



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

**DATE ISSUED:** October 8, 2010 **REPORT NO. PC-10-099**

**ATTENTION:** Planning Commission  
Agenda of October 21, 2010

**SUBJECT:** INITIATION OF AMENDMENTS TO THE BALBOA PARK MASTER PLAN AND CENTRAL MESA PRECISE PLAN

**OWNER/  
APPLICANT:** Plaza de Panama Committee

### **SUMMARY**

**Issues** – Should the Planning Commission:

1. Find the Supplemental Criteria identified in the General Plan's Land Use and Community Planning Element have been met; and
2. INITIATE amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan? The amendment has been requested to analyze vehicular and pedestrian circulation in the central area of Balboa Park.

### **Staff Recommendations**

1. Find the Supplemental Criteria identified in the General Plan's Land Use and Community Planning Element have been met; and
2. INITIATE the plan amendment process.

**Other Recommendations** – A workshop with the Balboa Park Committee was held on September 23, 2010. If initiated, the project will be thoroughly reviewed, and action taken on the design, by the Balboa Park Committee.

**Fiscal Statement** – There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

**Environmental Review** – Initiation of a community plan and general plan amendment by the Planning Commission is not a "project" pursuant to CEQA Section 15060(c) (2) and as defined in State CEQA Guidelines Section §15378(c). Once initiated, the project will be submitted to the Development Services Department and will require preparation

of an environmental document in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines. This determination is predicated on Section 15004 of the guidelines, which provides direction to lead agencies on the appropriate timing for meaningful environmental review.

**Code Enforcement Impact** – None

**Housing Impact** - None

**The initiation of a plan amendment in no way confers adoption of a plan amendment, that neither staff nor the Planning Commission is committed to recommend in favor or denial of the proposed amendment, and that the City Council is not committed to adopt or deny the proposed amendment.**

## **BACKGROUND**

Balboa Park is located immediately north of downtown San Diego. The Park is surrounded by the communities of Golden Hill, North Park, Uptown and Centre City. Balboa Park is one of the City's largest developed parks at 1,172 acres and is host to numerous passive and active recreational activities, cultural and educational institutions, and special events. Over 12 million visitors come to Balboa Park each year to enjoy the diversity of activities the Park has to offer.

Development, maintenance and management of Balboa Park are governed by the Balboa Park Master Plan, the Central Mesa Precise Plan, the East Mesa Precise Plan and subsequent amendments to those documents. The Balboa Park Master Plan is a part of the City's General Plan, and implements land use policies for Balboa Park. Therefore, amendments to the Master Plan and its Precise Plans must follow the Land Use and Community Planning Element of the General Plan.

The Balboa Park Master Plan was adopted by City Council on July 25, 1989 (Resolution No. R-274090). The Master Plan addresses the entirety of Balboa Park and provides general guidelines for development, maintenance and management. The Central Mesa Precise Plan was adopted by City Council on October 20, 1992 (Resolution R-280920) and addresses the central portion of the Park in greater detail.

In 2004 the City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department concluded the Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study (Study). The Study reaffirmed many of the recommendations of the current Master Plan and Precise Plans. The Study provided recommendations for short, medium and long term implementation.

In his January 2010 State of the City Address, Mayor Jerry Sanders identified the restoration of the Plaza de Panama as a signature project for the City to complete in advance of the centennial celebration of Balboa Park beginning in December 2014. In an effort to achieve this goal, Mayor Sanders has solicited the guidance and support of the community under the leadership of Dr. Irwin Jacobs. The Plaza de Panama Committee, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit entity, has been established to raise funds and coordinate efforts necessary to meet the December 2014 deadline. The Plaza de Panama Committee has retained a consultant team to work with community groups and Park stakeholders, and prepare designs and documentation required to implement the project.

On September 23, 2010 the Plaza de Panama Committee's Consultant Team (Consultants) held a publicly noticed workshop with the Balboa Park Committee to share preliminary designs for the reclamation of the Plaza de Panama, the West Prado streetscape and the Mall (between the Plaza de Panama and the Organ Pavilion) which is officially being called the *Balboa Park Plaza de Panama, Circulation and Parking Structure Project*. Each of these areas is currently heavily impacted by vehicular use. The Balboa Park Committee and the public in attendance provided the Consultants with feedback on the preliminary proposal. The Balboa Park Committee serves as the 'planning group' for Balboa Park.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Project Definition***

The primary goal of this project is to reclaim spaces currently impacted by vehicles for pedestrian and programmatic uses. The core of the project is the rehabilitation of the Plaza de Panama. The Plaza de Panama was the central gathering space for the 1915 Panama-California International Exposition. It was designed to accommodate large crowds of people, and like the surrounding buildings, was intended to be temporary. Modifications were made to the Plaza and surrounding buildings for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition. Almost nothing of original construction of the Plaza remains except nine Bougainvillea plants at the House of Hospitality. The fountain in the plaza was added in 1995 pursuant to the Precise Plan.

El Prado from the Plaza de Panama east to park Boulevard has been closed to vehicular traffic for many years. Removal of vehicles from this space has had a positive impact to the usability of this area. Pedestrians are able to move about safely between key venues and to enjoy the architecture, landscaping and water features without concern for vehicles. This project proposes to expand the pedestrian space westward to the Plaza de California at the Museum of Man, and southward along the Mall to the Organ Pavilion.

### ***Plan Amendment Focus***

In order to remove vehicles from the Plaza de Panama, West El Prado area and the Mall, vehicular traffic would need to be rerouted. The following elements would be further studied in the plan amendment process:

1. Plaza de Panama, El Prado, and Mall Improvements: The Plaza de Panama, El Prado (between the Plaza and the Museum of Man) and the Mall (between the Plaza and the Organ Pavilion) would be improved to emphasize pedestrian uses.
2. Bypass Road and Bridge: Study the feasibility of a new two way bypass road and bridge connecting to El Prado near the eastern end of the Cabrillo Bridge and linking to the Alcazar parking lot. Pedestrian and bicycle traffic would remain on El Prado.

### ***Plan Amendment Initiation Requirements***

The Balboa Park Master Plan and Precise Plans serve as community plans for Balboa Park. Deviations from these adopted policy documents require plan amendments. The Land Use & Community Planning Element of the General Plan identifies criteria for initiation of plan amendments.

The proposed amendments do not meet the requirements for a Technical Amendment Initiation. However, the Land Use & Community Planning Element of the General Plan identifies three criteria to be met for initiation of plan amendments by the Planning Commission (LU-D.10). The criteria are as follows:

- a. The amendment request appears to be consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan and community plan and any community plan specific amendment criteria; and*
- b. The proposed amendment provides additional public benefit to the community as compared to the existing land use designation, density/intensity range, plan policy or site design; and*
- c. Public facilities appear to be available to serve the proposed increase in density/intensity, or their provision will be addressed as a component of the amendment process.*

The following identifies how the proposed amendments would meet the criteria identified in the Land Use & Community Planning Element of the General Plan.

Criterion a: *The amendment request appears to be consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan and community plan and any community plan specific amendment criteria.*

The Balboa Park Master Plan implements the General Plan land use policies for Balboa Park. The Balboa Park Master Plan identifies six major goals. These goals are identified below, including staff analysis of how the Project Definition meets the goals of the Master Plan.

- ❖ ***“Create within the Park a more pedestrian oriented environment. Reduce automobile and pedestrian conflicts. Minimize through traffic.”***

The proposed amendments would remove daily vehicular traffic from the Plaza de Panama, West El Prado and the Mall by rerouting traffic from El Prado west of the Museum of Man, through the Alcazar parking lot and out to Pan American Road south of the Mall. The current Master Plan and Precise Plan allow traffic to continue in these areas.

- ❖ ***“Improve public access to the Park through an improved integrated circulation system, convenient drop-off points, better parking management, improved signage and increased security. The improved circulation system shall de-emphasize the automobile while increasing public access to the Park and Park facilities.”***

Removal of traffic from the Plaza de Panama would reduce recirculation of vehicles looping around searching for limited parking in the plaza. Separation of pedestrian, tram and vehicular traffic would improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety. New signage would better direct Park visitors. Ease of safe public access to Park facilities would be enhanced through these improvements.

- ❖ ***“Preserve, enhance and increase free and open parkland and establish a program of ongoing landscape design, maintenance and replacement.”***

Vehicles would be removed from the Plaza de Panama, West El Prado and the Mall, freeing that space for park visitors.

- ❖ ***“Restore or improve existing building and landscape areas within the Park.”***

The reclamation of the Plaza de Panama, West El Prado and the Mall would improve and restore the landscape and hardscape, and add much needed pedestrian park area.

- ❖ ***“Preserve and enhance the mix of cultural, and active and passive recreational uses within Balboa Park that serve national, regional, community and neighborhood populations.”***

The proposed amendments would enhance the experience of all Park visitors through improved access, safety, increased useable park land and programmable facilities.

- ❖ ***“Preserve Balboa Park as an affordable park experience for all citizens of San Diego.”***

Balboa Park is a public facility free to all City residents and visitors. While not all attractions in Balboa Park are free, the majority of the Park and its recreational resources will remain so. The reclamation of the Plaza de Panama, West El Prado and the Mall will add space for free active and passive recreational uses.

Criterion b: *The proposed amendment provides additional public benefit to the community as compared to the existing land use designation, density/intensity range, plan policy or site design.*

Removal of vehicles from West El Prado and the west side of the Mall would increase pedestrian access and free and open park land, and would provide improved safety over the existing Master Plan and Precise Plan.

The bypass road and bridge are necessary to maintain vehicular access through the park yet remove the vehicles from the Plaza de Panama, West El Prado and the Mall. Separation of vehicles and pedestrians would improve safety and flow, and allow reclamation of park land.

Criterion c: *Public facilities appear to be available to serve the proposed increase in density/intensity, or their provision will be addressed as a component of the amendment process.*

Balboa Park is currently adequately served by major public services such as water, sewer, electrical, telephone and other utilities. Any increased demand on these utilities would be addressed in the plan amendments and environmental document.

Police service currently serving the Park is adequate, and no increase in this service is anticipated. The Park Ranger staff also provides an additional level of security to the Park.

The Park is currently well served by freeways and roads, and no additional roads are anticipated at this time. Public transit improvements in the form of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) are currently being planned by SANDAG, and are anticipated to be in place in the near future. BRT lines are proposed for Park Boulevard, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Balboa Park itself can be considered a public service, providing recreational opportunities to adjacent communities, visitors from the region, and to tourists. The proposed increase in park land and Park services will be increased as a result of implementation of the land use plans.

The following issues have been identified with the initiation request. If initiated, these issues, as well as others that may be identified, will be analyzed and evaluated through the plan amendment review process:

- Historic resources protection
- Universal accessibility
- Availability and accessibility of parking
- Traffic circulation and pedestrian safety
- Accessibility of public and park transit

As outlined above, the proposed plan amendments meet all of the above criteria as described; therefore, staff recommends amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan be initiated.

Respectfully submitted,



Charles Daniels  
Park Designer,  
Park and Recreation Department



Stacey LoMedico  
Director,  
Park and Recreation Department

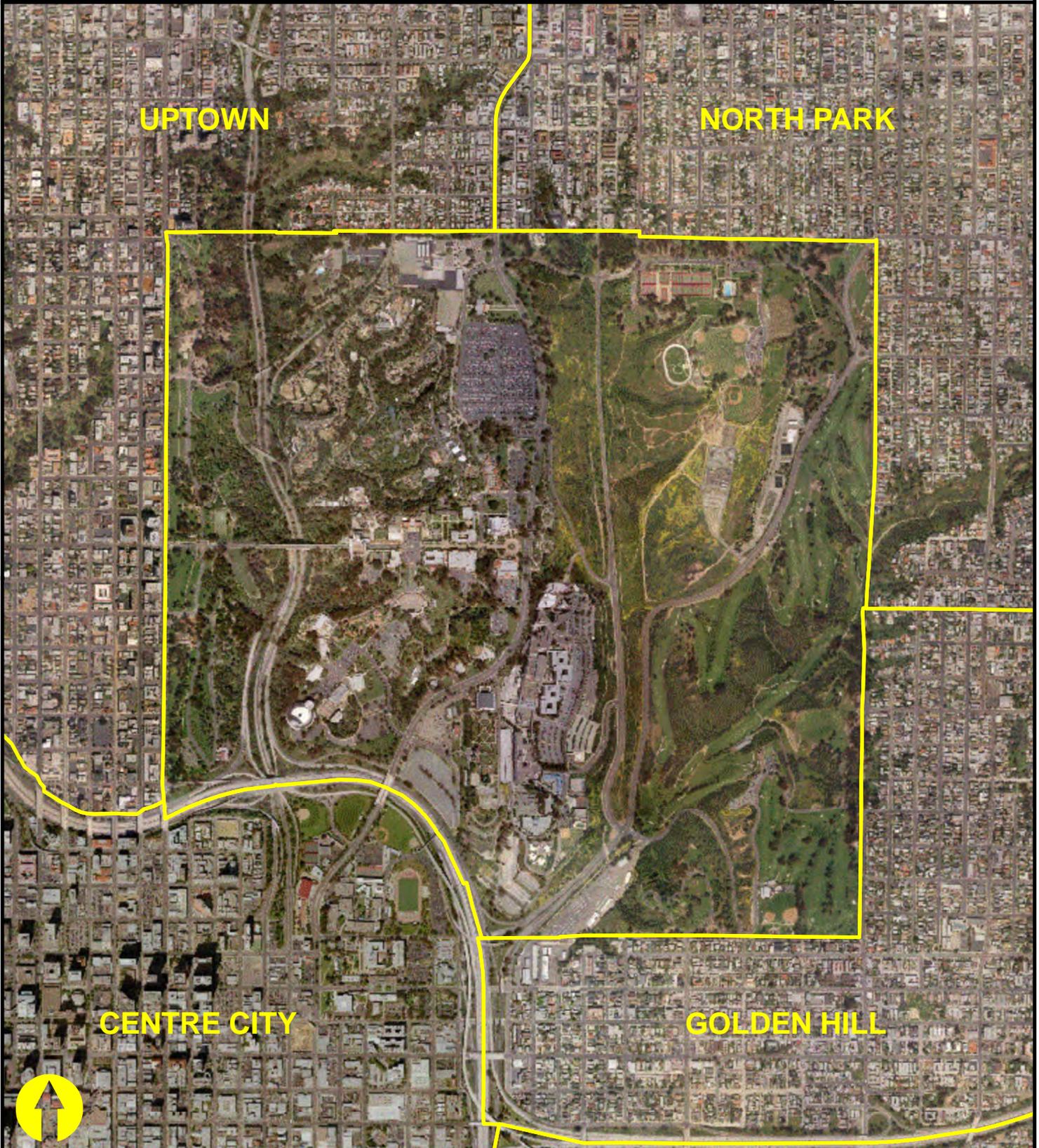
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Attachments: Map – Balboa Park and Surrounding Communities  
Map – Balboa Park West Prado Area  
Existing Central Mesa Precise Plan Figures  
Draft PC Resolution

# BALBOA PARK

## Balboa Park and Surrounding Communities

2010



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# BALBOA PARK

## West Prado Area

2010

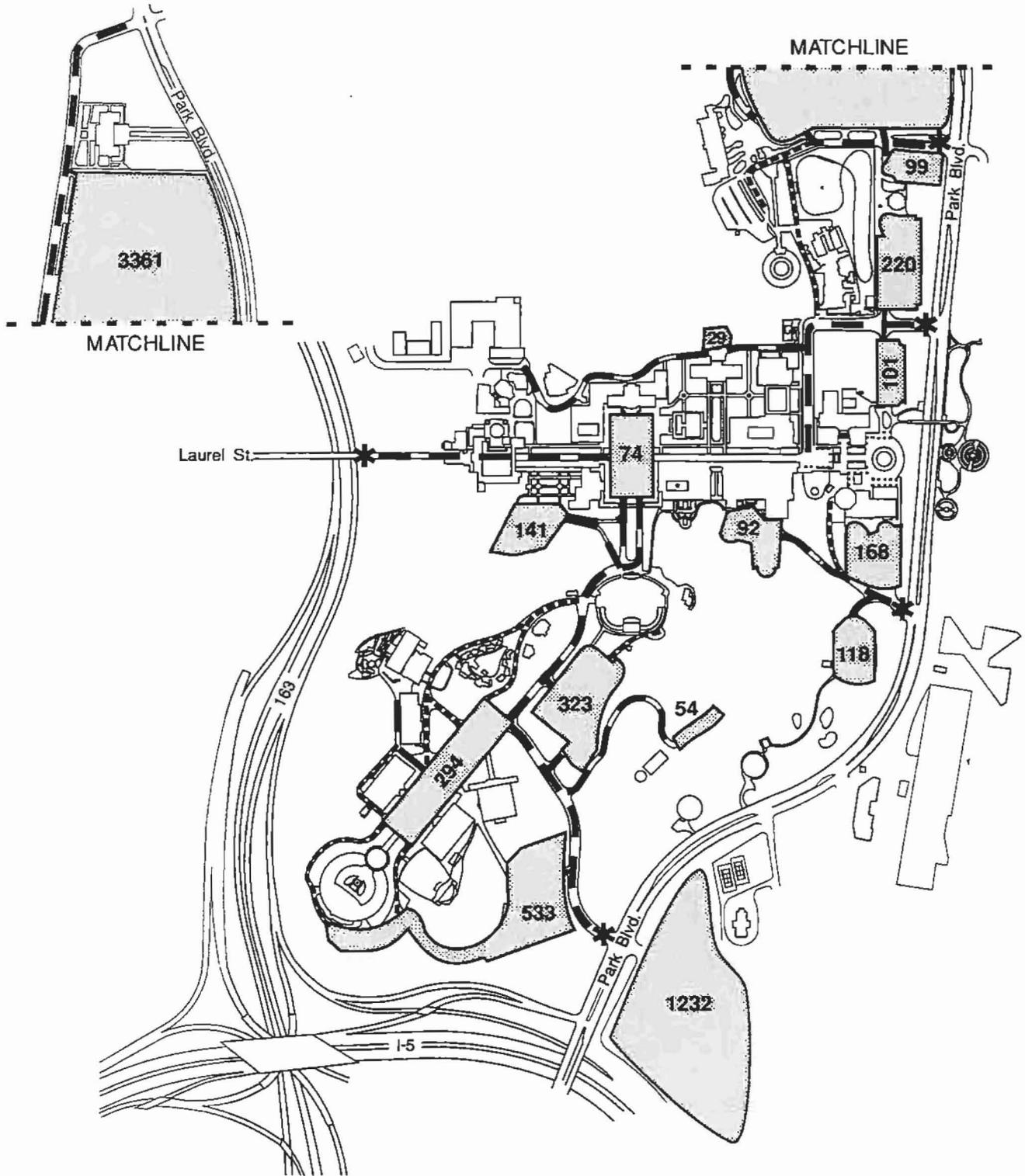


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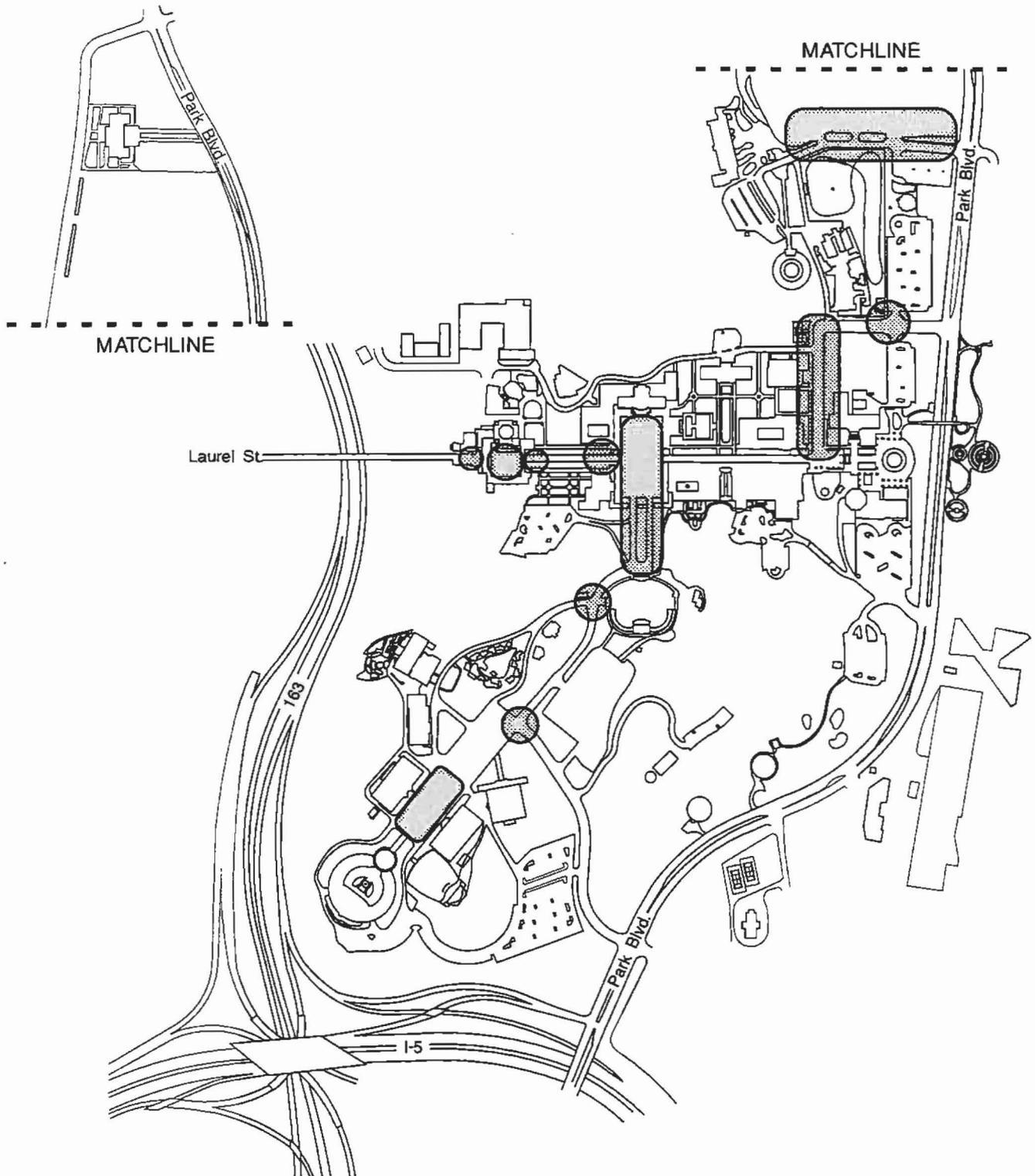
**Existing Vehicular Circulation and Parking**

13 June 1991

Figure  
17

- \* Vehicular Access Points
- (XXX) Number of Vehicular Parking Spaces per Lot
- — Vehicular Circulation
- Service Only





**Existing Pedestrian and Vehicular Conflict Areas**

13 June 1991

Figure  
18





## *West Prado*

Building rehabilitations for this area will consist of a full reconstruction of the House of Charm as well as the existing arcades. The Museum of Man will expand its storage facilities within non-historically significant interior basement spaces. The Plaza de Panama will regain its Exposition role as a multi-use pedestrian plaza, once again hosting a variety of public activities. Street trees will be added to the Prado streetscape. The entry walkway and central plaza at the Old Globe Theater complex will be redesigned. Alcazar Garden will be renovated and historical features will be restored. The Palm Canyon botanical collection will be enhanced and the west facing slopes of the Cabrillo Canyon will again return to unrestricted public use.

Vehicular circulation into the Central Mesa via the Cabrillo bridge will utilize one of two existing traffic lanes. A one-way eastbound automobile lane through the Prado will serve as an access route for the general public wishing to drive to the proposed Organ Pavilion parking structure. The other travel lane will be utilized for the Park tram. When the tram is not in service, the tram lane will open to allow two-way auto traffic between the parking structure and the West Mesa. Vehicular drop-off and loading zones will be included on both sides of the Prado and in the Plaza de Panama.



### West Prado

13 June 1991

Figure 29



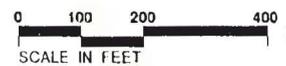
Trees

Groundcovers



Lawn

Paved Pedestrian Areas



PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_-PC

INITIATING AMENDMENTS TO THE GENERAL PLAN, THE BALBOA PARK  
MASTER PLAN AND THE CENTRAL MESA PRECISE PLAN

WHEREAS, on October 21, 2010, the Planning Commission of the City of San Diego held a public hearing for the purpose of considering a request to initiate amendments to the General Plan, the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan; and

WHEREAS, the proposed amendments would change vehicular circulation in the central area of Balboa Park, increasing the amount of available park land for pedestrian use; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission of the City of San Diego considered all maps, exhibits, and written documents presented for this project, and had considered the oral presentations given at the public hearing; NOW, THEREFORE:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Planning Commission of the City of San Diego determines that the proposed plan amendments meet the three criteria for initiation as described in section LU-D.10 of the Land Use Element of the General Plan:

- a) **The amendment request appears to be consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan and community plan and any community plan specific amendment criteria**
- b) **The proposed amendment provides additional public benefit to the community as compared to the existing land use designation, density/intensity range, plan policy or site design**
- c) **Public facilities appear to be available to serve the proposed increase in density/intensity, or their provision will be addressed as a component of the amendment process**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by the Planning Commission of the City of San Diego that it hereby initiates the requested Community Plan and General Plan Amendments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by the Planning Commission of the City of San Diego, that the initiation of a plan amendments in no way confers adoption of a plan amendment, that neither staff nor the Planning Commission is committed to recommend in favor or denial of the proposed amendment, and the City Council is not committed to adopt or deny the proposed amendment.

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Charles Daniels  
Park Designer, Park and Recreation Department

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Brenda Clark  
Legislative Recorder

Initiated: October 21, 2010  
By a vote of: