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Mayor Gloria Launches ‘Build Better SD’ to Improve Neighborhoods Faster

NEW INITIATIVE WILL CREATE CITYWIDE FUND FOR BETTER, MORE EQUITABLE INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY

SAN DIEGO – Fulfilling a promise he made during his 2022 State of the City address to deliver infrastructure improvements faster and more equitably across San Diego, Mayor Todd Gloria today announced his new [Build Better SD](#) initiative, which will do away with old, inequitable planning policies that restrict incoming public infrastructure fees to a single community and instead create a more efficient and sensible citywide funding program.

“Because of our outdated method of funding infrastructure projects, some of our communities are being left behind,” Mayor Todd Gloria said. “Build Better SD will break down barriers to get more things done in our communities by allowing us to prioritize investments in areas where the needs are greatest. At the same time, it will help us achieve our bold climate goals, create more equity across our city and spur economic activity in the communities that need it most.”

The launch event was held in Paradise Hills, an older community that has had difficulty funding needed infrastructure projects due to the current, outdated funding method.

“In order to achieve equity, we must focus on changing our systems from the inside out,” said Council President pro Tem Monica Montgomery Steppe, whose district includes Paradise Hills. “This includes having difficult conversations and removing thoughts of stigma toward our historically under-resourced communities. I look forward to the forthcoming infrastructure planning changes and to reclaiming our community’s narrative to drive toward future investment.”

“Neighborhoods like Paradise Hills in District 4 and Linda Vista in District 7 have been in need of new infrastructure for decades,” added City Councilmember Raul Campillo. “Now, as we build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, I applaud Mayor Gloria for righting the ship on these

historic inequities and prioritizing repairs so that economic progress will reach neighborhoods that need it most. Mayor Gloria is immediately making good on the promises made in his State of the City Address.”

Right now, when private projects are built, the development impact fees (DIFs) property developers pay toward new infrastructure improvements, such as libraries, streets and other public spaces, vary widely across communities based on often decades-old planning documents. Collected fees go into 43 separate neighborhood funds and these funds cannot be shared across neighborhood lines. Many of these individual pots of money are insufficient to finance planned improvement projects, resulting in a current combined \$222 million in unspent funds.

Build Better SD fixes this by putting all future DIFs collected into citywide funds by asset type, which would reduce the buckets of money from 43 to less than a handful. Infrastructure needs would be examined across San Diego and funding would be directed to high-priority projects. Previously collected fees would remain restricted to the neighborhood in which they were collected but could be topped up by new citywide fee collections to implement projects faster in every part of the city. This funding structure has already been applied to parks through the Mayor’s [Parks for All of Us](#) initiative, which was approved by the City Council in August 2021.

“The developer impact fee program is broken and has been for a long time,” said Councilmember Joe LaCava. “As it stands, the program cannot deliver the needed infrastructure and facilities that community plans promised. Our older communities need a new approach. Mayor Gloria has the courage to acknowledge this and offer solutions. I support Build Better SD.”

“For far too long, our historically underserved communities have watched their sidewalks, public streets, libraries and other facilities languish due to inequitable and inefficient funding policies,” said interim Planning Director Heidi Vonblum. “Infrastructure serves our entire City. It does not respect community boundaries, and our infrastructure funds should be available to align with this reality. In addition to prioritizing investments in areas with the greatest needs, we can also deliver much-needed public infrastructure projects to our entire City more quickly.”

To ensure Build Better SD is implemented appropriately, the City’s General Plan would be updated with new policies that prioritize investments in areas with the greatest needs and create opportunities to gather community input. Then, the Municipal Code would be amended to reflect these new policies. Further, the City would work with the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to improve the Regional Transportation Congestion Improvement Program to align with the City’s vision to create neighborhoods where residents can walk, bike or use public transit.

Planning Department staff is asking residents for their input on shaping these policies. On March 10, staff plan to hold a virtual public forum to provide more information on the initiative as well as receive feedback, and residents can also give their input through an online survey in English or Spanish. Information on both can be found on the [Build Better SD webpage](#).

The initiative is expected to go to City Council for consideration this spring.

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