

Presenter: Natasha Papousek, VAEF, Corresponding Secretary

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

A motion was made by Mr. Blackson and seconded by Mr. Singleton move Item 2 and 3 to consent and approve by consent. The motion carried unanimously (9-0-0).

11. INFORMATION ITEMS

None

12. ACTION ITEMS

Item 1: Professional Tree Care Association – Memorial Bench Proposal ♦ Presenters: Chuck Morgan, Professional Tree Care Association, Board Chair

Public Comment:

None

Committee Comment:

Michael Singleton – Seems like an appropriate location. Would be interesting to see the type of tree and where it came from on the plaque.

Howard Blackson – Have you spoken on to Forever Balboa Park about this.

Chuck Morgan (Responded) – No.

Michael Robinson – Are there any permits required for this?

Jon Richards (Responded) – An ROE will be required. Once we have plans we will look at the weight and find an appropriate location.

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

A motion was made by Ms. Vandenheuvel and seconded by Mr. Baron to approve the Professional Tree Care Association memorial bench per the staff recommendation. The motion carried unanimously (9-0-0).

13. WORKSHOP ITEMS

Item 4: Balboa Park Master Plan

Presenter: Heidi Vonblum, City of San Diego Planning Department, Planning Director; Kelly Stanco, City of San Diego Planning Department, Deputy Director

Public Comment:

Michael Steptner – Great timing for the master plan. Will be 100-year anniversary of John Nolan's plan. Robust community participation is what is needed to build support and advocacy. Need to have working sessions. Should not start from scratch. 1989 master plan is a good starting point. Everyone should be a part of the discussion.

Daniele Laman – It's currently listed as "park" master plan and should be "parks" master plan. What does WRT stand for? Access, safety and facilities should be considered. Deficiency percentage of nearby planning groups. What are plans for near HPR cottages?

Peter Comiskey – Balboa Park Cultural Partnership enthusiastically supports the launch of Balboa Park's master plan update. Urge the City to integrate following core points into the planning scope: Inclusion of the Cultural District; Balboa Park as an educational campus; Proactive and inclusive community engagement; Intentional integration of the San Diego Zoo in the park ecosystem; Deferred maintenance as a rapidly growing problem that should not be resolved on the backs of the cultural organizations; Defining success & post-adoption accountability.

Jackie Higgins – Thanks to the team for all their effort and time. Balboa Park is a community and regional park. Need to also reiterate it is a national and international destination as well. Make sure team is looking at park as an urban core and its importance to the community. A dedicated funding stream is needed. Investment needs to be more specific.

Committee Comment:

Michael Robinson – Wonderful presentation. Access and safety are very important. How does the group plan to advertise to disenfranchised individuals?

Heidi Vonblum (Responded) – We have a public engagement guide. We will look at different techniques and organizations on best way to message.

Howard Blackson – Thanks for being here. Where did the principles come from?

Heidi Vonblum (Responded) – Those were put together by staff.

Howard Blackson – First goal should be a world class visitor experience. Social and cultural values bring economic value. Appreciate being heard last time. Did things a bit out of order. Was a good recommendation and implementation policies. Is project fully funded by the Caltrans grant?

Heidi Vonblum (Responded) – Currently funded by 3 different grants. Will work to identify additional funding.

Howard Blackson – Land uses provided economic viability. Where do regulations come from for providing land uses economic standards? From the precise plan update?

Heidi Vonblum (Responded) – Intend to address the precise plan and development regulations could come in a variety of forms. Open to feedback.

Howard Blackson – Let governance and finance rise through this process. Will help create economic viability.

David Baron – Who is WRT?

Heidi Vonblum (Responded) – Wallace, Robert, Todd Landscape Architect Firm.

David Baron – How will deferred maintenance be a part of the process?

Heidi Vonblum (Responded) – Goal is to have a financially viable plan to not have deferred maintenance in the future.

Matt Jawlik – A lot of what is in 1989 master plan is still relevant today. Ferr & Pehrs analyzed 2 days of parking and that was used to implement paid parking which was bad.

Heidi Vonblum (Responded) – They are under direct contract and have public engagement. They are transportation consultants.

Matt Jawlik – Currently have 35 years of deferred maintenance. Has been on the institutions to take care of the buildings. Do hope the solution is not to renew leases with institution and squeeze the non-profits. There is a need for more parking in every version. Should be realistic about how people move around. The 2000 version has a call out to revisit every time there is a loss of public trust. City has taken measures that are counter to that. The new master plan needs to have teeth that can be enforced.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Think Matt's comments were good. Plan mentioned having a trolley here 20 years ago. That could potentially help move away from being car centric. Webpage looks like an engineer did it. Needs to be more visually engaging. Thanks for the presentation. Really want engagement with the community planning groups from the surrounding communities. Access is extremely important for some of those communities. DIF allocation was changed so Golden Hill

DIF could be used in the park. Can those fees back for this? East Mesa Precise Plan has a lot of promises. Prioritize children and families.

Makeda Cheatom – Thanks for the presentation. Agreed with what Mr. Stepner was referring to. 1989 master plan has some valuable things. Hope World Beat is represented in the new master plan. World Beat and Centro Cultural bring a lot of culture and events to park. Important to think of BIPOC community. Think about transportation.

Mandy Brown – The 6 principle mentioned communities. There are communities in the park that are important. Involve the ones who don't have brick and mortar but are still part of the park.

Patty Riddle – Ensure that surveys note that this will apply after paid parking will be removed. When asking for feedback, ask the people who engage with Balboa Park. The supervisors know what is going on and what people's concerns are. People need to understand where park is. People don't know what BPAC is. It's important that it has clean bathrooms.

Michael Singleton – Need to understand what the consultants are going to do. It is an international park, and hope WRT has a large role in it. Can we get a copy of the scope of work for the consultants? Needs assessment usually starts process. To support institutions and communities it needs to be at Balboa Park Committee in front of large public meetings. Advise caution on using a vision statement when things get controversial with lack of trust of the City. Call it a project objective or use a different term. Use goal statements the public came up with. You're asking for priorities in the survey. Define as what your needs are. Would have priorities later in the process. Identifying funding sources is important. Suggest partnerships for governance. Others could be looked at as well. People are willing to give money to park as long as it is not going to the City. West Mesa says it will be in the community plan. Should understand what current use levels are and use heat maps. Should review the status of leases and remaining life of facilities. Old studies should be tested. Summary of different types of costs. Always good to do a summary of assets, opportunities, constraints, and liabilities. Should have a statement that this is not a regulatory document. Have quantifiable assets but they were switched to qualitative metrics. Should come to BPC at least every other month or least provide an update. Approach to what committee is involved is a good use of experience.

Kathy Vandenheuvell – Is there a way to cut other thing off the agenda? Wish we have more time for this.

Howard Blackson – It's currently a workshop item on every agenda.

David Baron – Can we have this as its own meeting?

Jon Richards (Responded) - The Committee can call to have a special meeting.

14. ADJOURNMENT – 6:42 pm

Notice of Next Balboa Park Meeting:

October 1, 2026
4:00 P.M.
In-Person

Respectfully submitted,

Tyler Canales
District Manager