

BALBOA PARK

Sanders, Atkins back park-needs report

By Jeanette Steele
STAFF WRITER

Mayor Jerry Sanders and Councilwoman Toni Atkins endorsed a report yesterday that suggests a new management structure is needed to save Balboa Park because of years of neglect.

"In the past, the city has done a poor job of making deferred maintenance in this park a priority," Sanders said at a news conference in front of the park's iconic Botanical Building and Lily Pond.

The mayor said he wants to start a "thorough, formal public process" to examine what the city's next step should be.

The 187-page report, commissioned by three San Diego charitable groups, suggests three models that the city might adopt: a joint-powers authority with San Diego County and other cities, a new park district fueled by additional property taxes, or a nonprofit conservancy similar to the one that operates New York City's Central Park.

Atkins, whose district includes the park, said the report is "exactly what we need to bring Balboa Park's issues to the forefront of the city agenda."

The Balboa Park Committee is now in charge of handling the public debate.

The volunteer advisory committee, whose members are appointed by the mayor, is expected to hold a series of public meetings. Not all dates are set, but one meeting is scheduled for March 8.

Sanders said he expects a recommendation from the group by the fall. At that point, it will be up to the mayor and the City Council to act.

Sanders and Atkins said the political will exists to take a major step.

"I think all of us realize (that) if we want this treasure to be here for the next 100 years, we're going to have to do something different," the

mayor said.

Atkins said the council will respond to what the people say. "There will be the leadership to do what the public expects us to do; I don't doubt that," she said.

The report was written by the Trust for Public Land in Washington, D.C., and the University of Southern California's Keston Institute. Its cost, about \$100,000, was paid by the Legler Benbough Foundation, the Parker Foundation and the San Diego Foundation.

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