REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
TO THE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: October 15, 2026 REPORT NO.: 201

ATTENTION: Parks and Recreation Board
Agenda of October 15, 2026

SUBJECT: Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft – Parks and Trails

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE BOARD.

BACKGROUND

The Mid-City planning area encompasses approximately 8,052 acres and is centrally located in the San Diego region, northeast of Downtown, south of Mission Valley, and west of the City of La Mesa. Mid-City includes four communities: City Heights, Eastern Area, Kensington-Talmadge and Normal Heights. The northern boundary is defined by Interstate 8 (I-8) and the College Area community; the western boundary by Interstate 805 (I-805), State Route 15 (SR-15), and the communities of North Park and Greater Golden Hill; the eastern boundary by the City of La Mesa; and the southern boundary by State Route 94 (SR-94) and the communities of Southeastern San Diego and Encanto Neighborhoods, also referred to as Chollas Valley.

As of 2025, Mid-City had approximately 138,000 community members and around 53,500 homes. The draft plan allows additional capacity of up to 32,900 new homes than what is allowed today, accommodating approximately 89,000 additional people over the life of the plan. Parks within the Mid-City Communities Plan area currently provide 6,198.5 recreation value points reflecting refinements to park boundaries and updates to joint-use agreements and overlapping values since the information was last presented to the Parks and Recreation Board. Additional recreational opportunities identified in the Mid-City Communities Plan Update First Draft would increase the projected total to 11,870.75 recreation value points. Staff is seeking feedback from the Parks and Recreation Board on these recreational opportunities and concepts as work continues toward the Second Draft of the Mid-City Communities Plan Update.

DISCUSSION

The Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft, released in August 2026, presents draft goals and policies related to Land Use and Economic Prosperity, Historic Preservation, Sustainability, Equity, Resilience and Conservation, Urban Design, Mobility, Parks and Public

Facilities, and Implementation. The First Draft was informed by extensive public engagement, with more than 3,000 people providing over 9,000 comments through 107 events and two online surveys, as well as analysis of existing conditions. The purpose of the First Draft is to share the draft community plan with the public, facilitate discussion and gather input to inform the development of the Second Draft. The Parks and Public Facilities chapter (Chapter 7) includes draft goals and policies, park opportunity strategies, and planned parks and recreational facilities, including park spaces, open space, trails, joint-use facilities, and other public facilities. These goals and policies are intended to guide future park planning and investment consistent with the City's Parks Master Plan, including its recreational value-based park standard and its 10-20-30-40-minute access goals for equitable access to recreational opportunities.

The Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft applies the Parks Master Plan standard of 100 recreation value points per 1,000 community members, resulting in a need for approximately 22,700 points if the projected population of 227,000 is realized. The draft identifies approximately 11,870.75 existing and planned recreation value points. As discussed in the February 2026 presentation to the Board on the process of planning for parks and recreational opportunities, as future development occurs, additional recreation value points would be generated through development requirements, including onsite recreational improvements, to help meet the standard based on actual growth over the life of the plan. Because the projected population represents a potential future condition, the timing and extent of future development and associated recreational improvements will depend on how growth occurs. Planned parks and facilities include South Chollas Lake Park, Chollas Triangle Neighborhood Park, expansion of Teralta Park through additional freeway lids over SR-15, the Kensington Hillsides Loop Trail, enhancements to existing parks, new aquatic centers and recreation centers, and upgrades to existing recreation facilities. The draft also identifies opportunities to expand recreational access through small and non-traditional spaces, such as excess rights-of-way and smaller undeveloped publicly owned lots, as well as partnership and funding opportunities. A Community Enhancement Overlay Zone would require new development in villages and along commercial corridors to provide publicly accessible spaces and recreational amenities. The draft plan continues to support joint-use agreements with schools and ongoing coordination with the San Diego Unified School District, including a proposed joint-use facility at Carver Elementary. These partnerships would help increase public access to recreational facilities in areas where opportunities for new parks may be limited.

The Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft is accompanied by the Park and Recreation Inventory, which provides both a community-wide recreation summary and a detailed, site-by-site inventory of enhancements to existing parks and new park opportunities. The inventory includes a description of each site, recommendations for potential recreation programs and amenities, and the existing and potential recreation value points for each site. In total, the inventory identifies 89 opportunities to enhance existing parks and open spaces and develop new parks and open spaces, which could provide approximately 5,672.25 additional recreation value points for the Mid-City Communities, with a total of up to 11,870.75 recreation value points.

The goals for parks proposed in the Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft are as follows:

- A connected network of recreational facilities that places parks, trails and enjoyable public spaces within a 10-minute walk/roll or a 20-minute bike ride for all community members.
- Equitable access to parks and recreation for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.
- Recreational opportunities are enhanced by increased availability and variety of public spaces that support play, interaction and socialization.
- Public lands and facilities are optimized to increase recreational access and community benefits.
- Connect parks, trails and natural areas with pedestrian paths, bikeways, and transit access to enhance connectivity and accessibility.
- Inclusive, safe and resilient environments that support and enhance community livability.
- Cultural expressions and social connections in public spaces strengthen community identity.

Key Policies included in the Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft include the following:

- Design public parks for outdoor play, education, physical activity and social interaction centered on children, teens and their caregivers.
- Pursue opportunities to develop mini or pocket parks, plazas, and recreation facilities as part of future developments with visual and physical access from one or more street frontages wherever feasible.
- Integrate trail connections adjacent to development where permitted and expand access through recreational easements and strategic land acquisition.
- Support the development of multi-level recreation centers that maximize limited land availability, expand indoor recreation opportunities, and integrate complementary uses such as community gathering spaces, fitness facilities, and classrooms to serve a range of users and age groups.
- Replace, expand and upgrade public facilities and infrastructure as needed to maintain service levels that address community needs and enhance safety and environmental performance.
- Pursue joint use agreements to allow the use of school facilities during non-school hours for educational, civic, recreational, arts and cultural purposes.
- Preserve sufficient space for educational needs and coordinate long-term funding, maintenance, and operations to ensure the facilities remain safe and clean for students when planning future joint-use facilities. Coordinate with San Diego Unified School District to explore opportunities to reuse or expand community recreational access.

Together these goals and policies support a more connected network of parks, trails, public spaces and public facilities while also addressing environmental stewardship, community health and climate resilience.

<u>Parks Opportunity Highlights:</u>

The Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft identifies opportunities to enhance existing parks with additional recreational amenities and to create new parks, trails and joint-use

facilities where feasible and as funding, partnerships, land availability and future development allow.

Enhancements to Existing Parks

The following parks are existing facilities where additional recreational amenities or improvements could increase recreational opportunities and recreational value points:

- **Colina Del Sol Community Park –** An existing community park adjacent to Fay Elementary School Joint-use Facility, with play areas, a recreation center, an aquatic complex, golf course, ballfields, tennis and basketball courts, multi-purpose turf areas and picnic tables. Potential improvements may include expanding the recreation center to accommodate additional programs and improve access, along with potential new or rebuilt features such as a universally accessible children's play area, an off-leash dog park, picnic shelters, a community garden, disc golf, fitness stations, expanded tennis and/or basketball courts and sports lighting.

- **Azalea Neighborhood Park –** An existing neighborhood park with Azalea Recreation Center, a basketball court, multi-purpose turf areas, children's play areas, walking paths and picnic tables, with the City Heights Canyons Loop Trail running through the park. Future improvements may include a nature exploration playground, recreational features for people with disabilities, a community garden, pickleball and basketball courts, fitness stations, an off-leash dog area, scenic overlooks and wayfinding signage, along with expanding or replacing the recreation center.

- **Dr. Bertha O Pendleton (Clay) Neighborhood Park –** An existing neighborhood park in the Eastern Area, formerly called Clay Park, with a ballfield, two fenced half basketball courts, a play area, seating areas and a multi-purpose turf area. Potential new and upgraded facilities may include sports lighting, expanded play features, a community garden and fitness stations, with a wayfinding signage system to better connect the park with the adjacent Pendleton Elementary School Joint-use facility.

- **Kensington Neighborhood Park –** Located on Adams Avenue, the existing park shares its site with the Kensington-Normal Heights Branch Library, which is recommended for replacement with a new facility in the City's Vision 2040 Public Library Master Plan. Existing amenities include seating and picnic tables, large specimen trees and palms, a play area and a multi-purpose turf area. Future improvements may include a bocce ball court or similar recreational feature, an expanded play area, and a public art or placemaking element, with additional upgrades implemented in coordination with the future library replacement.

- **Wabash Neighborhood Park** – An existing small green space bounded by Wabash Avenue, Lincoln Avenue and University Avenue, with an adjoining bus shelter providing direct transit access. Future improvements may include expanding the park to create additional programming space, with shaded seating, public art and placemaking elements, small sport courts, fitness circuits and wayfinding signage.

Long term, the expanded park is envisioned as a gateway into City Heights and a welcoming public square.

- **Ward Canyon Neighborhood Park –** An existing neighborhood park in Normal Heights featuring an amphitheater, playgrounds, basketball courts, shaded picnic areas, an off-leash dog area with separate sections for large and small dogs, a community garden, multi-purpose lawn areas, a restroom building and abundant tree canopy. The draft recommends incorporating and expanding the park following the approved General Development Plan, with features to activate the park and additional passive and active recreation, including a proposed small recreation center within the western portion of the park.

Potential New Park & Trail Opportunities

The Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft identifies opportunities for new neighborhood parks, pocket parks, joint-use facilities, and trail systems where land availability, partnerships, redevelopment, funding or other implementation opportunities may allow additional recreation spaces. These opportunities could also improve connections between neighborhoods, existing parks, and canyon open space areas while expanding opportunities for walking, hiking, and nature-based recreation. Selected highlights include:

- **Teralta Neighborhood Park Expansion -** Proposed additional freeway lid parks north of Teralta Neighborhood Park between Orange Avenue and Monroe Avenue, and south between Polk Avenue and Landis Street, to promote active and flexible recreational uses, community gathering and child-friendly programs. Envisioned as a series of greenway parks with play areas, multi-purpose lawns, splash pads, shaded plazas, basketball courts with lighting, community gardens and restrooms. The opportunities could be pursued over the 30-year plan through grants, developer contributions and other capital improvement funding.

- **South Chollas Lake Park** - This existing park space south of College Grove Drive is an inactive landfill, occupied by the Chollas Lake Little League ballfields and the Chollas RC Flyers runway. It is envisioned as a major park and regional recreational destination, with future improvements that may include an aquatic complex, lighted active recreation fields and courts, trails along the southern edge of the park, playground and nature play, dog parks, native planting restoration areas and flexible community gathering spaces, serving as a civic hub with the proposed recreation center and new Oak Park Branch Library.

- **Manzanita Place** - A proposed neighborhood plaza formalizing the existing Manzanita Gathering Place along 43rd Street into a lively, destination-oriented park space, at the convergence of Clark Middle School, the Ocean Discovery Institute and the Joyner Elementary School Joint-use Facility. The site anchors the trailhead for Manzanita Canyon Open Space and the City Heights Canyons Loop Trail, with

facilities such as shade pavilions with seating, wayfinding and interpretive elements, overlooks, walking paths, native planting restoration and enhanced tree canopy.

- **Fairmount Avenue Pocket Park** - A proposed pocket park on City-owned land along Fairmount Avenue overlooking Swan Canyon, with facilities such as a children's play area, fitness circuits, a shaded pavilion with seating, and public art and placemaking elements.

- **Postal Pocket Park** - The post office site along Adams Avenue has strong potential to become a neighborhood recreation destination along this commercial and transit corridor if Postal Services cease at this site, serving families and children in the surrounding community. Facilities may include sports courts, fitness circuits, a shaded pavilion with seating, restrooms, wayfinding signage and interpretive elements celebrating the site's postal history.

- **Auburn Pocket Park and 50th Street Place** - Auburn Pocket Park is a proposed redevelopment of an underutilized recreation easement pocket park in City Heights, with playgrounds, open lawn areas, shaded seating and interpretive and cultural elements. 50th Street Place would transform excess right-of-way and parking space along University Avenue into a community gathering space reflecting the diverse immigrant communities of City Heights, including the neighborhood's Somali population. Together the two sites offer potential linkage south to Wightman Street Neighborhood Park, contributing to a series of community spaces along the University Avenue corridor.

- **Eugene Place Neighborhood Park -** A proposed neighborhood park on open space parcels at the Eugene Place cul-de-sac, could provide nature-based recreation with canyon views overlooking SR-15. Facilities would include nature exploration, playgrounds, fitness circuits, shaded seating, wayfinding signage and interpretive elements, with native and pollinator vegetation and tree canopy planted to contribute to urban forestry goals and restore native planting to enhance the site's ecological value.

- **Kensington Hillsides Open Space Loop Trail** - A proposed four-mile loop trail system following the natural contours of the Kensington Hillsides Open Space, providing a significant recreational trail asset for the Kensington community, with a trailhead, seating areas, interpretive and educational signage, scenic overlooks and wayfinding throughout. A proposed open space addition north of Aldine Drive would serve as a trailhead, with a recreation easement needed prior to site development.

- **60th Street Mini Park and Carver Elementary School Joint-Use -** A proposed mini park on City-owned land at the northeast corner of North Chollas Community Park, with a children's play area, fitness circuit, multi-purpose lawn, shaded seating and wayfinding and educational elements. The park would provide access to the adjacent Carver Elementary Joint-use Facility, proposed pursuant to a long-term joint-use

agreement, with a multi-purpose turf field, hard courts and play areas, and connect to North Chollas Community Park.

- **Thorn Street Places** - A series of proposed pocket parks at dead-end streets, including Thorn Street Place, Redwood Street Place, Glade Street Place and Hasty Street Place, each providing a small neighborhood gathering space with shaded seating, an open lawn and wayfinding signage. Together they form a connected recreational corridor along 60th Street and Thorn Street, with programming kept to a minimum to maintain fire access clearances.

Community Engagement

Since the launch of the Mid-City Communities Plan Update in Winter 2024, the process has engaged more than 3,500 people, who have provided over 10,000 comments through 117 events and two online surveys. These activities include 8 Working Group sessions, 11 workshops, 11 community interviews, 19 pop-up events, 5 community forums and 27 youth engagement sessions. In addition, staff hosted 15 open-office sessions or focus groups and attended 21 planning group meetings to provide opportunities for community members to ask questions and provide feedback. More than 300 postcards were also received from community members regarding feedback on the draft land use. Engagement is ongoing, and these numbers are true as of October 2, 2026.

As part of this ongoing engagement, City staff presented the First Draft in September 2026 at a Working Group meeting held in City Heights.

Community Input

The City Planning Department has received more than 1,000 comments on the Mid-City Communities Plan First Draft to date. These comments will inform the refinement of identified park opportunities and policies as the City works towards the Second Draft of the Mid-City Communities Plan.

Community members expressed strong support for ensuring that all community members have access to a park within walking distance. Feedback on proposed aquatic centers at Sunshine Berardini Field and South Chollas Landfill was mixed, with concerns about location, site constraints, and the feasibility of the South Chollas Recreation Center. Some community members suggested considering Azalea Park or North Chollas Community Park as alternative locations. While there was broad support for additional parks, community members raised concerns about maintenance capacity, infrastructure limitations, and public safety issues.

Community members expressed mixed support for the flexibility of joint-use parks and raised concerns related to public health and safety and frequent closures. The City continues to evaluate the feasibility of potential joint use sites in coordination with the San Diego Unified School District.

Community members also provided feedback on the presentation of recreation value points in the First Draft, including a request to provide recreation value points by community plan area in addition to the combined Mid-City total. Staff acknowledges this feedback and will consider incorporating a community-specific presentation of recreation value points in the Second Draft.

The City continues to evaluate opportunities for parks, recreation centers, aquatic complexes, trails, public facilities, and habitat restorations to develop more refined concepts for inclusion in the Second Draft.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Mid-City Communities Plan Update process is now in the third phase of community engagement, focusing on collecting feedback on the First Draft. Feedback received through this phase will be reviewed and considered to inform the Second Draft of the Mid-City Communities Plan Update, anticipated to be released in early 2027.

While the public comment period closed on October 2, additional focus groups will be held throughout October, and formal feedback from community planning groups and public agencies will be received by the end of October, including any feedback from the Park and Recreation Board. A third Planning Commission workshop is scheduled to be held on November 19th to present the First Draft as an informational item. The next Working Group meeting will be scheduled following the release of the Second Draft is released.

Staff will continue to conduct public engagement with the Working Group, Community Planning Groups, and community members as the Second Draft is developed. The City welcomes and values ongoing feedback from the Parks and Recreation Board and the broader community. Staff anticipates returning to the Park & Recreation Board in the coming months to present revisions to the Parks and Public Facilities chapter included in the Second Draft of the Mid-City Communities Plan Update for the Board's consideration and recommendation.

All Mid-City Communities Plan Update documents are available on the project website: www.planmidcity.org.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachments (Attachment & link):

A. Attachment: First Draft of the Parks and Public Facilities Chapter of the Mid-City Communities Plan Update
B. Link: Park and Recreation Inventory