



NORTH PARK PLANNING COMMITTEE
PUBLIC FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION, PARKS, AND PUBLIC ART SUBCOMMITTEE

www.northparkplanning.org

CORRECTED MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 14, 2011, 6:00 p.m., North Park Recreation Center/Adult Center
2719 Howard Avenue, San Diego, CA 92104

Attendance:

Seated Board Members: Dionné Carlson (Chair), René Vidales (Vice-Chair), Vicki Granowitz, Cheryl Dye, Lucky Morrison

Community Voting Members: Ernie Bonn, Rob Steppke (arrived 6:09 p.m.), Robert Barry (arrived 6:17 p.m.)

Board members not seated: None

Also present: Vicki Estrada

Parliamentary Items

Call to order. The meeting was called to order at 6:06 pm

Approve September 14, 2011 Agenda. Motion: Approve Agenda. Dye/Granowitz 6-0-0

Chair's Comments. Chair Carlson announced the following:

- Chair Carlson thanked Vicki Estrada for attending this meeting.

Approve August 10, 2011 Minutes. Motion: Approve August 10, 2011 minutes with the following revisions: In Item A add edits forwarded by Caltrans and in Item B revise from "had recently" to "has". Bonn/Steppke 5-0-2 (Granowitz and Dye abstained)

Announcements:

1. Taste of University Heights will be held on Sunday, September 18
2. Taste of North Park will be held on Saturday, October 8
3. The Plaza de Panama Committee is having its first walking tour Saturday, October 17, and it will continue monthly every 3rd Saturday of the month

Non Agenda Public Comment: None

Old Business

A. Mid-City Rapid Bus Project. *Update/Discussion*

Previously installed illegal parking on Park Boulevard between Center Street and Polk Avenue has been removed. No other updates.

B. Texas Street Improvement Design. *Update/Continuation of discussion of improvements to Texas Street from Madison Avenue to Camino Del Rio South, part of the mitigation improvements for the Quarry Falls (Civita) Development in Mission Valley.*

No documentation on setting up the maintenance endowment fund has yet been received from Julie Ballesteros, but it was suggested to contact David Graham at the Mayor's office.

C. Plaza de Panama – Balboa Park (Project No. 233958). *Proposed project includes an amendment to the Balboa Park Master Plan; an amendment to the Central Mesa Precise Plan; and a Site Development Permit. Ongoing discussion of parking, pedestrian & vehicular circulation for possible action.*

Chair Carlson introduced Vicki Estrada, whose firm prepared the Balboa Park Master Plan, The Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan, and a number of subsequent amendments to both documents.

Discussion focused primarily on both the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan, but the Site Development Permit was also part of the discussion. Summary of points discussed:

- The *Balboa Park Master Plan* preparation and ultimate adoption took 9 years of preparation, including a 3 year public input process. The *Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan* also took several years of preparation and public input process prior to the final adoption.
- The Cabrillo Bridge was closed twice in the past, and in both cases attendance in the park went up; the bridge was closed once to repave it, and the second time during a 3-month period for retrofitting. There is a strong consensus of opinion from the Sub-Committee that it would be a good idea to request attendance, traffic, circulation & parking studies when the Cabrillo Bridge is closed to vehicular traffic during the next seismic retrofitting period, which will likely take place in January 2013 for a period of 3 months.
- The Bypass bridge alternative was studied and rejected during the public process for the original *Balboa Park Master Plan*. The issues that existed 20 years ago when the original plan was being put together are still applicable today.
- The currently proposed Parking structure behind the organ pavilion is part of the *Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan*, however its design was supposed to be awarded through a national competition.
- An earlier “*Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation, and Parking Study*” prepared by Civitas recommends the parking structure be located along Florida Canyon, but was not adopted at the time due to funding issues. The *Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan* should have been updated a long time ago to show all parking structures removed from the central core of the park and placed along the periphery instead.
- The proposed parking structure adds only 258 New spaces with 100 of those being reserved for valet parking. The consensus from the subcommittee is that it costs too much money for too little benefit.
- It is possible that the Palisades parking lot will also close in the future, making the need for parking on the periphery of the park greater.
- The Sub-Committee expressed concerns that the revenue from the proposed parking structure would be insufficient to pay off the bond debt, operations and maintenance of the structure, and would not leave sufficient revenue available to operate the “people mover” tram as proposed. According to the Independent Budgeted Analysis (IBA) report “*The proforma assumes an average 88% annual occupancy for the proposed parking garage*”. The IBA report then goes on to state that “*The availability of free parking in other areas of the park poses a challenge for occupancy assumptions for the paid parking garage on typical non-event days at the park. As noted above, there are currently approximately 6,500 available free parking spaces in the Central Mesa and Inspiration Point areas of the Park. Free parking exists at 15 lots including the Zoo, Inspiration Point and the Federal/Aerospace Lot. Free parking also exists along Park Boulevard and in surrounding neighborhoods. it is not likely to get to those levels because unless for special events, most of the time the parking structure would be empty.*”
- The committee expressed concern that, once it becomes apparent that the revenue from the parking structure is insufficient due to lack of occupancy and available free parking elsewhere, the city will make all parking “pay to park” inside the park, negatively impacting the ability of the city’s average and poor citizens to enjoy the park’s amenities.
- There is a consensus that if paid parking is instituted, people will look elsewhere; the Zoo will soon start charging and everyone will be impacted.
- The committee expressed concern that, if the plan amendments are approved first (prior to the City Council vote on the project and the site development permit) by the City, the subsequent action the City would take is to approve the EIR. While the EIR has to meet CEQA, overriding findings for the EIR can always be made by the City if it has already “shoe-horned” the project into the plan amendments.

- Regarding the reducing traffic through the center of the park; An inexpensive alternative is to use removable bollards as currently used in other US cities and in Europe and in other parts of the world, in order to diffuse vehicular traffic.
- Parking in the Plaza de Panama is easily removable today without building a Bypass bridge

The following items were presented for each of the documents during discussion:

Balboa Park Master Plan Amendment:

- The Balboa Park Master Plan was adopted in 1989 after 8 years of community input; the text in the currently proposed amendment is about to make drastic changes to the original plan and has not had positive public input to date.
- The adopted Balboa Park Master Plan (Figure 13) does not include a bypass at the Cabrillo Bridge but rather shows a reversible one-way route through the Plaza the Panama; which makes the Cabrillo Bridge more pedestrian and transit friendly.
- The adopted plan shows the Cabrillo Bridge carrying only eastbound traffic, freeing the westbound lane for the intra-park tram, inter-park shuttle, bicycles, and pedestrian use; the proposed amendment shows two-lane vehicular traffic through the Cabrillo Bridge.
- The adopted plan calls for the parking facility at the Palisades to be subject of an architectural design competition to ensure the widest possible search for a quality design; the amendment gives the applicant (“the Plaza de Panama Committee”) the freedom to choose the architect for the parking structure, eliminating the option for the best possible design to be integrated into the area in question.
- The adopted plan calls for automobile access from the parking structure at the Palisades to the Prado to pass under the promenade; the amendment eliminates this option.
- Alternative D in the 1986 and 1987 EIR is the environmentally preferred Alternative as shown in Figures 28 and 34. This closes the Cabrillo Bridge to vehicular traffic and it uses Quince Street as its main vehicular access from the west.

Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan:

- The Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan was adopted in 1992 after 3 years of community input; the text in the proposed amendment is about to make drastic changes to the original plan and has not had positive public input to date.
- The Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan does not include a bypass at the Cabrillo Bridge, but rather details a reversible one-way route through the Plaza de Panama which removes most of the vehicular traffic from the Plaza de Panama without construction of the bypass, making the Cabrillo Bridge more pedestrian and transit friendly.
- The 2-way bypass road in the proposed amendment does not separate vehicles and parking from pedestrian corridors, since pedestrians will tend to use the same road, and the narrow cross section with two 13’ vehicular travel lanes will create traffic jams when a vehicle gets a flat tire or ceases to operate because no shoulders are provided.
- The proposed amendment reconfigures the Alcazar Garden Parking Lot, creating a LOT of conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles, because it provides handicapped parking/accessible parking, valet drop-off, and bus drop-off all at the same location as the main vehicular entrance to the park, directly conflicting with vehicular traffic that is passing by in order to get to the parking structure.
- Alternative D in the 1986 and 1987 EIR is the environmentally preferred Alternative as shown in Figures 28 and 34. This closes the Cabrillo Bridge to vehicular traffic and it uses Quince Street as its main vehicular access from the west.

Site Development Permit Grading Plan and Landscape Plan; specific concerns:

- The amount of dirt that will be exported from the site should be reduced. The project proposes 159,000 cubic yards of cut; 33,000 cubic yards of fill, and 126,000 cubic yards of export. At approximately 10 cubic yards per truck, approximately 12,600 truckloads of earth are proposed to be moved elsewhere.

- The proposed project should eliminate or reduce the height of the retaining walls shown for the unsafely curving road, which is currently 15 feet to 20 feet tall in the vicinity of the organ pavilion, including eliminating or reducing the very deep excavation for construction of the road, and eliminating or reducing the slopes and drops involved that would otherwise create a hazard.
- The plans & renderings for the proposed project should clearly show safety railings where required for the steep slopes to be created.
- The proposed project should analyze the loading zone in the Alcazar Garden Parking Lot for eastbound traffic, which currently is not long enough for 2 buses.
- The proposed project should analyze the conflicts with pedestrian and vehicular interference, due to the fact that pedestrians must cross the flow-through traffic to get from ADA (American Disabilities Act) cars to the access ramps.
- The proposed project should analyze ADA accessibility conflicts with flow-through traffic.
- The proposed project should analyze the roadway exiting the Alcazar Gardens leading into the new parking structure where the curve in the road has a radius of 102', which is a steep turning radius and would not be permitted on a public street.
- The proposed project should analyze the curve in the roadway on the northeast side of the new parking structure, which has a radius of 83' and is a sharp radius that would not be permitted on a public street.
- The proposed project should analyze the 90-degree turn from the Cabrillo Bridge onto the Bypass, which is not an improvement over the current route through the park and under City guidelines would require a stop sign.
- The proposed project should analyze the 90-degree turn from the Cabrillo Bridge onto the Bypass that creates pedestrian-vehicle conflicts
- The proposed project should analyze pedestrian traffic for the Bypass, because there is sidewalk proposed on both sides of the Bypass and pedestrians will tend to use the same road as vehicles.
- The proposed project should analyze likely traffic jams into the park because the cross section shows two 13' vehicular travel lanes and traffic jams can be created when a vehicle gets a flat tire or ceases to operate because no shoulders are provided.

The following categories were tabulated with specific areas of concern:

- Vehicular Traffic: Goal should not be bringing traffic into the core of the park, but rather minimizing or eliminating it.
- Bypass Bridge: The Bypass Bridge does not comply with accepted guidelines for treatment of historical resources.
- Fees: The Introduction of Fees brings land use issues, has impacts in areas outside the park as well as inside the park
- Net gain of parking spaces: If more parking is needed, the net gain from this proposal does not increase it by much
- Funding: There is no guarantee that there is adequate funding; there is no guarantee that parking structure occupancy will support the level of funding needed to service bonds; there is no guarantee that funds can be raised by the Plaza de Panama Committee as promised;
- Private influence in public property: The inordinate influence of moneyed interests on public parklands with this proposal raises the issue of conflict of interest
- Legal challenge: The recent MOU entered into by the City with the Plaza de Panama committee is currently under legal challenge. There will likely be further legal challenges to this project due to its impact on significant historic resources, resulting in growing legal expenditures for the City.
- Previous planning efforts: This proposal disregards all the past years of planning efforts and public input.
- Public Transit: The proposal does not bring transit into the park and would not alleviate increase of vehicular traffic. Lack of compliance with the SANDAG 2050 Regional Transportation Plan

It was concluded that answers to the following questions will be worked on during future meetings:

1. To what degree the changes do not comply with the adopted plans?
2. To what degree the amendments are in compliance with the original project?

3. To what degree the amendments are in conflict with the substance of the original project?

There was discussion of the fact that committee members had asked the NPPC Chair to request that plans and plan amendments on the Plaza de Panama project be provided to the committee in electronic format, either as .pdf files or as links to a City website. The first Plan amendment documents were provided in hardcopy only, and one copy only, resulting in a lot of labor for a committee member to scan and distribute so that committee members could all familiarize themselves with the documents prior to the meetings. The NPPC chair informed the committee that she had made the request, but that no such links or files were forthcoming. Members of the committee expressed their annoyance with this, in light of a planning committee's mandate for transparency and to inform the public of projects that come before it. After further discussion the following motion was made:

MOTION: To insist that all hard copy documents provided by the City of San Diego to the North Park Planning Committee and other CPGs pertaining to the Balboa Park Plaza de Panama Project PTS 233958 to also be provided in electronic format. Carlson/Dye 8-0-0

The *Independent Budget Analyst (IBA) Report on Parking Structure Bond Financing* and the *Old Town Parking Study (2002)* were brought up as part of other discussions but not fully analyzed, due to lack of time. Chair Carlson requested board members familiarize themselves with these and other documents for next month's discussion.

D. Discussion of "Park & Recreation Needs Assessment Survey for the Greater Golden Hill North Park, & Uptown Communities".

Item continued until the next meeting.

Next meeting dates for 2011: Wednesday, October 12, 2011 and November 9, 2011

Adjournment. Motion: To adjourn meeting Granowitz/Barry. 8-0-0. Meeting adjourned 8:02 p.m.