

DATE ISSUED: September 27, 2001

REPORT NO. 01-203

ATTENTION: Natural Resources and Cultural Committee  
Agenda of October 3, 2001

SUBJECT: ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SAN DIEGO'S PROPOSED MASTER  
PLAN AND PRECISE PLAN AMENDMENT PROJECT

REFERENCE: Planning Commission Initiation Report No. P99-084 Dated May 28, 1999  
(Attachment 1).

OWNER: City of San Diego

APPLICANT: Zoological Society of San Diego (Society)

SUMMARY:

Issues - The Zoological Society of San Diego has submitted an application to the Development Services Department Project Management Division for an amendment to the Balboa Park Master Plan and Precise Plan. Staff is currently working with the applicant on items necessary to begin processing the application. At this time, no action is required on the part of the Committee or City Council on the Society's proposed project. Staff is seeking policy direction on several issues related to the Society's proposed amendment to the Balboa Park Master Plan and Precise Plan. This report does not contain a specific analysis of the proposed project.

The Balboa Park Master Plan is the policy document that gives definition and guidance to the future development of Balboa Park (Attachment No. 2). The Central Mesa Precise Plan was developed to further define the goals and objectives of the Master Plan for this unique area of the Park (Attachment No. 3). All proposed projects for the Park are reviewed by staff by using these documents as the guideline for development. The primary zoo leasehold is not within the Precise Plan boundary. The Zoo parking lot leasehold is entirely within the Precise Plan boundary and is part of the War Memorial and Zoo Parking Lot Subarea. Since the Zoo is not a part of the Precise Plan, modifications to the Zoo were not contemplated in the original policy documents, therefore staff is requesting policy guidance related to three key areas in order to address the concerns raised by the Planning Commission and the citizen groups:

Land Use  
Parking and Circulation  
Historic Resources

---

Manager's Recommendation - None at this time on the specific project. Please refer to specific alternatives presented under each key issue.

Community Planning Group Recommendation - The project will be presented to various community planning groups once it begins processing through the Project Management Division of the Development Services Department.

Other Recommendations - None at this time. The project will be scheduled for recommendation from the Historic Resource Board, the Park and Recreation Board and

the Planning Commission in the future.

Environmental Impact - None with this action. An Environmental Impact Report will be prepared for the specific project in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

Fiscal Impact - None with this action. Future fiscal impacts will be analyzed once the Society submits a proposal on how the construction of the parking structure will be funded.

Code Enforcement Impact - None.

Housing Afford ability Impact - None.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Society submitted a proposed expansion project to the City of San Diego in April of 1999. The project proposed was to expand the existing leasehold by approximately 25 acres within the following areas of Balboa Park: Public parking lot adjacent to the Zoo, War Memorial Building, Archery Range, Miniature Train/Carousel, Richmond Street Off-Ramp Parcel and the parking Area adjacent to the Botanical Building (Attachment No. 4 Site Plan for the original project dated 4/99.)

### **Planning Commission Initiation:**

The proposal was initiated by the Planning Commission in June 1999. As part of the Commission's initiation action, staff was directed to analyze subsequent proposals from the Zoo in relation to several key issues which are summarized in the Planning Commission Resolution as follows:

1. *The policy issues related to the conversion of public parkland to a private leasehold and other issues identified in the discussion section of Planning Commission Report No. P99-084.*
2. *Recommendations or issues described in the letters received from Citizens Coordinate for Century 3 (June 16, 1999), partners for Livable Places/San Diego (February 18, 1999), San Diego Council of Design Professionals (June 15, 1999) and the American Society of Landscapes Architects (June 17, 1999).*
3. *Comments made at the public hearing on June 17, 1999, related to the demolition of the War Memorial Building, inclusion of the War Memorial Building site into the Zoo leasehold boundary; creation of a parking structure on the current site of the War Memorial building; consideration of the pay-to-park parking structure; the timing and the site selection for relocation of the archery range and inclusion of the train and carousel within the Zoo leasehold boundary.*
4. *Comments and recommendations made at future workshops conducted with the Planning Commission.*
5. *Other issues that may be raised in future public forums conducted with the Board and Commissions identified in the Central Mesa Precise Plan; the Uptown, North Park, and Golden Hill Community Groups; and other special interest groups, including the War Memorial Building users, the Archers and the Girl Scouts of America.*

6. *The War Memorial Building user requirements.*
7. *The relationship between the Zoo and the Wild Animal Park as one operation.*
8. *The interface between the Zoo and existing land uses in the surrounding community.*
9. *The impact to all of Balboa Park and the relationship to the existing Master Plan and Precise Plan.*

**It is direction on some of these key issues that staff is seeking from the Natural Resources and Cultural Committee. Specifically, Land Use; Parking and Circulation; Historic Resources.**

At the Planning Commission Initiation hearing and at a subsequent public workshop held in September 1999, numerous organizational representatives, community planning groups and citizens continued to raise a variety of concerns related to the proposed project.

In response to those concerns, the Society elected to place its project on hold in order to develop a collaborative method that would allow more direct public input into the process.

In February 2000, The City of San Diego formed the “Working Group”, a 40 member citizens group consisting of representatives from a variety of organizations including community planning groups, design professionals, veteran’s groups, Balboa Park institutions, landowners and residents, as well as business, civic and environmental organizations (Attachment 5).

**The stated purpose of the Working Group was to:**

***“Develop options which integrate the needs and interests of the Zoo, other Balboa Park Institutions, users and neighbors and the San Diego Community at large.”***

Approximately twenty-five public meetings were held with the main Working Group. Additionally, approximately twenty of the meetings were held with various subcommittees. Some of the topics presented included planning and land use issues related to the Balboa Park Master and Precise Plans, parking and circulation issues, Zoo space needs and a review of environmental and historical resources. Several of the meetings included presentations by local community planning groups and organizations, including members of the Working Group, as well as San Diego City College, the Navy, the Park and Recreation Department and, the Center City Development Corporation.

These meetings included a Design Charrette, a hands-on workshop, whereby the Working Group as well as members of the general public, were invited to develop and consider design options related to several areas such as potential Zoo expansion areas, parking lot and parking structure locations, open parkland areas, pedestrian and vehicular routes, mass transit opportunities and Zoo and Park entries. These series of meetings ended in December 2000.

To memorialize their efforts, the Working Group prepared a report titled “The Final Working Group Report” dated December 2000 which documents their experience together, provides a detailed analysis of the common design options derived from the Charrette process and, outlines suggested proposed criteria for the evaluation of proposed amendments to the Master Plan documents. (Attachment No.6, “Final Working Group Report December 2000”). The Society indicated that they would use this document to guide them in the preparation of a revised project proposal. That revised project is about to begin processing with the Project Management

Division of the Development Services Department. Staff will also refer to this document in its analysis of the proposal submitted by the Society.

In June of 2001, the Society submitted a revised proposal to the Project Management Division Development Services Department. Staff is currently working with the Society on those items necessary to deem the project complete so that the formal review process may begin. In response to the issues raised during the Working Group discussions, the project has been revised from what was presented to Planning Commission in June of 1999 (Attachment No. 7, Site Plan of Revised Project) dated 6/01). Staff anticipates a complete submittal by November 2001.

In their application, the Society has stated that the project as proposed includes the following elements:

1. Proposed areas to be included total 1.01 acres and are shown on Attachment No.8, "Areas Proposed to be Added as Leaseholds":

The area adjacent to Richmond Street exit (Parcel A, .72 acres)

The area at the new entry of the Zoo (Parcel B, .29 acres)

Proposed areas to be deleted total 2.43 acres and are shown on Attachment No. 9, "Areas Proposed to be Deleted as leaseholds":

The area adjacent to Spanish Village (Parcel D, .65 acres)

The area adjacent to Park Boulevard (Parcel E, .73 acres)

The Society has indicated that this would result in a loss of 1.42 acres.

2. Removal of the existing parking lot for the construction of a proposed five-level parking structure and new exhibit area. With respect to the pay-to-park issues, the Society has not submitted a financing plan with the preliminary proposal and has stated that the funding source is unknown at this time.
3. Modifications to the National Historic Landmark Zone.
4. A new Zoo entry in closer proximity to Park Boulevard. A new pedestrian promenade connecting the Zoo entry to the Prado fountain.
5. Elimination of the existing pedestrian bridge currently located near the Rose Garden. Construction of a new pedestrian bridge located north of this location.
6. Relocation of the Carousel and Miniature Railroad Train.

## **DISCUSSION**

The following three main issues require policy direction in order for staff to review the proposed plan amendments. The three main issues deal with 1) Land Use Policy, 2) Parking and Circulation; and 3) Historical Resources. The issues are found within the Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan. Policy direction on these issues will allow staff to study the proposed plan amendment and come forward at a later date with a recommendation.

## **Issues:**

## **A. Land Use Issues**

The Goals and Plan Summary section of the Central Mesa Precise Plan (Precise Plan) incorporates specific objectives that should be used to measure future projects with the Central Mesa Study Area. The primary zoo leasehold is not within the Precise Plan boundary.

As part of the Commission's initiation action, staff was directed to analyze subsequent Land Use proposals from the Zoo with the following considerations:

*The policy issues related to the conversion of public parkland to a private leasehold and other issues identified in the discussion section of Planning Commission Report No. P99-084.*

*The War Memorial Building user requirements.*

### **Policy direction requested:**

- 1. Should the Zoo leasehold be permitted to expand beyond their current leasehold?**
- 2. If so, what are the primary Land Use Goals which should be used to measure the appropriateness of the expansion?**

### **Current Policy Document Recommendations**

The Central Mesa Precise Plan includes approximately 193 acres. The fenced in area of the Zoo leasehold is approximately 100 acres. Of the 293 acres that constitute the Central Mesa area of Balboa Park, 54% is held in private leaseholds, the largest three leaseholds are the Zoo (124.03 acres), the Japanese Friendship Garden (12.6 acres) and the Miniature Railroad (3.8 acres). The remaining 135 acres in the Central Mesa are made up of parking lots (45 acres), restricted areas (28.3 acres) and free and open park land (61.7 acres).

One of the major goals of the Balboa Park Master Plan is to preserve, enhance and increase free and open parkland. The Plan states that free and open park land is a dwindling resource which must be protected and recovered from encroaching uses wherever possible.

The Precise Plan states that, because there is a finite amount of land in the Central Mesa, future attendance growth in the park will require a greater amount of public open space to maintain the same quality park experience that exists today.

The Precise Plan recognizes that cultural institutions and organizations will outgrow their facilities and they should be encouraged to expand their programs to locations outside the Park, so as to preserve a park environment in the Central Mesa (page 171).

Under the Land Use objectives the Plan, several recommendations are outlined including the following: expand open public park land, minimize all building expansions, minimize new roads and parking areas and minimize new restricted use areas.

### **Land Use Facts and Figures**

Of the original 1,400 acres set aside by the Board of Trustees for the City of San Diego in 1868, the State of California in 1868 and the Federal Government in 1874, there are 1,172.86 acres remaining as public park land. Within the remaining acreage there are the following land uses:

24% of the land (283.6) is held in restricted areas (largest area being the Golf Course at 243.5 acres)

23% of the land (268 acres) as free recreational land (largest area being West Mesa along 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue at 90 acres)

22.5% of the land (264.83 acres) as private leaseholds (largest private lease being the Zoo at 100 acres)

18% of the land is natural areas and canyons

11.5% of the land is parking lots and roads

1% if the land is Park and Recreation Facilities.

### **Working Group Recommendations:**

The Working Group's generalized criteria for evaluating proposed amendments to the Policy documents regarding land use (page 9):

The proposal should efficiently and effectively use land within the existing defined leasehold and explore off-site options for shared land uses as a precursor to proposing expansion.

The proposal should be complimentary with adjacent uses.

The proposal should enhance public use of the Park; at a minimum accomplish a "no net loss" of free and open parkland and preserve natural environments. Ideally the proposal should increase both. (This criteria was in response to the presentation on park needs in the year 2020, where the communities surrounding the park will be short parkland by 393.87 acres based on projected population.

### **Land Use Policy Considerations:**

The following are a few alternatives which could be used to evaluate the proposed project, if so directed by NR&C. These are not currently policies that govern the Zoo leasehold:

- a. Establish use thresholds within Balboa Park, similar to Mission Bay Park where no more than 25% of the public parkland can be within private leaseholds.
- b. Allow expansions provided that recommendations/goals of the Precise Plan are implemented.

### **B. Parking and Circulation Issues:**

The policy documents do not address the San Diego Zoo specifically with respect to parking and circulation other than the requirement that the existing "Zoo parking lot" be brought into compliance with city-wide landscape standards when improvements are proposed.

As part of the Commission's initiation action, staff was directed to analyze subsequent proposals from the Zoo with the following considerations:

*The policy issues related to the conversion of public parkland to a private leasehold and other issues identified in the discussion section of Planning*

*Commission Report No. P99-084.*

*The interface between the Zoo and existing land uses in the surrounding community.*

*The impact to all of Balboa Park and the relationship to the existing Master Plan and Precise Plan.*

**Policy direction requested:**

- 1. What would be the criteria for the location and size of the proposed parking structure?**
- 2. Who should have access to the structure?**

**Current Policy Document Recommendations:**

The Balboa Park Master Plan parking and circulation elements states that existing parking areas should be expanded and new parking facilities will not be located within the Park unless:

It is demonstrated that offside parking and/or transportation alternatives have not, after an adequate period of testing and use, provided adequate accessibility; and

An equal or greater amount of usable open park land is recovered through the provision of parking facilities.” In addition, the Plan states that “Additional parking for the Central Mesa area of the Park shall be provided through off-site shared parking facilities in a manner that supports increased transit and shuttle access to the Park.”

A circulation goal of the Central Mesa Precise Plan states that a pedestrian park environment should be established that features public transportation use while providing adequate vehicular access to and within the Central Mesa. The Plan further outlines that parking should be increased by the following measures:

A proposed parking a 1,500 space parking structure behind the Organ Pavilion.

The re-striping of lots to allow for compact spaces by relegating large bus and recreational vehicle parking to the perimeter of the park

Prioritizing parking with designated lengths of stay by providing tram service to long term parking lots during the peak hours and by encouraging Park Institutions to provide a joint shuttle service for employees who park in long term lots.

**Parking and Circulation Facts and Figures:**

Currently the Central Mesa area of Balboa Park contains approximately 5,779 public parking spaces. The largest parking lot in the Park is the parking lot adjacent to the Zoo, containing approximately 3,016 spaces. This parking lot is part of the Zoo lease, but the lease specifically states that this area will be used for zoo and park users at all times and that a fee can not be charged unless approved by the Council. The next largest parking lot is found at Inspiration Point containing approximately 1,232 parking spaces.

In the year 2020 future parking needs in the Central Mesa area would be: Zoo needs 4,216 spaces, Museums needs 3,180 spaces and the park needs 2,538 spaces. This is a total of 9,934 spaces and

with the present parking and the addition of the approved parking structure behind the Organ Pavilion (an addition of 753 spaces, making the total 7412 spaces) it is anticipated that there will be a shortage of 2,522 parking spaces in 2020.

These numbers do not take into account the parking needs of the Naval Hospital (who leases park land from the City for parking) and the adjacent City College users. To accommodate parking needs and maintain the amount of public park land, parking structures are identified as an alternative.

### **Working Group Recommendations:**

The Working Group's Final Report includes generalized criteria for evaluating proposed amendments to the Policy documents regarding parking and circulation on page 9:

The proposal should create attractive and pleasant pedestrian linkages that provide an enjoyable park experience for visitors between major park activity centers.

The proposal should integrate a comprehensive and user friendly public transit and/or tram system as part of the new park use of improvements.

The proposal should provide sufficient access, including mass transit, parking, pedestrian ways, etc., for intensified land uses.

### **Parking and Circulation Policy Considerations:**

The following are a few alternatives which could be used to evaluate the proposed project, if so directed by NR&C. These are not currently policies that govern the Zoo leasehold:

- a. Provide small parking structures throughout the park in existing parking lots.
- b. Require that all new parking be located off-site and public/park transit be provided to serve users.

### **C. Historic Resource Issues:**

#### **Current Policy Document Recommendations:**

The Balboa Park Master Plan's historic preservation goal states that:

*“Buildings, arches, plazas and horticultural elements which contribute to the local historic designation and the National Historic District status of the park should be preserved, maintained and enhanced. Rehabilitation and new construction should respect the historical and architectural character of the existing historic structures, arched, plazas and horticultural element of the Park (page 10).”*

All proposed changes and alterations to historic resources are required to meet the U.S. Secretary of Interior Standards and the local Historic Resource Board will make the determination on whether these Standards have been met.

As part of the Commission's initiation action, staff was directed to analyze subsequent proposals from the Zoo with the following considerations:

*The policy issues related to the conversion of public parkland to a private leasehold and other issues identified in the discussion section of Planning*



**Policy direction requested:**

- 1. Should the City consider plan amendments that could alter or impact the National Historic Landmark District?**
- 2. If so, should the City re-map the District maintaining the same acreage and historic thresholds?**

**Historic Resources Facts and Figures:**

The Local Historical Site Board designated the El Prado Area of Balboa Park as City Historical Site Number 1 on September 7, 1967. In February 1978, the sites of the 1915 and 1935 Expositions were granted National Historic Landmark status by the National Park Service. This is the highest level of historical designation given by the Federal Government to a historical area. There are only a few Landmark Districts in the United States, which includes the Washington Mall and Central Park. The Landmark District status has made Balboa Park a worldwide tourist destination for historic places. The Landmark status also makes Balboa Park eligible for a variety of benefits including federal grants, loans, and legal protection. The Federal laws such as the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and the State laws such as the California Environmental Quality Act provide protection for properties and Landmark areas.

The Miniature Train became the newest attraction for the youngsters of Balboa Park in November 1948. The original 1948 train number 510 (10<sup>th</sup> one built) was designed to be one-fifth scale, approximately 3 feet high, 3 feet wide and 75 feet long. Approximately 500 G16 trains were built by the Miniature Train Company in the late 1940'. It is estimated that less than 100 and perhaps as few as 50 remain today. The Miniature Train is a 3 minute, mile trip through 3.67 acres of Balboa Park. In 1998 the Zoological Society purchased the actual train and train tracks from David Weir with a three year lease. The three year lease expires September 30, 2001 and the Zoo will have use of the land on a month to month basis.

The historic Balboa Park Carousel was made in New York city in 1910. The Carousel was permanently settle in the Park in 1922 at the Plaza de Balboa. It was moved in 1968 to its current location as part of the new Balboa Park Master Plan. In 1988, the Historic Site Board amended the local historic site and National Historic Landmark designations to include the Carousel and the Miniature Train. Attachment 10, Graphic of Proposed (revised) National Historic Landmark Zone.

**Working Group Recommendations:**

In their Final Report, the Working Group developed generalized criteria for evaluating proposed amendments to the Policy documents regarding Historical Resources, Architecture and Landscape (page 10). Several of the criteria addresses historic resources and include the following:

The proposal should respect and enhance the historic cultural resources of Balboa Park

The proposal should keep and maintain the integrity of existing historical resources within Balboa Park.

## CONCLUSION

The private leaseholds in the Central Mesa area of Balboa Park have been in the park since 1915 and have made this area of the park a cultural center for not only the citizens of San Diego but for the world. As stated in the Central Mesa Precise Plan Vision:

*“Our challenge today is to build on the guiding principles that gave birth to the Central Mesa’s greatness. We must do this in the context of the changes and opportunities which begin to occur the moment the perimeter fences of the first Exposition were dismantled and the real world flowed in. Our opportunity is to reconcile the real and the ideal and provide a place for all people to enjoy. We must preserve the qualities that make the Central Mesa unique, enhance its present value and usefulness, and transfer the vision to succeeding in generations of San Diegans.”*

As our population continues grow, we look to provide increasing housing opportunities while enhancing our quality of life. The proposed Zoo project is part of a unique recreational and cultural character within San Diego.

Staff is seeking direction on key policy issues to review the proposed project while balancing these goals and objectives.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Marcia C. McLatchy  
Park and Recreation Director

Tina P. Christiansen, A.I.A.  
Development Services Director

Approved: George I. Loveland  
Senior Deputy City Manager

SMT:dj

Note: Attachment Nos. 2 and 3 are not available in electronic format. A copy is available for review in the Office of the City Clerk.

ATTACHMENTS: 1.Planning Commission Report No. P99-089  
2.Balboa Park Master Plan dated 7/25/89  
3.Central Mesa Precise Plan dated 10/20/91  
4.Site Plan for original project dated 4/99  
5.Listing of Working Group members  
6.Final Working Group Report dated 12/00  
7.Site Plan of Revised project dated 6/01  
8.Graphic of leasehold added areas  
9.Graphic of leasehold deleted areas  
10.Graphic of Proposed (revised) National Historic Landmark Zone

Note: Due to the size of Attachment Nos. 2, 3, and 6, only a limited distribution was made in hard

copy format. Copies of the attachments are available for review in the Office of the City Clerk.