

St. Louis park a model for Balboa?

Jeanette Steele ([Contact](#))

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

11:20 a.m. December 18, 2008

Related stories, reports

Previous coverage:

- [Balboa Park needs new focus, study says](#) (Jan. 2008)
- [Should Balboa Park be run by nonprofit?](#) (Nov. 2006)



Studies, reports:

- [The Future of Balboa Park Funding, Management and Governance: A report from the Balboa Park Committee Submitted to the Mayor and City Council of San Diego](#) (Dec. 2008)
- [The Soul of San Diego: Keeping Balboa Park Magnificent In its Second Century](#) (Jan. 2008)
- [Balboa Park Cultural Partnership report: Helping to build the framework for the successful governance of Balboa Park](#) (Oct. 2008)

SAN DIEGO — New York City? More like St. Louis, Mo.

That's where a citizen-led committee thinks San Diego should look for a model for how to run Balboa Park, the city's much-loved but well-worn urban oasis.

A new report by the Balboa Park Committee recommends that San Diego form a private entity to help with the 1,200-acre park. The nonprofit group's job would be to attract new donations and take on tasks that the city's parks department doesn't already do – coordinate volunteers, for example, or manage the parking crunch.

"Forest Park in St. Louis is the model," said Vicki Granowitz, chairwoman of the committee, which has studied the issue for nine months at Mayor Jerry Sanders' request. Other examples looked at where New York City's Central Park Conservancy and, more locally, the San Diego River Park Foundation.

"They, like us, don't have seven blocks of multimillionaires who can fund their conservancy. They are a middle-class community like San Diego is, and they have a mix of different kinds of institutions," Granowitz said.

"The other thing (about St. Louis) is the way in which the division of labor has worked out. Park and Rec keeps the things that Park and Rec is really good at, like taking care of landscaping lawns – not managing construction projects."

This idea, which has been kicked around for a few years, already has some critics who fear the park will slip out of the public's control.

"The question is, who is this to benefit? If it is for San Diegans by San Diegans, I'm for it. If it's to create a tourist Disneyland or a valet-service park for the (museums and other cultural) institutions, I'm against it," said City Heights attorney John Stump, a frequent critic of the city on parks policy.

Granowitz said her committee is not suggesting that the city hand over the keys. The report recommends that city government keep ultimate authority of the park, including policy and land-use decisions.

"This is not privatization. This isn't about outsourcing," said Granowitz, a North Park resident and longtime volunteer on community boards.

The report will be discussed Thursday night at the committee's 5:30 p.m. meeting, held at the park's War Memorial Building at Park Boulevard and Zoo Drive.

The gears started working toward this meeting in January. That's when a privately funded report concluded that the park was crumbling after years of getting short-shrift in the city's budget. It listed \$238 million in fix-it projects, big and small, that mostly have no funding.

Sanders asked the Balboa Park Committee, an all-volunteer group that includes park leaders and community members, to examine the situation. This summer, the group brought in officials from St. Louis to discuss how the city and its private foundation, Forest Park Forever, work together.

The committee's report will go to the San Diego Park and Recreation Board in January and eventually to the City Council for possible action.

Jeanette Steele: (619) 293-1030; jen.steele@uniontrib.com