

DATE ISSUED: January 25, 2002 REPORT NO. 02-026

ATTENTION: Natural Resources and Culture Committee
Agenda of January 30, 2002

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

REFERENCE: Manager's Report to the Natural Resources and Cultural Committee
Report No. 10-203 dated September 27, 2001

OWNER/
APPLICANT: City of San Diego

SUMMARY

Issues - 1) Today's meeting is the first quarterly workshop to provide a status update to the NR&C Committee and the Planning Commission on the Zoological Society of San Diego's proposed project (Attachment No. 1).

Manager's Recommendation - None at this time.

Community Planning Group Recommendation - The project will be presented to various community planning groups beginning in February 2002. Those groups are:

The Balboa Park Committee
The Uptown Community Planning Group
The Greater Golden Hill Community Planning Group
The Greater North Park Community Planning Group

Other Recommendations - None at this time. The project will be presented to the Historical Resources Board (HRB) for their recommendation. Staff is currently working with subcommittees of the HRB as the project moves forward. Additionally, quarterly workshops such as this one are being held with the Planning Commission. The project will be scheduled for recommendation from the Historical Resources Board, the Park and Recreation Board and the Planning Commission in the future.

Environmental Impact - The environmental review process has begun. On December 19, 2001, a Notice of Preparation and Scoping Letter was issued to the applicant which identifies issues to be addressed/discussed in the Environmental Impact Report (Attachment No. 2).

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 Affordability Impact - None.

BACKGROUND

The proposed Park Boulevard Promenade project was presented to the Natural Resources and Culture Committee on October 3, 2001. The purpose of that meeting was to provide staff with policy direction on Land Use, Parking and Circulation and Historic Resource issues related to the Zoological Society of San Diego's (Society) proposed modifications to the San Diego Zoo. The subsequent motion from that meeting provided staff with general policy guidance related to these and other issues. Those key issue areas will be outlined in the "Project Elements/Policy Direction" section of this report. Staff were also directed to schedule quarterly joint workshops with NR&C and the members of the Planning Commission and to report back in January 2002 with a status update of the proposed project.

In October 24, 2001, the Society submitted their proposed project to the Project Management Division of the Development Services Department. The project is a Plan Amendment to the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan for the construction of a proposed four-level, below grade parking structure located in the area of the Miniature Train leasehold and the existing park parking lots; creation of a new pedestrian promenade, above the parking structure, linking the Zoo entrance to the Prado; relocation of the Carousel and Miniature Train leasehold; and creation of a new transit center on Park Blvd. Additionally, a new signal on Park Boulevard and a 300-space, employee parking lot is proposed off of Richmond Street. The proposal includes modifications to the existing National Historic Landmark Zone (NHLZ).

CURRENT PROJECT STATUS

Staff representing various disciplines reviewed the project and have completed their initial review. On December 11, 2001, the Project Management Division issued the first project assessment letter to the Society (Attachment No. 3). The assessment letter details the additional information required by staff in order to gain a complete understanding of the project components, outlines clarifications necessary on the submitted plan graphics, and, requests specific technical reports required for the project.

Additionally, staff have determined that the proposed project potentially modifies several sections of both the Balboa Park Master Plan and more specifically, the Central Mesa Precise Plan. As such, the Society was directed to submit strikeout/underline plan amendment language of both documents for City staff to review.

As of this writing, the Society has not yet resubmitted the proposed project clarifications, technical reports and plan amendment language. However City staff have conducted numerous meetings with the Society to guide them in the preparation of the requested information and in

the level of detail and scope required in the necessary technical reports for the proposed project. It is anticipated that the project and the requested reports will be resubmitted to the Project Management Division within the next month.

PROJECT ELEMENTS/POLICY DIRECTION

The NR&C Committee provided staff with preliminary policy direction in three key issue areas: Land Use, Parking and Circulation, and Historical Resources (Attachment No. 4). Additionally, three significant policy questions were raised in a memorandum from Council Member Atkins dated October 2, 2001 (Attachment No. 5). This memorandum was subsequently included into the NR&C motion. These policy questions are listed below:

1. *“Will this project be of benefit to the whole of Balboa Park?”*
2. *“Is it consistent with the broader themes and objectives of the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan?”*
3. *“Is input from the community being respected and incorporated?”*

With respect to questions number 1 and 2, staff will continue this analysis throughout the review of the proposed plan amendments. Concerning question number 3, as part of the action plan for this project, staff is scheduled to go out to the community to present the project and to obtain feedback from the local community planning groups (Attachment No. 6). Additionally, staff will incorporate the Working Group’s recommended criteria in its review of the proposal. To further keep the public apprised throughout the processing, staff is in the process of updating our web site for this project in order to make the information for the public more user friendly and accessible.

The following is the current status of our analysis of some of the key issues raised as well as an analysis of the specific staff directed motion items.

A. Land Use:

The NR&C Committee gave direction to staff to continue its review of the proposed modifications to the Society’s leasehold. Policy issues discussed related to the potential for establishing use thresholds within Balboa Park. Another land use consideration discussed was whether or not the proposed project would implement the goals and recommendations of the Central Mesa Precise Plan.

An initial review of the project indicates that the proposed project implements several of the existing major plan goals, including maximizing pedestrian experience and, providing a “green” link between the War Memorial lawn area and the Prado area. However, land use issues are under analysis to determine the project’s potential impacts, if any, to surrounding uses; parking and circulation; and, public accessibility to existing free and open park land. Consistency with the Master and Precise Plans is under evaluation and more information will be presented at the next quarterly update.

These are nine land use goals/objectives within the policy documents:

1. Expand open public park land.
2. Minimize all building expansions.
3. Minimize new roads and parking areas.
4. Minimize new restricted use areas.
5. Support and encourage cultural activities on the Central Mesa.
6. Develop a mechanism for cultural institutions and organizations on the Central Mesa to expand their facilities to Centre City and other areas.
7. Create new outdoor public spaces to support expanded cultural activities throughout the Central Mesa.
8. Distribute visitor activities through the Central Mesa to reduce reliance on existing high use areas.
9. Increase winter season and evening use of the Central Mesa.

B. Parking and Circulation:

The NR&C discussed several issues related to parking and circulation. Staff were directed to conduct a comprehensive review of potential parking structures in other locations in the Park, and to make certain that this review would be a part of the Environmental Impact Report. A review of public/park transit was to be included.

Preliminary review of the project includes elements which could modify existing circulation and parking in the Central Mesa area. These include the proposed relocation of the Zoo's main entrance and construction of a parking structure, the separation of the main entry from a group entry, and the siting of an employee parking lot off Richmond Street. Circulation along Park Boulevard and to the other Central Mesa cultural institutions could be impacted. Additionally, the location and supply of parking within the Central Mesa is proposed to be modified. A comprehensive analysis of the potential impacts to these 3 project elements will become a part of the EIR.

C. Historical Resources:

The proposed project requires a Site Development Permit as modifications to the National Historic Landmark Zone are proposed. These include relocation of the Zoo's entry, relocation of the Carousel and Miniature Train Depot, and changes to the NHLZ boundaries. Because a portion of the Zoo is within both City Historical Landmark #1, and the National Register Landmark District, the Historical Resources Board will review the proposal for consistency with US Secretary of Interior Standards.

Within the Historical District/Site two historical features, the Carousel and the Miniature Train will be relocated. This relocation will cause the Historic District/Site boundaries to change. The War Memorial Building which is another City Historical Landmark and National Register Site, will be linked to the El Prado.

An Historic Report is required for the project and the review will become a part of the Environmental Impact Report.

DISCUSSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CULTURE COMMITTEE MEETING
10/3/01 MOTION

On October 3, 2001, the Natural Resources and Culture Committee made a motion which gave initial direction to staff in several key areas pertaining to Land Use, Parking and Circulation and Historic Resources. At this early stage in the review process, many of the issues identified in the motion are still being analyzed therefore, not all of them are presented in this report. The following is staff's preliminary analysis of those items, based upon our initial review of the project:

- 1) ***“Initially reconcile parking details with the vision in the Central Mesa Precise Plan and Balboa Park Master Plan.”***
- 2) ***“Look comprehensively at the potential of an additional parking structure within the west end of Balboa Park, in addition to the mass transit component.”***
- 5) ***“Ensure that traffic and circulation analysis is part of the project’s Environmental Impact Report.”***
- 6) ***“Provide an analysis of a “paid versus free” public parking structure, while acknowledging expressed opposition to both options.”***

The Precise Plan calls for only one parking structure to be located behind the Organ Pavilion. This structure is to provide 1,000 to 1,500 parking spaces and is intended to remove the parking in the Prado and Palisades area to this location in order to make these areas of the park a pedestrian space.

The Working Group stated in their final report (dated 12-14-00) options for parking structures based on the design Charette results, page 17- 22. The locations are listed in order of preference: Inspiration Point, Organ Pavilion, Within Zoo Lot, Area of Spanish Village and Under the Rose Garden.

The plan amendment now being processed by the Society will update the current parking numbers based on an actual field count. The number will differ from those in the 1989 Master Plan due to restriping and Municipal Code changes on parking space standards. An evaluation of additional opportunities to increase parking spaces and improve vehicle transit access will be part of a future update of the Balboa Park Master Plan. This plan update is proposed to begin within the next year.

As part of the environmental analysis, the Environmental Impact Report will include an analysis of the potential for other parking structures and locations, a traffic and circulation analysis and the “paid versus free” concept. The request to analyze alternative potential parking lot/structures would include the Organ Pavilion location, the area of Spanish Village and an area underneath the Rose Garden. The Transportation and Circulation/Parking Study required for the project will be included in the environmental document and will include an

appropriate analysis of potential project impacts and will include a “pay versus free” public parking alternative within the proposed structure. The report will include an analysis of how transit and pedestrian accessibility could be enhanced by the proposed changes along Park Boulevard, and include an analysis of how the proposed circulation and parking changes might affect Spanish Village and other museums/cultural institutions in the Central Mesa area. The report has not yet been submitted.

The Society has indicated that they have employed a financial consulting team to assist in evaluating and recommending a realistic financing package for the proposed project. Introductory information on the consulting team will be distributed at the January 30, 2002 NR&C/PC workshop. At future NR&C joint workshops, information of options will be shared for discussion. Other Balboa Park institutions and the City Treasurer’s Office are participating with the Society in evaluating options and considering a realistic financing package for the proposed project.

Staff anticipates that additional details and analysis will be incorporated into the Parking Study as information becomes available regarding the financing of the proposed parking structure, the pedestrian bridge and, the potential for developing a second Balboa Park structure in the Organ Pavilion area.

3) *“Review space needs and options within the right-of-way for Park Boulevard for mass transit, landscaping etc.”*

The proposed plan amendments will address the provision of accessibility of transit and pedestrian accessibility by the proposed changes to Park Boulevard. The review will include an analysis of how much (if any) park land would be removed in order to create mass transit lanes.

The Metropolitan Transit Development Board has reviewed the proposed project and has indicated that the new proposed bus/transit facility proposed within the Park Boulevard right-of-way are conceptually consistent with the goals and objectives of MTDB’s Transit First strategic plan (Attachment No. 3, pages 15 and 16). Specific details and options on transit station design are being evaluated as part of an on-going MTDB effort work effort. As part of the proposed project, City staff will coordinate with the Society and MTDB on the location and general design of a new transit station and pedestrian overpass that maintains options for the ultimate transit station design.

7) *“Review management of the current Balboa Park and Mission Bay Park funds that were allocated for the Parks but may have been borrowed and spent elsewhere for other projects.”*

Four point one million dollars in Transient Occupancy Tax funds were utilized for the construction of the Central Area Police Substation with the agreement that the funds be repaid in regular installments. Four million dollars have been repaid, with the last payment of one hundred thousand dollars to be made in October of 2002.

8) *“Look at guidelines for how much Balboa Park acreage should be free and open to the public and how much should be leased out for private uses.”*

Currently, there are no specific limitations on leaseholds within Balboa Park. Below is a listing of the current facts on land areas devoted to leaseholds:

Facts and Figures for all of Balboa Park:

Original Acreage 1,400 acres

Park Acreage today 1,172.86 acres

LAND USE CATEGORY	ACRES	% OF PARK (of the 1,400 acres)
Total Restricted Areas	283.6 acres	24% of park
(Example: Balboa Golf Course, Archery Range, City Operation Center)		
Total Recreation Areas	268 acres	23% of park
(Example: Turf areas and fields)		
Private Leaseholds	264.83 acres	22.5% of park
Natural Areas/Canyons	213.4 acres	18% of park
Parking Lots and Roads	133.93 acres	11.5% of park
Park and Rec Buildings	9.1 acres	1% of park

Current Facts and Figures for Central Mesa Area and the Zoo Area

Acreage per Precise Plan 193 acres + Zoo leasehold 124.03 acres = 317.03 acres

Private Leaseholds in the Central Mesa 160.03 acres 50.47% of Central Mesa Area

10) Look at the current Historic Landmark Zone acreage with what is being proposed, with the objective of no net acreage loss.

An Historical Report must be submitted for the proposed project and will be a significant part of the EIR. A detailed analysis of the project’s proposed alterations to the National Historic Landmark Zone (NHLZ) will be addressed. Initial Research reveals that there is some confusion regarding the current NHLZ boundaries established by the National Park Service (NPS). Although this issue is independent of the Society’s proposal, City staff and the applicant are working with the State Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service staff to clarify the exact boundary location. The boundary clarification will provide staff with the necessary tools to fully evaluate whether a “no net acreage loss” can be accomplished with the processing of the proposed project.

11) “Incorporate the Zoo Working group’s generalized criteria for evaluating plan amendments.”

City staff will incorporate the Working Group’s recommended criteria in its evaluation of the project once the project is resubmitted (Attachment No. 7).

12) “Review the American Disabilities Act issues associated with this project.”

All projects on City land or funded by City funds are required to meet ADA requirements. The plan amendments will include guidelines that assure that the project level design complies with these regulations.

CONCLUSION

Staff continues to work with the Society on those items and technical reports necessary for staff review to begin the formal environmental review process. The project was presented to a subcommittee of the Historical Resources Board in December 2001 for early input into the project design. Community Planning Group meetings are scheduled for February 2001 and March 2001 to allow early community input in the process. The next joint meeting for NR&C and the Planning Commission is scheduled for April 2002.

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce A. Herring

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..... Approved: P. Lamont Ewell

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CHRISTIANSEN/TEASLEY

Attachments: [1a. Zoo Submittal - Amendments to the BPMP and CMPP](#)

[1b. Zoo Submittal - Application for the Site Development Permit](#)

[1c. Zoo Submittal - Concept Plan](#)

[2. Notice of Preparation/Scoping Letter](#)

[3. Project Assessment Letter](#)

[4. NR&C 10/3/01 Motion](#)

[5. Council Member Atkins Memorandum dated 10/02/01](#)

[6. Project Timeline](#)

[7. Working Group Criteria](#)