



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: March 1, 2021

REPORT NO: 101

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board
Agenda of March 18, 2021

SUBJECT: Proposal to Name Old Cactus Garden in Balboa Park

SUMMARY

Issue – Should the Park and Recreation Board recommend approval of the naming of Balboa Park's old cactus garden to the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden?

Department Recommendation – Recommend approval of the naming of the old cactus garden to the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden.

Fiscal Impact – None. The Balboa Park Conservancy will provide the sign naming the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden.

Environmental – This activity is categorically exempt under CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15301, Existing Facilities.

Other Recommendations – This proposal has been reviewed by the Balboa Park Committee. Their recommendation is provided under Discussion.

BACKGROUND

There is a cactus garden located immediately west of the Balboa Park Club Building in the Palisades area of Balboa Park. The garden was originally constructed for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition. However, the garden is not indicated on the Exposition map while other gardens are. See the attached vicinity map, Attachment A.

The Central Mesa Precise Plan describes some of the history of the landscape for the 1935 Exposition but does not mention the cactus garden. The "Recommendations" section of the Precise Plan (Protea Garden, page 358, Attachment B) suggests planting the garden with Proteas, essentially changing its character from the original intent as a cacti and succulent garden.

The old cactus garden has never had an official name and is often confused with the Desert Garden located on Park Boulevard adjacent to the Inez Grant Parker Memorial Rose Garden. There are multiple maps of Balboa park that have been created over the years, and many of the maps omit this garden or simply refer to it as the "old cactus garden." This leads to

confusion about the cactus garden and desert garden, and where people are to meet.

In 2019 and 2020 the Balboa Park Conservancy (Conservancy) solicited donations for the renovation of the old cactus garden. Improvements included reconstruction of stone lined decomposed granite walkways, reconstruction of deteriorated stone walls, the addition of concrete planters, new plants and general maintenance/clean-up.

The Conservancy has done extensive research on the origin and history of this garden. While the garden was designed by horticulturalist Chauncy Jerabek, the design was inspired by Kate Sessions, and includes many cacti and succulents donated by Sessions. Additional details of Kate Sessions' inspiration for the old cactus garden can be found in the attached presentation. For these reasons the Conservancy proposes to officially name the old cactus garden as the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden.

DISCUSSION

City Council Policy 900-20 addresses Naming of City Assets (Attachment C). This Policy identifies four categories to be considered when naming City assets including:

1. Location
2. Significant Events, People and Places
3. Outstanding Individuals
4. Major Donations

Category 2 states that the history of a major event, place or person may play an important role to preserve and honor a community's history, landmarks or prominent geographical features. Kate Sessions is widely known as "the mother of Balboa Park." Staff feels her contributions to the City, Balboa Park and the old cactus garden warrant the naming of this garden in her honor.

Category 3 is intended to acknowledge individuals who have made substantial contributions to benefit the City, local community, park and recreation system, or public library. Staff believes the same contributions identified under Category 2 equally apply to Category 3.

The proposal to name the old cactus garden to the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden has been reviewed by Historic Resources staff and they take no exception to the proposal.

Signage memorializing the official naming of the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden would be in compliance with the Balboa Park Sign Manual.

The naming proposal was reviewed by the City's Historical Resources staff and they have taken no exception to the naming of the old cactus garden.

On March 4, 2021 the Balboa Park Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of the naming of the old cactus garden to the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden. Additionally, the Department has received letters of support for the naming from the Save Our Heritage Organisation, the Friends of Balboa Park, the Balboa Park Committee of One Hundred, and the San Diego Floral Association (see Attachment E).

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ALTERNATIVES

Do not recommend approval of the naming of the old cactus garden to the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden.

Respectfully submitted,



Christina Chadwick
Assistant Deputy Director
Parks and Recreation Department

CC/cd

Attachments: Attachment A – Vicinity Map
Attachment B – Central Mesa Precise Plan Excerpt
Attachment C – Council Policy 900-20 – Naming of City Assets
Attachment D – Presentation
Attachment E – Letters of Support