



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: March 26, 2009

TO: Balboa Park Committee Members

FROM: Susan Lowery – Mendoza, District Manager

SUBJECT: House of Hungary Sándor Márai Memorial

SUMMARY

Issue Should the Balboa Park Committee approve the proposed placement of a Sándor Márai Memorial, adjacent to the House of Hungary in Balboa Park?

Staff Recommendation – Do not approve the House of Hungary proposal to place the Sándor Márai memorial adjacent to the House of Hungary as it is not consistent with Park and Recreation Board Policy No. 1002 or Council Policy 100-02. However placement of the memorial within the House of Hungary is at their discretion.

Fiscal Impact – The House of Hungary has funded the cost of the monument.

Environmental – This activity is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 (b), Minor Alteration to Land.

BACKGROUND

The House of Hungary is a member of the House of Pacific Relations in Balboa Park. On January 5, 2009 staff received written correspondence dated December 30, 2008 from Mr. Gidofalvi, President of the House of Hungary, stating that funds had been raised for the Sándor Márai memorial. He requested a permit to place a bronze plaque (16" x 24") mounted on a rock, in a planter area in front of the House of Hungary. Invitations had been sent for a dedication ceremony planned for February 22, 2009 to mark the twentieth anniversary of Mr. Márai passing.

Prior to meeting with Mr. Gidofalvi, a February 14, 2003 letter sent to him which outlined the review process for memorial plaques in parks, a copy of Park and Recreation Board Policy No. 1002, Gifts of Architectural Features, Works of Art and Commemorative Plaques for Public Parks or Other City Owned Land and Council Policy 100-02, City Receipt of Donations was in the House of Hungary file.

On February 2, 2009 staff met with Mr. Gidofalvi and subsequently exchanged email correspondence. He recalled the February 2003 correspondence and was again informed of the review process and the pertinent policies. The February 22, 2009 ceremony took place with the stipulation that the rock and plaque be removed the following day and that the review process would occur. The House of Hungary complied with the request to remove the memorial.

Members of the House of Hungary wished to honor the memory of Sándor Márai. According to some, Sándor Márai was one of the most influential Hungarian writers of the twentieth century. His work consisted of poems, novels and diaries. Born in Kassa, in 1900, he lived in different European countries, immigrated to the United States in 1951, moved to San Diego in 1980, and resided in an apartment on Sixth Avenue until his death on February 21, 1989. It has been said that he had a fondness for Balboa Park and often spent his time around the Houses of Pacific Relations.

DISCUSSION

Park and Recreation Board Policy 1002 addresses “Gifts of Architectural Features, Works of Art and Commemorative Plaques for Public Parks or Other City Owned Land.” The proposed memorial to Sándor Márai does not meet the requirements of the Policy.

According to Policy: 8, The Park and Recreation Board shall evaluate each individual memorial on nine specific points. The following are ways in which the proposed memorial does not meet these criteria:

- Does it add to the attractiveness and or usefulness of the park?

While the memorial is attractive it does not add to the usefulness of the park.

- Does it commemorate an individual group or event of general interest to citizens and tourists?

Sándor Márai is of interest to the Hungarian community and to those who have read his literature.

- Is the individual, group, or event worthy of commemoration to future citizens?

While some of Sándor Márai’s work was translated to English in the mid 1990’s, it is unknown how popular his literature will become in the future.

- Does a proposal for a tribute to a living person meet all criteria, and will “time” substantiate the memorial?

This criterion does not apply.

- If the “feature” provides a service, are City funds needed for installation, and are they available?

This criterion does not apply.

- Will proper maintenance be feasible?

The maintenance of the proposed memorial would be minimal.

- Will the feature withstand vandalism and can its design be altered either to deter vandalism or make the cleanup of vandalism easier?

The simple design of the proposed memorial has been cast. It should be easily cleaned or repaired if vandalism should occur.

- To what extent has the person, group, or event been commemorated in other locations in the metropolitan area?
- No other memorials are within the metropolitan area commemorating Sándor Márai.
- Does the location proposed add significance to the memorial?

The Hungarian community is proud of the work done by Sándor Márai, however, the only connection to Balboa Park is that he lived nearby and frequented the Park.

Council Policy 100-02, City Receipt of Donations, 5.a., states that donations of works of art shall consult with the Commission for Arts and Culture regarding the procedure for its review and acceptance by the City. This review did not take place.

The proposed Sándor Márai memorial is not consistent with Park and Recreation Board Policy 1002 or Council Policy 100-02.

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ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the proposed Sándor Márai memorial, adjacent to the House of Hungary in Balboa Park.
2. Approve the proposed Sándor Márai memorial adjacent to the House of Hungary in Balboa Park with modifications.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowery-Mendoza,
District Manager

Attachments: 1. February 14, 2003 Correspondence to Mr. Gidofalvi
2. City Council Policy 100-02
3. Park and Recreation Board Policy No. 1002
4. Photo of proposed Sándor Márai Memorial