



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 23, 2012

MAYOR JERRY SANDERS FACT SHEET

PLAZA DE PANAMA PROJECT DRAFT EIR RELEASED

Document studies an unprecedented 13 alternatives to the proposed project

The City of San Diego today released the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) for the Plaza de Panama project, a proposal put forward by Dr. Irwin Jacobs and the Plaza de Panama Committee to restore Balboa Park's plazas and promenades in advance of the park's 2015 Centennial Celebration.

The Draft EIR provides a comprehensive review of potential environmental impacts of the proposed project, as well as 13 alternatives to the proposed project. Project alternatives that were included in the study were largely generated from public input.

"This is believed to be the most comprehensive and inclusive Draft EIR in city history, giving the public a wealth of information about the Plaza de Panama project and more than a dozen alternatives," said Mayor Jerry Sanders. "This level of detailed information and analysis is exactly what was promised to the public. It is now up to San Diegans to take this opportunity to fully inform themselves and provide us with their input."

The Draft EIR is available for review online. This is the first time the City has taken such a step in the interest of greater transparency.

The proposed Plaza de Panama project would restore more than six acres of parkland, including the Plaza de Panama, Plaza de California, West El Prado and Esplanade. Through the construction of the Centennial Bridge and Road, it would maintain proximate public access from both the east and west sides of the park, which is critical for the continued success of the institutions and museums in the park.

A new underground parking structure behind the Spreckels Organ Pavilion – topped by a new two-acre park – would add 270 new parking spaces for visitors. The project would be paid for by private donations and a self-supporting bond, and will require no government funding.

The number of alternatives studied in this Draft EIR is unprecedented in an environmental document in San Diego. Thirteen alternatives to the proposed project were considered:

1. No Project (No Development / Existing Condition) – Project is not undertaken. Project site remains in its "current" / existing condition; equivalent to existing environmental setting.

2. No Project (Central Mesa Precise Plan) – One-way traffic across Cabrillo Bridge and through El Prado and Plaza de Panama. Parking removed from Plaza de Panama, Alcazar Lot reconfigured for majority of ADA parking, with through vehicle traffic road rerouted behind Organ Pavilion to east side of 1000- to 1,500-stall below-grade parking structure.
3. Pedestrianize Cabrillo Bridge, No New Parking Structure – Cabrillo Bridge closed to vehicular traffic, all vehicles will enter Park from east side. Vehicular traffic and parking eliminated from El Prado and Plaza de Panama. Organ Pavilion Lot remains as is; Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking, valet, and drop-off; no new parking added, net loss of parking.
4. Pedestrianize Cabrillo Bridge, Parking Structure at Organ Pavilion Lot – Cabrillo Bridge closed to vehicular traffic, vehicular traffic and parking eliminated from El Prado and Plaza de Panama. Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking, valet, and drop-off. New 800-stall below-grade parking structure with rooftop park built at location of Organ Pavilion Lot.
5. Pedestrianize Cabrillo Bridge, Parking Structure at West Mesa – Cabrillo Bridge closed to vehicular traffic, vehicular traffic and parking eliminated from El Prado and Plaza de Panama. Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking, valet, and drop-off; new 800-stall below-grade parking structure built at West Mesa (lawn bowling site); Organ Pavilion Lot remains as is.
6. Pedestrianize Cabrillo Bridge, Parking Structure at Inspiration Point – Cabrillo Bridge closed to vehicular traffic, vehicular traffic and parking eliminated from El Prado and Plaza de Panama. Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking, valet, and drop-off; 800-stall parking structure built at Inspiration Point; Organ Pavilion Lot converted to park.
7. Cabrillo Bridge Open w/ Centennial Bridge and Gold Gulch Parking Structure – Vehicle traffic continues on Cabrillo Bridge, rerouted from El Prado via new Centennial Bridge. No vehicular traffic or parking along El Prado and Plaza de Panama. Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking, valet, and drop-off; 800-stall parking structure in Gold Gulch with new access road and pedestrian overpass to Organ Pavilion Lot; Organ Pavilion Lot converted to park.
8. Cabrillo Bridge Open w/ Centennial Bridge and No-Pay Organ Pavilion Parking Structure – (Same as proposed project except free parking in parking structure.) Vehicle traffic continues on Cabrillo Bridge, rerouted from El Prado via new Centennial Bridge. No vehicular traffic or parking along El Prado and Plaza de Panama. Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking, valet, and drop-off; 800 stall below-grade parking structure with rooftop park at Organ Pavilion Lot.
9. Cabrillo Bridge Open w/ Tunnel Under Plaza de Panama – Two-way vehicle traffic continues on Cabrillo Bridge, through Plaza de California and onto El Prado West, 275-foot tunnel to bypass under the Plaza de Panama with openings at east end of El Prado and north end of Esplanade. Vehicular traffic and parking eliminated from Plaza de Panama; Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking, valet, and drop-off; 800-stall below-grade parking structure at Organ Pavilion Lot with rooftop park and pedestrian promenade.
10. Cabrillo Bridge Open One-Way w/ Stop Light – One-way eastbound traffic only across Cabrillo Bridge, traffic signal at entry to Plaza de California, traffic continues through El Prado and Plaza de Panama. Parking eliminated from Plaza de Panama; Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking, valet, and drop-off; new surface parking configured at south-east lawn adjacent to Federal Lot; Organ Pavilion Lot remains as is.
11. Cabrillo Bridge Open w/ Modified Precise Plan – Two-way vehicular traffic continues across the Cabrillo Bridge, through the El Prado and Plaza de Panama. No parking in Plaza de Panama; valet and drop-off remain in Plaza de Panama; no new parking facilities; Alcazar Lot reconfigured for ADA parking; Organ Pavilion Lot remains as is.

12. Cabrillo Bridge Open w/ Half-Plaza – Two-way vehicular traffic continues across the Cabrillo Bridge, through the El Prado and Plaza de Panama. No parking in Plaza de Panama; valet and drop-off remain in Plaza de Panama; Alcazar Lot converted to parkland; below-grade parking structure built at Organ Pavilion Lot with new pedestrian overpass and park through-road routed to the east of parking structure.

13. Phase Alternative – Phased approach to proposed project. Final components are same as proposed project, only schedule/phasing is different in order to analyze cumulative progress.

Perhaps the most noteworthy revelation in the Draft EIR is that all alternatives – including the “No Project” Alternative – have potential impacts that cannot be mitigated. In the case of the Plaza de Panama project, the only unmitigable impacts would result from the proposed Centennial Bridge. While the bridge will not be seen from most vantage points, historical and visual impacts would occur because it is a new structure in a historic district.

Other alternatives studied would result in significant traffic impacts that cannot be addressed, either in neighborhoods surrounding Balboa Park or inside the Plaza de Panama and other areas of the park. In addition, all alternative projects and the proposed project would result in temporary impacts during construction.

The Draft EIR is available for the public to review and provide comments for a 45-day public comment period. Because of the public interest in the project, the City has posted the draft EIR on its website to ensure that it is accessible to the public. (<http://clerkdoc.sannet.gov/Website/publicnotice/pubnotceqa.html>).

Copies of the document are also available at the Downtown Central Library (820 E St., San Diego, CA 92101-6416) and the North Park Branch Library (3795 31st St., San Diego, CA 92104-3720).

Comments may be submitted in writing to the city via U.S. Mail and e-mail to:

E. Shearer-Nguyen, Environmental Planner
City of San Diego Development Services Center
1222 First Avenue, MS 501
San Diego, CA 92101
DSDEAS@sanidiego.gov

The deadline for submitting comments is 5 p.m. on March 9, 2012.

About the Plaza de Panama Committee

Founded by Dr. Irwin Jacobs, the Plaza de Panama Committee is a sole purpose entity devoted to the development and implementation of the Plaza de Panama Project. It is separate, but complementary to, the Balboa Park Conservancy and the Balboa Park Centennial Committee. The committee will sunset with completion of the project. It is a 501(c)(3) California Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation.

###