



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE ISSUED: July 13, 2006 REPORT NO. 06-095

ATTENTION: Land Use and Housing Committee
Agenda of July 19, 2006

SUBJECT: General Plan Update Workshop – Recreation Element

REFERENCE: Manager’s Report Nos. 03-019, 03-115, 03-204, 03-205, 03-206, 04-149,
05-038, 05-161
Council Report No. 06-025
Planning Commission Report Nos. P-03-183, P-03-227, P-03-333, PC-04-220,
PC-05-070, PC-05-183, PC-05-261, PC-05-304

REQUESTED ACTION:

Provide policy suggestions on the new working draft of the General Plan Recreation Element.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Direct staff to continue to refine the draft Recreation Element in preparation for public hearings later this year.

SUMMARY:

BACKGROUND

The General Plan update is underway to replace the 1979 Progress Guide and General Plan (1979 General Plan). The update has been guided by the City of Villages strategy and citywide policy direction contained within the General Plan Strategic Framework Element, which was adopted by the City Council on October 22, 2002. The Recreation Element is one of ten elements proposed as part of the General Plan. The City of San Diego (City) is world famous for its many beaches, parks, open spaces and countless recreational amenities and facilities. Updating the Recreation Element of the General Plan will set the course on how the City handles recreational issues as the City continues to grow over the next 20-30 years.

San Diego has a history of protecting its open spaces and natural systems and providing exceptional recreational opportunities that attract visitors worldwide. Park lands have been acquired by the City through various ways, including: bond measure revenues, exactions from subdividers, development impact fees, development agreements/extraordinary benefits,

bequeaths, donations, opportunity purchases using local park fees, state and federal grants, sales tax revenues and sales of City-owned land.

In order to understand the existing baseline attitude of the public toward recreation facilities in the City, and to provide insights to the development of refined standards and a future Parks Master Plan, the Planning Department commissioned a *Public Attitude Survey of San Diego City Parks and Recreation*. Results from the final survey (December 2004) are outlined below and helped to form the foundation for the proposed policies in the Recreation Element. Key findings include:

- The City as a whole has nearly all of the recreation facility-types that residents want.
- Regional parks (beaches/Balboa Park) and neighborhood parks are the most visited.
- A better distribution of specialized facilities such as dog parks, swimming pools, sports courts and skate parks is desired.
- Residents would prefer to improve, and maintain existing facilities rather than build new facilities.

Given the overall positive response to the existing recreation facilities, the challenge will be to maintain and improve the level of satisfaction while accommodating future population growth. In order to address this issue, the survey suggests the City develop policies that:

- Place greater resources into the maintenance and improvement of existing facilities;
- Locate recreation facilities, especially general purpose passive parks with facilities such as playgrounds, walking trails, swimming pools, or sports courts, in regions of the City perceived as lacking;
- Improve accessibility and overall maintenance of existing facilities; and
- Capitalize on the City's natural environment, beach/ocean access and open spaces.

DISCUSSION

The draft July 2006 Recreation Element (Attachment 1) contains policies which are intended to result in increased and enhanced public recreation opportunities and facilities throughout the City for all users. The proposed element provides policies to: achieve a wide range of recreational opportunities for a diverse population; protect and preserve our regional resources; provide timely facilities; direct preparation of a citywide Parks Master Plan; and create a system of trails linking neighborhoods, parks, and open space. The Recreation Element is divided into six issue areas containing goals and policies addressing: 1) public access and recreational opportunities; 2) preservation of existing recreational facilities, and cultural, historic and open space resources; 3) accessibility of facilities and services; 4) cooperative efforts to attain parkland and facilities; 5) preservation and management of open space and resource-based parks; and, 6) guidelines for the provision of park and recreation facilities.

With only about four percent of the City's land vacant and available for development, the current update to the General Plan needs to provide greater definition to many of the broad policy initiatives that were set forth in the 1979 General Plan. These initiatives are further discussed below. The proposed Recreation Element also contains new and revised policies that were developed as a result of public outreach, surveys, workshops, community planning group input, and research.

The following provides a summary discussion of the six park and recreation issue areas addressed in the draft Recreation Element, with a focus on those topics that have received most attention from the public, the Community Planners Committee (CPC), the Park and Recreation Board, the Land Use and Housing Committee (LU&H) and Planning Commission.

A. PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

This section of the Recreation Element provides policies to ensure that a wide range of recreation uses and services are provided throughout the City, depending upon demographic and community needs. The following proposed policy has received a mixed response from stakeholders:

- Use portions of resource-based parks to satisfy neighborhood and community park guidelines (RE-A.4). (A companion policy [RE-F.14] also appears in Section F, Park and Recreation Guidelines, as discussed below.)

The proposed policy builds off of the 1979 General Plan language that acknowledges that “[r]esource-based parks are intended to preserve and make available areas of outstanding scenic, natural, or cultural interest . . . [h]owever, parts of them (e.g., Mission Bay Park and Balboa Park) can and do function to fulfill local neighborhood and community park needs of surrounding residents . . .” “Where appropriate, they may be developed with landscaping and recreation facilities. Beaches should have adequate restrooms. In general, development and amenities should not impair the feature or resource that motivates the resource-based park (p. 165).” In accordance with this policy, portions of Balboa Park, a resource-based park, are being used to satisfy some of the population based park needs of the surrounding communities per City Council direction for the Centre City area.

The proposed Parks Master Plan (see report discussion, Section F, below) could be used to develop the criteria and details of how the allowances/calculations would be implemented and documented. Until a Parks Master Plan is approved, interim criteria are needed to provide community safeguards and guidance for the review of discretionary proposals. These interim criteria could be in the form of an appendix to the General Plan, or other means.

B. PRESERVATION

This section focuses on policies to preserve, protect and enrich natural, cultural, and historic resources that serve as recreation facilities. Stakeholder input on this topic has been supportive of the policy language in this section. Key policies addressing citywide park and recreation preservation issues include the following:

- Acquire land abutting existing parks and open space lands to protect the integrity of the park, open space or resource, where appropriate (RE-B.2).
- Protect parks from over-commercialization and over-privatization (RE-B.7).
- Protect beaches and canyons from uncontrolled urban run off (RE-B.8).
- Require private recreation venues to provide assurances that the facility and programs are for public use (RE-B.11).

C. ACCESSIBILITY

This section of the Recreation Element complements the “Preservation of Existing Recreational Facilities” policies (Section B) and provides direction to ensure that park and recreation facilities and services are available to the greatest variety of users, integrated into the open space system, and include a balance of programmed and non-programmed uses. Stakeholder input has been supportive of the language in this section. Key policies addressing citywide park and recreation accessibility issues include the following:

- Equitably distribute specialized/amenity-based recreation facilities that are not feasibly located in most community parks based on broader service areas (RE-C.4).
- Provide safe and convenient linkages to and within park and recreation facilities and open space areas (RE-C.6).
- Balance the scheduling of programmed and non-programmed use of recreation facilities to provide access to a diversity of users (RE-C.8).

D. JOINT-USE AND COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

This section includes policies to maximize the efficient use of recreation space throughout the City by using joint-use and cooperative opportunities to attain parkland and facilities for public use. Stakeholder input on this topic has been supportive, with some concern over joint-use agreements with school districts.

The current working draft Recreation Element includes policies to:

- “Work with local school districts, colleges, and universities to expand development of on-campus joint-use recreation facilities including multi-purpose courts, parking lots, and multi-purpose athletic fields” (RE-D.2).
- “Negotiate and enter into joint-use agreements with school districts to help implement population-based park recommendations” (RE-D.11). In addition, sub-policies “a – c” limit total joint use acreage credits, and provide safeguards to ensure that joint use lands are made available to the public.

San Diego has a well-established history of developing successful joint-use recreation facilities. The City entered into its first joint-use agreement in September 1948 with the San Diego Unified School District. The City is now a party to approximately 100 similar agreements with the San Diego Unified, Solana Beach, Del Mar Union, Poway Unified, and San Ysidro School Districts. The 1979 General Plan considers the location next to a school facility as a benefit and potential community focal point, and provides a corresponding five acre (for neighborhood parks) and seven acre (for community parks) reduction in required acreage to meet population-based guidelines (p. 162). What has been a problem, that this General Plan update intends to correct, is that acre-for-acre credit has sometimes been given for joint use agreements that have not materialized.

E. OPEN SPACE LANDS AND RESOURCE-BASED PARKS

This section focuses on policies to protect and minimize alterations to our open space lands and resource-based park system by providing for sensitive planning, ensuring beaches are public, and preserving the natural elements of our park system as the City strives to maximize recreational opportunities for all users. Stakeholder input on this topic has been supportive. Key policies

addressing citywide park and recreation preservation and management issues include the following:

- Protect and enhance resource-based parks through planning and acquisition (RE-E.1).
- Provide for sensitive development of recreation uses within and adjacent to City-owned open space lands (RE-E.2).
- Acquire remaining private beaches within the City for public use and providing access to beaches, lakeshores, rivers, and streams (RE-E.3).

F. PARK AND RECREATION GUIDELINES

The concluding section of the Recreation Element provides policies to guide the City’s vision and goals for park and recreation facilities as we continue to grow citywide and within our individual communities. It provides population-based parks guidelines and calls for development of a Parks Master Plan. Element policies support: components of the “Canyonlands” initiative (discussed below); the use of creative methods of providing “equivalent” recreation facilities and infrastructure in constrained areas; and, implementation of providing a financing system to better fund park facility development and maintenance. Stakeholder input on this topic has focused on the need to create a citywide Parks Master Plan, the proposed policies for population-based park guidelines, and the use of “equivalencies” to achieve population-based guidelines, and park financing. Key proposed policies are:

- Develop a citywide Parks Master Plan (RE-F.2).
- Provide population-based parks guidelines of 2.8 net usable acres per 1,000 residents (RE-F.3).
- Where appropriate, use resource-based parks that satisfy neighborhood park and community park guidelines towards fulfilling population-based park needs (RE-F.14).
- Use Park and Recreation “Equivalencies,” as a means of providing quality park and recreation facilities and infrastructure where development of useable acres for active recreational purposes are limited by land constraints (RE-F.13). Sub-policy a.2 would limit the use of equivalencies to a maximum of 50 percent of the required lands.
- Use the State Subdivision Map Act/Quimby Act for collecting appropriate park land or fees from new subdivisions (RE-F.5).

The City Planning and Community Investment and Park and Recreation departments have been working on refining the population-based park guidelines based on previous input from CPC, LU&H, PC, the Park and Recreation Board, and other public/stakeholders, and review of data using current standards. The draft Recreation Element now contains language calling for a minimum ratio of 2.8 net usable acres per 1,000 residents. It is proposed that some of the 2.8 acres could be satisfied through the use of “equivalencies”, and through counting limited portions of resource-based parks.

EQUIVALENCIES

“Equivalencies” can be provided in the form of “alternatives,” a category of improvements that provide additional park land/recreation facility space; and “enhancements” which are physical improvements to existing park lands that do not add acreage or square footage. While the

provision of increased park acreage in underserved communities will still be aggressively sought, the use of “equivalencies” can play a significant role in meeting some of the City’s park and recreation needs in a timely manner. As the City evolves into a fully urbanized environment, the need for creative solutions to meet park and recreation needs has become increasingly important.

Important points to consider regarding this issue include the following:

1. The 1979 General Plan calls for flexibility in the implementation of park standards in areas that were developed prior to implementation of the 1979 standards. The 1979 General Plan recognized that there is “considerable variation among the various communities and areas of the City with respect to the actual facilities provided, total acreage, and acres/1000 population (page 160).” The 1979 General Plan further states:

“An ideal balance of recreational opportunities cannot be achieved through just citywide application of numerical standards for physical facilities. These standards are important, however, they should be used with discretion rather than mechanically. They are only a basic tool for guiding and evaluating the adequacy of service to a given area and to the City as a whole. Their application should be related to economic feasibility and the nature of the specific neighborhood or community, and should allow for flexibility as specific areas change or the needs and desires of the residents change (page 162).”

2. In newly developing communities (Facilities Benefit Assessment areas), a ratio of 2.4 useable acres per 1,000 residents has typically been applied. Under the 2.4 acre ratio scenario, the acreage of one neighborhood park is included within a community park for every 25,000 residents. In some cases, newer communities have developed at a reduced ratio due primarily to anticipated joint-use projects which did not materialize, and environmental and topographic constraints which yielded less park acreage than originally anticipated.

The proposed Parks Master Plan is intended to provide criteria on how the “equivalencies” would be applied. Interim criteria should be adopted as an appendix to the General Plan, or other means, until the Park Master Plan is prepared. In any case, equivalencies are proposed to be limited to a maximum of 50 percent of the required park lands.

3. Equivalency determinations would occur as part of the discretionary project review process, with findings to be made by the Park and Recreation Department.

PARKS MASTER PLAN

The draft Recreation Element includes the following policy calling for a Parks Master Plan:

- Develop a citywide Parks Master Plan that will inventory all City recreational uses and facilities; set priorities and develop implementation strategies to meet community needs; address inequitable access to recreational resources; and establish the basis for a sound financing mechanism to develop, enhance and maintain our parks (RE-F.2).

The Parks Master Plan would include, but not be limited to, the following information: existing conditions/needs assessment; Park and Recreation guidelines, including those for “equivalencies” that include credit toward fulfilling population-based parks; measures of

recreation performance; proposals for the integration of canyons, trails and pedestrian circulation linkages; prioritization procedures; and financing mechanisms.

CANYONLANDS

San Diego Civic Solutions has recently sponsored a community-based “Canyonlands” effort to protect and restore San Diego’s canyons. A presentation on the benefits and suggested strategy for the “Canyonlands” initiative was presented to the Natural Resources and Culture Committee (NR&C) on June 28, 2006. The NR&C requested that staff address this initiative as a part of the General Plan update, as well as other City programs. Currently, the draft General Plan supports the “Canyonlands” proposal through the following draft policies:

- Promote the preservation and management of the City’s canyons as a part of the Parks Master Plan. Acknowledge the many environmental and recreational benefits they provide (RE-F.2.f).
- Preserve and protect natural landforms and features (Urban Design Element (UD) -A.1).
- Use open space and landscape to define and link communities (UD-A.2).
- Design development adjacent to natural features in a sensitive manner to highlight and complement the natural environment in areas designated for development (UD-A.3, with additional detail pertaining to views, grading, visual and physical access contained in sub-policies “a”-“g”).
- Protect and conserve the landforms and open spaces that define the City’s urban form . . .(CE-A.1) and sub-policy “c,” which calls for “the protection of urban canyons and other community open spaces . . .”
- Additional canyon issues (e.g., erosion, invasives, access, etc.) are addressed throughout the Conservation Element, including discussion and policies in sections: A (Open Space and Landform Preservation), B (Water Resources Management), C (Urban Runoff Management), E (Biological Diversity) and K (Environmental Education).

PARK FINANCING

The key to providing increased recreation opportunities on a long-term basis is to identify and ensure adequate financing for park development, maintenance and staffing. The draft Recreation Element includes the following proposed policy to use the Subdivision Map Act/Quimby Act as a means to acquire park lands and/or fees:

- Adopt an ordinance which authorizes implementation of the state Subdivision Map Act/Quimby Act to collect land and/or appropriate park fees for population-based park and recreation facilities to serve future residents (RE-F.5).

The need to secure funding to remedy existing park needs and the role of development impact fees will be further discussed in the context of the Public Facilities, Services and Safety Element.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS:

Public outreach has taken place through a series of forums; mass e-mail distributions; workshops, presentations and meetings; and planning group communications including working sessions with the CPC and the CPC General Plan subcommittee. A summary of the General Plan public input process, including a list of the many of the interested groups consulted with or that received

presentations has been provided to LU&H in previous General Plan workshops (see City Council Report No. 06-056 for more information). For the Recreation Element, the CPC and the Park and Recreation Board have been two key citizen-based groups that have provided valuable input on the direction of and policies contained in the draft element.

COMMUNITY PLANNERS COMMITTEE

City Planning and Community Investment staff presented the draft recreation element to the CPC on January 24, 2006. The CPC's recommendations, and City staff's responses, are documented in this report (see Attachment 2). A key CPC recommendation, that is now reflected in the working draft, is for population-based parks be provided at a ratio of 2.8 net usable acres per 1,000 residents. CPC members also raised concerns that the use of "equivalencies" and resource-based parks to help satisfy population-based park needs will lead to lost opportunities to gain park lands.

PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

City Planning and Community Investment and Park and Recreation department staff presented the May 2006 working draft of the Recreation Element to the Park and Recreation Board on May 18, 2006. Park and Recreation Board members individually provided their input on the Recreation Element. The following points summarize the main conclusions from the members present:

- The population-based park standard should be 2.8 net usable, no less. If the issue is net usable, do not lower, just specify "net usable."
- The issue of non-developed vs. developed portions of resource-based parks being considered for credit by developers still needs to be discussed and fully understood.
- The development and funding of a Parks Master Plan is critical to the success of the Recreation Element.
- A discussion/understanding of Development Impact Fees, Quimby Act and other mechanisms to secure parkland must be provided. Financing is the key.
- Joint-use agreements to provide park lands should be strengthened (there have been cases where schools which were intended to provide park space were never built).
- The use of private recreational facilities to meet population-based standards must be carefully reviewed.
- Enhancements, although acknowledged to have use in some areas and have a basis in the existing Progress Guide and General Plan, were generally disliked because we are still short on acreage in many areas of the City.
- Regional parks should be protected from over-commercialization (i.e., Mission Bay);
- There needs to be more of a focus on resolving issues in underserved/deficient areas and equitable development.
- Do not redefine parks to meet a standard.

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE AND PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIONS:

The General Plan update has been in progress for the past three years. City Council Report No. 06-056 details previous LU&H Committee and Planning Commission actions.

FISCAL CONSIDERATION:

Staffing for the General Plan update is dependent on funding through the General Fund and the General Plan Application Fee.

CONCLUSION:

The revised draft Recreation Element represents significant edits to the July 2005 draft. City staff is seeking LU&H input on the element, particularly pertaining to proposals to:

- Establish a population-based park standard of 2.8 net usable acres per 1,000 residents (RE-F.3);
- Use “equivalencies” to meet up to 50 percent of the required population-based park lands;
- Develop criteria upon which to evaluate and limit the use of “equivalencies” (RE-F.13);
- Use portions of resource-based parks to meet required population-based park lands (RE-F.14);
- Support development of a Parks Master Plan (RE-F.2);
- Expand financing mechanisms for park lands (RE-F.5); and
- Support efforts to further the proposed “Canyonlands” initiative (RE-F.2[f]).

Respectfully submitted,

William Anderson, FAICP, Director
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Attachments: [1. Draft Recreation Element \(July 2006\)](#)
[2. CPC’s Recommendations, and City Staff’s Responses – Recreation Element](#)