



Parks for All

presented by

PARC
(Parks and Recreation Coalition)

1

- PARC is work-in-progress made up of volunteers who signed a coalition letter and testified requesting improvements to the Plan and the process at the Nov City Council hearing. PARC includes city planners, landscape architects, architects, and community planners, each volunteering to improve the Parks Master Plan. Also, We cover a lot of ground so please take notes for questions at the end.



“Park improvement is among the most important undertakings before the city. It should have the cordial cooperation of all.”

San Diego Union Editorial 1910



Why are we here? WE NEED PARKS! Parks are VITAL to everyone and this has been especially illustrated during the pandemic. The city proposing a new Parks Master Plan with significant changes to park standards and the way Development Impact Fees are calculated.



This one will have to last a long time!

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THE GOOD: Admirable Goals

- Promotes a parks system that is relevant, accessible, iconic, sustainable and equitable
- Meets the changing needs and priorities of current and future residents
- Addresses long-standing inequities in the City's park system

3

This is the first Parks Master Plan for 50 years! The goals are good but changes are required to meet them. PARC supports addressing inequities in the parks planning and allocation processes, including the Citywide Park fee, though we have questions about how it is being calculated and how it will be allocated.

What needs to be improved and how?



We appreciate the amount of time and commitment that staff was able to put into the Plan. The artificial deadline of the election did not provide enough time to address significant concerns that can be addressed now. Also, this presentation is going to be covering a dense amount of material, so please take notes along the way with any questions you have.

Issues with the Parks Master Plan

- Limited vision: Less parkland for our growing city
- Limited resident participation after release of Draft
- Equity, Funding & Prioritization Framework for Citywide Park Fee
- Untested: Points system and park standards
- Commercialization, MSCP, Historic Resources, Design Review, Implementation issues



- One of the biggest issues is the elimination the current land standard just when we're increasing housing density and incentivizing smaller units. We support the need for flexibility for communities to choose to add recreational amenities into parks but there should still be an easily understandable land standard. **More people need more parks**, not just more amenities added into existing parks. As with Affordable Housing, just because you can't meet the goals doesn't mean you shouldn't have them. We have found no other city that doesn't have a clear land standard.
- While the city held many meetings for input into the Plan, after the Draft Plan was released, the prior administration invested most of their time in the Housing and Mobility portions and we feel pushed the PMP forward on the artificial deadline of the election. Presentations were not made to Community Planning Groups or Rec Advisory Groups. Since this Plan will be the basis for any bond measures on future ballots, it's critical is that public support is built now. We need to love this Plan as much as we love our parks!
- Funding - we all know there's not enough and we are suggesting ways to help. The Prioritization Framework refers to how the new Citywide Park Fee will be allocated. This should be released as soon as possible and the Plan should not be adopted without it.
- The points system is complicated and as the first such approach being tried by any City, needs more discussion and changes.
- Other issues we've identified will be addressed in this presentation.

Public Engagement



The first step in equitable park planning is to *“be in conversation with communities to get their vision for what they want parks to be, whether that’s building new parks or reimagining existing spaces.”* Room to Roam, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, October 2020

REQUEST: Consult with Community Planning Groups & Community Recreation Groups



- Due to the time crunch from the outgoing administration, the Planning Department did not involve individual Community Planning Groups or Recreation Advisory Groups after draft Plan was released. It also appears that more time was spent working with the development community than community groups. Since this is likely to be the Plan for the next 50 years and the basis for any park bond, the plan needs to be easy to understand to be able to gain the support from voters for future funding approvals.

Limited Vision: Less parkland for our growing city



Higher density housing, smaller-sized units and more people increases the need for more parkland. More housing without more parkland will not create a world-class parks and recreation system. Parkland is significantly devalued; policy is only “continue to pursue.”

REQUESTS:

- Retain the park acreage standard
- Include minimum protections for passive recreation in parks
- Increase minimum % funding for parkland acquisition



- The problems with the existing system are not related to the standard of more land for parks - the **need** for additional parkland remains the same yet Plan & Recreation Element devalue & reduce standards for more parkland. Higher density housing, smaller-sized units and more people increases the need for more parkland, not only adding “amenities” in existing parks. Having no benchmark for new parkland means there’s no standard to weigh it against as communities and the Mayor & Council make choices.
- We understand that “limited open land and rising acquisition costs make it increasingly difficult to meet the acreage-based standard” but should we give up? NO! The land standard is not the problem. With a projected population increase of 350,000 people during the next 30 years, it would be harmful to adopt a policy which aims to primarily use existing parks to satisfy the residents' park and recreation needs. More people need more parks.
- Existing passive park lands are put at risk due to the incentives in the points system. Protections for open park land for passive recreation need to be improved.
- The only way to really ensure more parkland is to set-aside a fund for it. This was added into the Resolution and the percentage should be increased.



Funding for parks

The Development Impact Fee (DIF) system is not sufficient to meet the city's park needs nor can it be used for operations and maintenance.

REQUESTS:

- Build support for other significant funding sources
- Retain policy in Recreation Element to do nexus study to establish fees for non-residential uses (RE-A-2 d)
- Require Community Benefit Zoning analyses in community plan updates and upzones for parkland acquisition
- Disclose and review assumptions and rationale for 60% discount for land costs in the DIF formula
- Seek City Attorney Opinion re: dismantling FBAs

8

- Plans sit on the shelf unless we know how to fund them and this Plan will be the basis for any future park bond measures so the details and engagement with the public matters for when they are asked to vote for new funding.
- The Development Impact Fee - known as a DIF system - both existing and proposed - is **not** a sufficient source of funding to meet the city's park needs. Other sources are critical but with estimates for DIFs exceeding \$1 Billion, significant changes to the DIF merit transparency and scrutiny.
- Commit to other funding sources and build support for them beginning with this Plan. Below are ideas for additional funding:
- The existing Recreation Element contains policies for the City to determine to correct level of fees for non-residential uses. Current DIFs are only paid for residential uses. Other cities do have fees for other uses. The city should retain these policies and not delete them.
- Community Benefit Zoning is a method for the city to share in the increased value associated with upzoning properties rather than giving property owners increased density for free. Downtown had a CBZ program that has raised millions for urban improvements. CBZ should be analyzed in Community Plan Updates as a way to fund public benefits.
- Finally in the category of transparency: The formula that establishes DIFs consists of: construction costs, contingency costs, admin overhead and a land component that is called Right-of-Way costs. Land costs, based on more than parks recently completed or under construction inform the land component. But this component is then discounted by 60% - is this a fair discount? We've been unable to see the justifications for this discount. Transparency is critical when you make such a significant change impacting more than a billion dollars.

Address Inequities



REQUESTS:

- Require minimum payment of DIF fees into Citywide fee fund
- Disclose assumptions for DIF estimates: will overall funding go up or down and will it be available for Communities of Concern?
- Release Prioritization Framework for DIF allocation ASAP
- Include sufficient time for public review

9

- Redlining and other discriminatory policies have shaped the location of housing, freeways, businesses, and parks that affect health in today's urban landscape. Specific to parks, researchers have identified that increased heat islands have left some areas several degrees hotter than others.
- AND To achieve equity goals, one has to follow the money - both how it's raised and how it's spent.
- First, One of the policies in the existing system that has led to inequities, has been to allow developments to waive 100% of the DIFs by satisfying park standard on their own sites. This works great for their own communities, but provides nothing for other parts of the City. We are recommending that a minimum fee be required into the Citywide Park fund. There is already an ad hoc fee being paid under the current system by some projects, but this is not codified in the proposed Plan.
- The assumptions that make up the more than \$1 billion in DIF fees estimates for the new system and the old are critical to understand whether the new system will generate more or less additional funding overall and inform decisions related to setting those fees and whether or not they are equitable. So transparency is essential.
- Third, the staff report dated Sept 15, 2000 noted that Engineering & Capital Projects is already working on the Prioritization Framework with an update to Council Policy 800-14 Prioritizing Capital Improvement Program Projects. "It is anticipated that this update will include a new focus on Communities of Concern, park deficient communities and communities anticipated to experience the most residential growth." This policy should be released as soon as possible and the PMP should not be passed without it.

Confusing Points System (Part 1) *The Value of Trees*



- Trees clean the air
- Trees protect & save water
- Trees provide oxygen
- Trees store carbon
- Trees cool streets and provide shade



The city is proposing to replace the existing 2.8 acre/1,000 park land standard with a complicated points system that combines amenities with land and setting the points standard to 14 points/1,000 population. And trees are an important feature of parks as well as key to the City's Climate Action Plan.

So how does the points system address trees?

The existing conditions report notes these values for trees: (see slide) But what happens in the points system?

Confusing Points System (Part 2) *The Value of Trees in Points System*



Good Goal for Developers

50% tree canopy after 5 years =
2 points (with 2 point maximum)

What About Public Parks?

Case Study for Children's Park removes trees and replaces with "all weather shade" for 2 points. This increases the points total with the explanation: "a redesigned forest area promotes a sense of openness."

Actual trees have zero point value!

The points system devalues passive park land and trees even though the city's policy is to increase the urban tree canopy. They have a good goal for developers: 50% tree canopy after 5 years. BUT what about Community Planning for PUBLIC PARKS? One of the 3 Case Studies in the PMP of Children's Park removes trees stating "the redesigned forest area that promotes a sense of openness" (not a value listed for trees). They propose to remove part of the forest area and add "All-weather shade". Aside from the fact that Trees already provide all weather shade... for Community Planning purposes: Trees were never valued and have zero point value. In their own example, the city is proposing a system that is biased to support reducing the tree canopy and other free play areas in this PMP. This is why we feel the city must adopt baseline standards for certain park sizes.

NOTE: Communities with adjacency to open space, riparian corridors, or canyons tend to have tree canopy coverage of about 15-25%

Built-out areas, such as downtown, communities with industrial activity or proximity to military facilities, and some coastal landscapes have a lower overall percentage of trees (Existing Conditions Report page 25)

Confusing Points System (Part 3)

- Creates untested & complicated points-based system as new standard for park land combined with amenities
- Combined system pits land vs. amenities
- 10 sq. ft. interpretive sign has same point value as 1 acre park!

REQUESTS:

- Simplify by separating Land Standard from Recreational Amenity points
- Establish baselines for park based on size (protect passive uses).
- Clarify how point system will be used
- Separate Community Planning usage from DIF calculation usage of points
- Establish review process and refine over time



- The Plan needs to be straightforward for staff and the public to understand. Volunteers in Pacific Beach took the points charts to all their parks to seek to determine whether they'd be more, or less park-deficient under the new plan - and also to get experience with it. It's confusing and complicated. Another example of where points don't make sense: A sign and a 1-acre park each have the same point "value."
- This combined system of land and amenities using the same points scale creates bad incentives. It could lead to developers providing smaller parks filled with less important items by using items with the cheapest points to meet their requirements. The Points system does not adequately protect our habitat lands or coastal-based parks or protect passive park lands from the "play everywhere" emphasis.
- It also devalues passive recreation - playing catch or flying a kite or just the enjoyment of open turf
- After a lot of thinking about the system, our Recommendations are: Simplify by separating Land from Recreational Amenity points; Better define the application of the points system. Separate Community Planning usage from DIF calculation usage and Establish specific review process of the application of the points system for refinement over time.
- Regarding the separation of Community Planning usage from DIF usage: The major use of the points system is for developers to use it to calculate their DIF fees and make decisions about what to build on-site instead of paying DIFs. The other usage would be for Community Planning. But this usage is insufficiently documented and in trying to work with the system, we believe the CP usage should be separated from the DIF usage. There appears to be no reason why communities should use points to determine their recreational and park needs. If they want a skatepark or pocket park, it should be theirs to define through a public process and then to seek funding, not to be concerned about arbitrary points.

Commercialization of Public Parks



- Language deleted from Recreation Element: “Protect parks from commercialization and privatization.”
- Language added in Draft Recreation Element: “Policy A.3: Where appropriate, accommodate and design for temporary or permanent commercial uses in parks to increase public use of the park’s space. Examples of commercial uses may include, but are **not limited to**, restaurants and cafes, food trucks, carts and kiosks, youth-oriented facilities, bike rental and repair, museums, cultural centers, **other retail uses, and other similar uses.**”

REQUESTS:

- Retain language proposed for deletion: “Protect parks from commercialization and privatization.”
- Fix language: “Protect parks from commercialization and privatization. Ensure that commercial uses within parks contribute to the recreational use and value of the park and are sufficiently limited.”

13

- These commercialization Changes were never presented or highlighted in reports or public presentations to the Council. They are removing important protective language and replacing it to encourage commercialization without sufficient limits.
- The Draft language is repetitive and subjective and is poor English, but the **items in red (not limited to, other retail use and other similar uses**” each and together support beyond what is a reasonable list of uses - too much more. Here is our suggestion for how to FIX it and note that the language **Ensure that commercial uses within parks contribute to the recreational use and value of the park** is from the proposed Plan, and we are open to ways to set the limits.

Open Space & Biodiversity

- Open space and public parks are important in reducing climate change impacts.
- MSCP lands are legally protected habitat reserves and should be managed as such. To ensure consistency with City of San Diego MSCP obligations and to avoid future project by project conflict, MSCP Consistency Findings should be confirmed prior to identification of trails or other public use areas with potential MSCP impacts. Trails and other impacts must be addressed in a manner consistent with criteria set forth in the MSCP.

REQUESTS:

- Strengthen climate change policies (use more recent data; address carbon uptake, tree canopy issues)
- Ensure sound process based on MSCP criteria for establishing trails within MSCP areas



Many groups are concerned about encroachments into habitat reserves and we need to ensure they are adequately protected. A robust public review process is needed for the trails that can be allowed. Also, open space policies are important in addressing the impacts of climate change.

Historic Resources

Historic resources, including cultural landscapes, are barely mentioned and not discussed

REQUESTS:

- List Historic Resources in parks
- Assess their condition
- Preserve using applicable standards
- Train existing staff

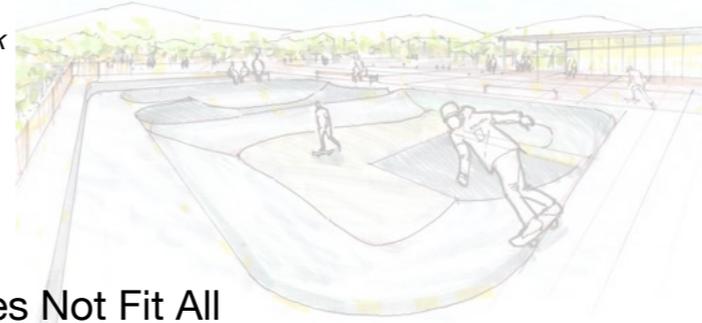


Parks have many Historic Resources but they are not even discussed in the Plan and barely mentioned. What we have should be documented in the Plan. More staff training is needed.

Park Quality / Design Review



“Get out and take a walk in a ‘good’ park. Look at the elements that cause it to work well. Talk to the people who use it and find out what features they value most. -Peter Katz. “What makes a good urban park” Congress for New Urbanism, Public Square, 1 March 2017



Design Matters: One Size Does Not Fit All

REQUESTS:

- Re-build the Parks and Recreation Department Park Planning and Development Division
- Re-establish the citywide park Design Review Committee
- Add policies and criteria for the planning and design of parks with community input

16

- Design and Design Review is not adequately addressed in the Plan. Standards alone will not provide the high quality parks and facilities that will meet the needs of individual community.
- To implement the Guiding principles the City needs to rebuild the Parks & Rec Planning and Development division to include landscape architects and urban design professionals who are working on behalf of the public interest. Re-establish the Design Review Committee and Add design policies to the Plan.



Implementation

Implementation of the PMP and Recreation Element requires internal and external oversight to ensure goals and policies are met

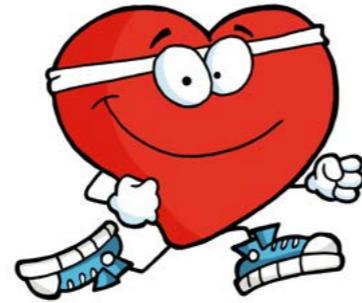
REQUESTS:

- Implement Citywide DIF via Municipal Ordinance and not just a Resolution
- Bring Prioritization Framework (CP 800-14 Prioritizing Capital Improvement Program Projects) forward as soon as possible
- Update CP 600-33 (Public Notification and Input for City-Wide Park Development Projects) via public review process
- Require Annual Report on implementation of the PMP, Recreation Element, and Citywide Park DIF for public review beginning with Community Planning Groups

17

- Resolutions do not have the legal force that Municipal Ordinances have and are much easier to change and harder to enforce.
- Council Policy 800-14 PRIORITIZING CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM PROJECTS was already coming forward in early 2021 and should be publicly released ASAP
- Council Policy 600-33 - the process for park projects needs revisions to become consistent with goals
- Just as they are requiring annual reports for the Housing and Mobility components, require for Parks

Parks for All



Park Proximity

- Increases property values as much as 20%
- Higher property values = higher taxes
- Attracts new businesses & visitors

Local Parks

- Maintain Physical & Mental Health



The pandemic has underscored the need for more urban parks for everyone for our physical, mental, and emotional health. And please note, that in the fight for needed funds, proximity to parks increases property values and high-quality parks draw new businesses and visitors. More people not only need more parks, the city and property owners gain from them financially as well.

MORE details (probably not time to include):

- Inner city homes within a quarter mile of a park have an increase value of 10% on average
- A home near just a cleaned-up vacant lot will have an increased value of 17% on average
- Residences next to a larger and longer “greenbelt” area which is great for hiking or biking saw a increase of 32% in home value on average

ref: The Park Catalog, Oct 2018

“High-quality public parks and open space draws new businesses and visitors to cities.” Room to Roam, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Oct 2020

Local parks and green spaces play a crucial role in maintaining physical and mental health and helping communities navigate toward recovery. (National survey conducted in May 2020 for the 10 Minute Walk coalition by The Trust for Public Land, Urban Land Institute, and National Recreation and Park Association)

“Proximity to parks increased property values as much as 20 percent, which in turn increases local tax revenues. High-quality public parks and open space also draw new businesses and visitors to cities.” The pandemic has underscored the need for more urban parks: So what comes next?” Land Lines October 2020, Lincoln Land Institute of Land Policy

What we would like you to do

Suggested MOTION:

- To bring it to Community Planning Groups and Community Recreational Groups for input before bringing back to City Council, and
- Request that the Prioritization Framework be released ASAP, and
- Request that city planners work with PARC on improvements



Thank you!



“A park is unlike any other asset in the city. It is not a building, not a production line, nor a warm breeze. A park is a living, growing thing that will die if the will of the people dies, or it will flourish as much as they want it to.”

San Diego Union, January 1969

***Email questions/comments and individual endorsements to:
planning@icontactweb.com***

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20

Our request is for the City to work with us to address these issues and for groups to ask the City to do so, and endorse this presentation, Parks for All. THANKS for your time and consideration and we're happy to answer questions or get back to you if we don't know the answers right now. The email address is on the slide for anything that come up after this presentation.

Prioritization Framework



The PMP has identified a four-pronged approach to prioritizing investments:

- 1 length of time a person must travel to get to a park or facility (access);
- 2 socio-economic characteristics of people living in an area (equity);
- 3 number of possible users relative to a park's capacity and recreational value (park pressure), and;
- 4 condition of developed assets within a park (existing park conditions).

Communities and parks that score the highest on selected metrics would then rise in priority to receive funding that expands facilities and programming that deliver recreation to everyone. A prioritized approach to future investments is a critical tool in promoting a balanced and equitable network of recreational experiences for everyone.

Policies related to the Prioritization Framework

EA1: Use measurable criteria, including the City's Climate Equity Index, the age and condition of existing parks, park capacity and recreational value relative to surrounding population density, walking, bicycling, and transit accessibility, and areas experiencing the greatest levels of growth to prioritize future capital investments.

EA4: Prioritize the delivery of new parks, trails, community centers, and aquatic facilities in areas with the greatest needs, communities of concern, and in higher density urbanized areas with fewer parks.

F8: Ensure that park fees are expended consistent with City equity goals and where parks are needed most to ensure an interconnected Citywide parks system accessible to all.

Prioritization Framework: Ref: PMP Executive Summary pages viii ix

*Park Pressure (ref PMP page 81) is the relationship between the number of people living in an area and the size of the park. Areas of high park pressure are candidates for investment to increase capacity and available recreational value. Policies are from "Equity & Access" and "Funding" sections.