



# REPORT

## THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

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DATE ISSUED: June 10, 2009

REPORT NO: 102

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board  
Agenda of June 18, 2009

SUBJECT: House of Charm General Development Plan

### SUMMARY

Issue - Should the Park and Recreation Board recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan (GDP) for the House of Charm as proposed by the Mingei International Museum?

Director's Recommendation - Recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan for the House of Charm as proposed by the Mingei International Museum.

Other Recommendations – The recommendations of the Historical Resources Board's Design Assistance Subcommittee, the Balboa Park Committee and the Design Review Committee will be addressed under the Discussion section of this report.

Fiscal Impact - Funding for design and construction of the new improvements will be provided by The Mingei International Museum. Additional maintenance generated by the improvements will be provided by The Mingei International Museum. Maintenance performed by the Park and Recreation Department will remain at its current level.

Environmental - This activity is categorically exempt under CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15331, Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation (LDR Project No. 178172). This project is consistent with the Central Mesa Precise Plan, which has an associated Supplemental Environmental Impact Report dated July 28, 1992, and certified by City Council on October 20, 1992 (R-280919). That document is supplemental to the Environmental Impact Report prepared for the Balboa Park Master Plan, dated November 6, 1986, and certified by City Council on July 25, 1989 (R-274089).

## BACKGROUND

The Balboa Park Master Plan, adopted by City Council on July 25, 1989, guides overall development of Balboa Park. That document also recommends preparation of Precise Plans for areas of Balboa Park that require a greater level of detail. To that end, the Central Mesa Precise Plan was prepared, and subsequently adopted by City Council on October 20, 1992.

The Central Mesa Precise Plan is divided into sections that address the various geographic regions of the Central Mesa. These areas include the West Prado, East Prado, North Prado, War Memorial & Zoo Parking Lot, Pepper Grove, and Palisades. The House of Charm is located in the West Prado area of Balboa Park.

The House of Charm was originally constructed for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, then named the Indian Arts Building. As with most of the buildings in Balboa Park, it was intended to be a temporary structure. The building was retained after the close of the 1915 Exposition, and renovated several times between the 1915 Exposition and the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition. The building was renamed as the House of Charm for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition. For additional information on the history of the building, please visit <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/bpbbuildings/charm.htm>. Over the decades the House of Charm fell further into disrepair. Consistent with the Central Mesa Precise Plan, the building was completely reconstructed in 1996.

The House of Charm sits on the southwest quadrant of the Plaza de Panama. The Plaza de Panama was a central gathering space for both the 1915 Exposition and the 1935 Exposition. The Plaza was a large open space in 1915, and had a large arch and reflecting pool in 1935. Since that time the turf around the perimeter of the Plaza has been largely replaced with hardscape, and the center has been converted to asphalt paving and used for parking.

Page 147 of the Central Mesa Precise Plan provides an overall description of improvements in the West Prado area of the Park. Page 215 of the Central Mesa Precise Plan identifies complete reconstruction of the House of Charm. Page 289 of the Central Mesa Precise Plan identifies specific improvements to the Plaza de Panama.

The Mingei International Museum is located in the House of Charm Building. They have occupied the building since its reconstruction in 1996, and were responsible for all interior improvements for their museum. The other major tenants of the building are the San Diego Art Institute (SDAI) and The Old Globe Theatre.

## DISCUSSION

The Mingei International Museum is proposing modifications to the existing building as well as the adjacent quadrant of the Plaza de Panama. The proposed changes are shown on the attached plans and as described below.

### Building Modifications

- Remove three railings that separate the building arcade from the Plaza, allowing greater pedestrian access.
- Enclose two arcade alcoves in glass, providing additional display space (Sheet A6.3).
- Replace the main entrance door with a recessed frameless glass door. The original wood arcade pocket doors will be retained (Sheet A6.1).
- Modify Museum signage above the main entrance and add signage on either side of the main entrance (Sheet A6.1).
- Add signage above the north doors and northeast doors identifying “The Collectors’ Gallery” inside the building (Sheet A6.2).
- Add signage above the southern doors identifying the new “Café Mingei” inside the building (Sheet A6.2).
- Replace translucent glass in arcade display cases with clear glass, allowing visibility of displays by the Mingei International Museum (Sheet A6.2).
- Re-paint the building ornamentation to the historical Coral color.

### Landscape Modifications

- Remove and replace all concrete paving (excluding arcade paving) per attached plans. Add tree grates per the Central Mesa Precise Plan (Sheet A2.1p).
- Re-stripe the existing adjacent parking area (Sheet A2.1p).
- Replace Nikigator resilient surfacing (Sheet A2.1p)
- Relocate Poet and Muse sculpture (Sheet A2.1p).
- Enhanced signage for the Poet and Muse sculpture and for Nikigator sculpture (Sheet A6.4).
- Relocate House of Charm historical information sign (Sheet A2.1p).
- Relocate four existing benches and provide two new custom wood benches at the main entrance (Sheet A2.1p and Sheet A6.5).
- Place new planters within the arcade (Sheet A2.1p).
- Provide two new trash receptacles to match existing (Sheet A2.1p).
- Replace two existing Pear trees with Queen Palm trees (Sheet A2.1p).
- Re-landscape planters, retaining as much of the existing vegetation as possible.

The Historical Resources Board’s Design Assistance Subcommittee has reviewed the proposed General Development Plan for conformance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, and has determined that the project is consistent with these standards.

On March 5, 2009 the Balboa Park Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of the House of Charm GDP as proposed by the Mingei International Museum.

On May 13, 2009 the Design Review Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of the House of Charm GDP as proposed by the Mingei International Museum with conditions. The following are the conditions and responses.

1. Explore another pedestrian connection between the café tables and chairs and the arcade to the south.

*Response: Historical Resources staff does not support the removal of railings from the southern arcade to support this request. Park and Recreation staff does not support the removal of planting areas. The southern arcade has steps which prevent it from being accessible.*

2. Review the plant legend and only include the plants intended to be used. Eliminate the Queen Palms.

*Response: The plant palette has been reduced substantially per the recommendation. The Queen Palms are the trees specified in the Central Mesa Precise Plan; elimination of Queen Palms would be inconsistent with the adopted policy documents. Two Queen Palms have been deleted from the planters adjacent to the building. However, the two Queen Palms in the plaza will remain.*

3. Recess the information signs at the main entry into the wall.

*Response: Historical Resources staff does not support the recessing of the signage into the building walls.*

4. The lettering stand-off from the building walls should only be ¼” to ½” rather than the 1” shown on the GDP.

*Response: The lettering stand-off has been reduced to ½” per the recommendation.*

5. Remove the planting island at the southeast corner of the parking lot.

*Response: The planter island has been removed from the parking lot per the recommendation.*

6. Use drought tolerant plant material as much as possible.

*Response: The plant palette has been adjusted to be more drought tolerant while still being compatible with existing plantings.*

7. Recess the café into the building enough to remove people standing at the counter from the pedestrian traffic within the arcade.

*Response: The arcade is 15 feet wide in the location of the proposed café. The Mingei International Museum and its consultant feel the width of the arcade is sufficient and that the café does not need to be recessed into the building.*

8. Add a railing between the café tables and the traffic lanes.

*Response: A railing has been added per the recommendation.*

## ANALYSIS

### Building Modifications

The removal of three railings will increase pedestrian access between the arcade and the plaza. This proposal differs from the historical configuration but was deemed acceptable by the Historical Resources Board's Design Assistance Subcommittee (HRB DAS).

The enclosure of the two alcoves will provide display space for the Museum which may enhance the Park visitor's experience. The space is currently not used for any Park purposes. The HRB DAS deemed this modification acceptable.

Replacement of the front door with a frameless glass door will provide more transparency into the building. However, the appearance will be more contemporary. The HRB DAS deemed this modification acceptable since the solid wood pocket doors will be retained.

The signage proposed above the four building entrances uses the Hypatia font. The signage program of the Central Mesa Precise Plan states that the Optima font should be used for all signage. The brushed stainless steel letters and signage frames will have a more contemporary appearance. The signage on either side of the main entrance would be a more formal version of what is currently being used. Since the Mingei signage is not historic, the desired effect is to have a contrast between new elements and older historical elements.

Replacement of the display case glass with transparent glass will provide visibility of the display cases, and can be used to enhance the Park visitor's experience. One display case will be used by the San Diego Art Institute.

Re-painting of the building's ornamentation to a Coral color would be considered historically appropriate, and is supported by both the Park and Recreation Department and Historical Resources staff.

### Landscape Modifications

The existing concrete pavement is in poor condition. Edges that have been lifted by tree roots have been ground down; curbs around tree planters are disintegrating; there is a mixture of older and newer concrete; the curb ramps do not comply with current standards; pathways between railings and curbs are very narrow and are difficult to navigate. The proposed configuration of the paving improves appearances, circulation and safety, and is consistent with the Central Mesa Precise Plan.

Re-stripping of the existing parking lot will reduce the number of accessible spaces from seven to six. However, there is other accessible parking within the Plaza de Panama. The parking will be placed on the edges of the space where the accessible path of travel will be safer. With the cars relocated from the center of the parking lot the space will be opened up visually, allowing better views of the main entrance of the arcade and museum.

The rubberized surfacing around the Nikigator is worn and would benefit from replacement. The existing surfacing is discolored and has small pieces missing. Relocation of the Poet and Muse sculpture does not pose any negative impacts. Provision of enhanced signage for the Nikigator and the Poet and Muse would add to the Park visitor's experience.

Relocation of benches in the arcades and plaza do not present any negative impacts. Relocated donor benches will be placed in the same general vicinity. The two new benches, while not consistent with the Central Mesa Precise Plan, will provide visual interest adjacent to the Museum entrance. The new benches will be maintained by the Museum.

Additional trash receptacles and colorful planters are proposed for the café area and arcades. These additions will be a benefit to the Park. The new trash receptacles will match the existing. The planters, while not identical to those specified in the Central Mesa Precise Plan, have a similar design. The planters will be maintained by the Museum.

Replacing two Pear trees with Queen Palms will provide additional visibility to the main entrance of the building. The Queen Palms are specified in the Central Mesa Precise Plan for the perimeter of the Plaza de Panama, and their use is consistent with the Precise Plan. Retaining some of the existing Pear trees at this time is desirable to keep a balance with the other quadrants of the Plaza.

Tables and chairs are proposed for the café area. The use of tables and chairs around the Plaza de Panama is consistent with the Central Mesa Precise Plan. However, the proposed tables and chairs are not those specified in the Central Mesa Precise Plan. The tables and chairs will be brought into the building each night.

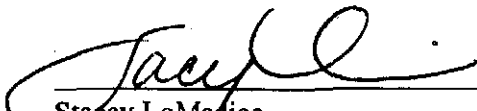
### Operations

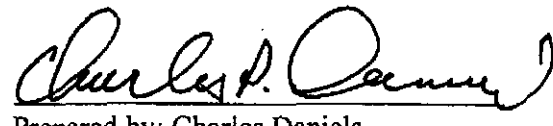
The Park and Recreation Department currently maintains all landscaping and improvements in the project area. The Mingei International Museum has agreed to provide supplemental maintenance that may be required as a result of the proposed improvements and café use.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan for the House of Charm as proposed by the Mingei International Museum with modifications.
2. Do not recommend approval of the proposed General Development Plan for the House of Charm as proposed by the Mingei International Museum.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Stacey LoMedico  
Park and Recreation Director

  
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Prepared by: Charles Daniels  
Park Designer

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Attachments: Excerpts from the Central Mesa Precise Plan  
General Development Plan

cc: Council District 3