

To: THE COMMITTEE ON CHARTER REVIEW OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO, JUNE 11, 2015 at 6:00 P.M.

RE: ITEM-3: § 55 Educational use of park land. 1. Consideration of a recommendation to allow educational organizations to lease/build facilities on public park land, specifically, Balboa Park. (Click here to read New Museum School's January 26, 2015 letter.)

2. Consideration of a recommendation to prohibit educational organizations from leasing/building facilities on public park land, specifically, Balboa Park. (Click here to read The Protect Our Communities Foundation's February 20, 2015 letter and Balboa Park Heritage Association's May 28, 2015 email.)

Dear Committee,

I've reviewed the letters sent to you by -1) The director of the New Museum School, -2) The Protect our communities foundation and also the letter from -3) David Lundin president of Balboa Park Heritage Association.

I am unable to attend your session in person due to a previous engagement but I want to tell you what's on my mind pertaining to revision of the City Charter to permit other uses, in this case a educational use request.

What is at issue here is the consideration of changes to the Charter for expansion, revision and repurposing of Balboa Park Land and possibly other city parks.

Mr. Beaumont director of the museum school addressed the Committee and says he'd like to discuss how the Charter Review Committee might, with one small change to our City's governing document, expand access for education in Balboa Park.

He then goes on to describe the Charter school's values and to idealize what in his opinion would be a more diverse and expanded use of Balboa Park to lease land to the school for his school's educational purposes. He states it could also be used for the public's educational needs on weekends and at night after school. I noticed the school runs an after school program so I'm not sure what time or when the after school period would commence for other organizations or groups use?

Mr Beaumont goes on to explain that "We have the very real possibility of some significant funding available to make this occur within the next year or two." He states, As part of our exploration, we have considered the possibility of actually locating within the park itself. Currently, the city's charter limits Balboa Park to 'park, recreation or cemetery purposes'. I believe that our park can, and does, offer much more than that. Museums already have educational components built in to them, camps and classes are offered throughout the park. With the current review of the city charter, there is a possibility for a small change that could open up a big idea.

I have no doubt that Mr Beaumont has the children of the New Museum school's best interest at heart and is dedicated to advancing their education and their cultural exposure. What I do take issue to however is his proposition to alter the use of Balboa Park to benefit his school.

Additionally he mentions that the school may receive a large amount of special funding that could provide ways to help cure the lack of spending and the maintenance of structures that are sorely needed in Balboa Park, which he points out is a challenge to the city.

What I also want to point out though is that making a change to the city's charter would be the beginning of an increasing demand from various groups both altruistic and otherwise and would be opening up a Pandora's box. There likely would be a non stop clamor for repurposing parks for this, that and other special uses. I strongly urge the committee to veto a change to the City Charter.

First of all there is the problem of why the Museum school should be gifted with a portion of the park when various other groups could also argue that their organizations have equal if not more need or right to that gift or privilege?

For example: A senior citizen committee or organization could claim that their group would benefit from the fresh air and also the cultural opportunities for them to ally themselves with the museums and other resources. They might say for example that an Alzheimer's or Dementia program would be compatible for their purpose and ask the council for a right to lease part of the park for creating or utilizing existing park structure.

Another scenario could be children's organization using the park land and buildings or creating new structure for children with Autism or Down's Syndrome who could also benefit by utilizing the park's resources. There might be a request for a school that focuses on horticulture or a school for troubled teens who need to be exposed to culture. There could be churches, citizen groups, benevolent societies, etc.

The list could go on ad-infinitum. The point is that the charter already allows for the parks to serve as "parks" for public and recreation and they indeed do offer many rich resources to the public for culture and recreation so they needn't be sold off for one particular school or organization for their special agenda.

I'd think the school needs to seek other premises for its expansion and let the students enjoy the park as other citizens and schools do. If the school wants to have certain visits, trips and interaction with the park great, but should it be allowed to actually monopolize a section of the park for itself? I think not.

Thank you for your consideration in reading my letter and considering its merits.

Respectfully Yours,  
Meryl Burke