

AUGUST 2021

Visioning Workshops Report

Balboa Park, San Diego



Prepared for

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PARK
CONSERVANCY



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PLACEMAKING IN BALBOA PARK VISIONING WORKSHOPS REPORT



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE, SCOPE, & PARTNERS

San Diego's Balboa Park is a unique urban and cultural park. Spanning 1200 acres, the park is home to 30 cultural institutions, clustered in the heavily used Central Mesa area, along and in proximity of El Prado walkway. The park's East and West Mesas are used as active and passive recreational areas respectively, and include natural landscapes, canyons, unique trees and native vegetation, and other special features. While being a regional cultural asset and a major tourist destination, the park is also serving as "the central park" of San Diego, and the only neighborhood park for many of the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

These multiple functions often create cross-purpose needs in the park and the Balboa Park Conservancy, providing stewardship for the park in cooperation with the City's Department of Parks and Recreation, sought out placemaking as an approach that can help address these needs in a cohesive and highly localized way. Since this engagement and visioning, the Balboa Park Conservancy has merged with the Friends of Balboa Park under a new name: Forever Balboa Park. However, this report will continue to refer to the Balboa Park Conservancy since the work was done with that version of the organization.

The Conservancy already has experience working with Project for Public Spaces and using the Placemaking approach to improve Plaza de Panama,

the busy hub of the Central Mesa and of the Prado. In 2014, a Southwest Airlines Heart of the Community grant was awarded to the Balboa Park Conservancy to collaborate with Project for Public Spaces to develop a vision for the place and to activate the Plaza as an outdoor central gathering space with programs and amenities.

Building upon the momentum of these placemaking activities, the Balboa Park Conservancy was awarded a second Southwest Airlines Heart of the Community grant in late 2018 to continue this work with Project for Public Spaces through several placemaking visioning workshops.

Working in close collaboration, Project for Public Spaces and the Balboa Park Conservancy sought to articulate a Placemaking Vision that lays the foundation for future planning, visioning and design work, and begins to bring the three distinct areas of the park - the Central Mesa, the East and the West Mesa - together. This vision plan includes overall recommendations and general strategies for the park, as well as conceptual designs and sketches for several specific destinations, which were selected and discussed in the public process and could play a key role in unifying the three areas of the park.

1.2 APPROACH

1.2.1 ABOUT PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is a collaborative process based on the belief that it is not enough to simply develop planning and design elements to improve or create a public space. Many design and planning projects jump right into design solutions that treat public spaces as aesthetic objects or as an afterthought that comes after all other issues are resolved. As a result the places they end up with are often monotonous, predictable, and lack life and character.

Working with people in communities, and ensuring that participation is early, continuous, and meaningful is what distinguishes Placemaking as a process from traditional planning and development approaches. We bring community members and stakeholders across sectors and disciplines together and facilitate productive conversations to align their perspectives on how their public spaces can best serve their collective needs and goals. We encourage broad participation by making the process easy, fun, and convenient for community members and private stakeholders through strategies like hands-on workshops, pop-up activities at community events, and online surveys.



1.2.2 WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE

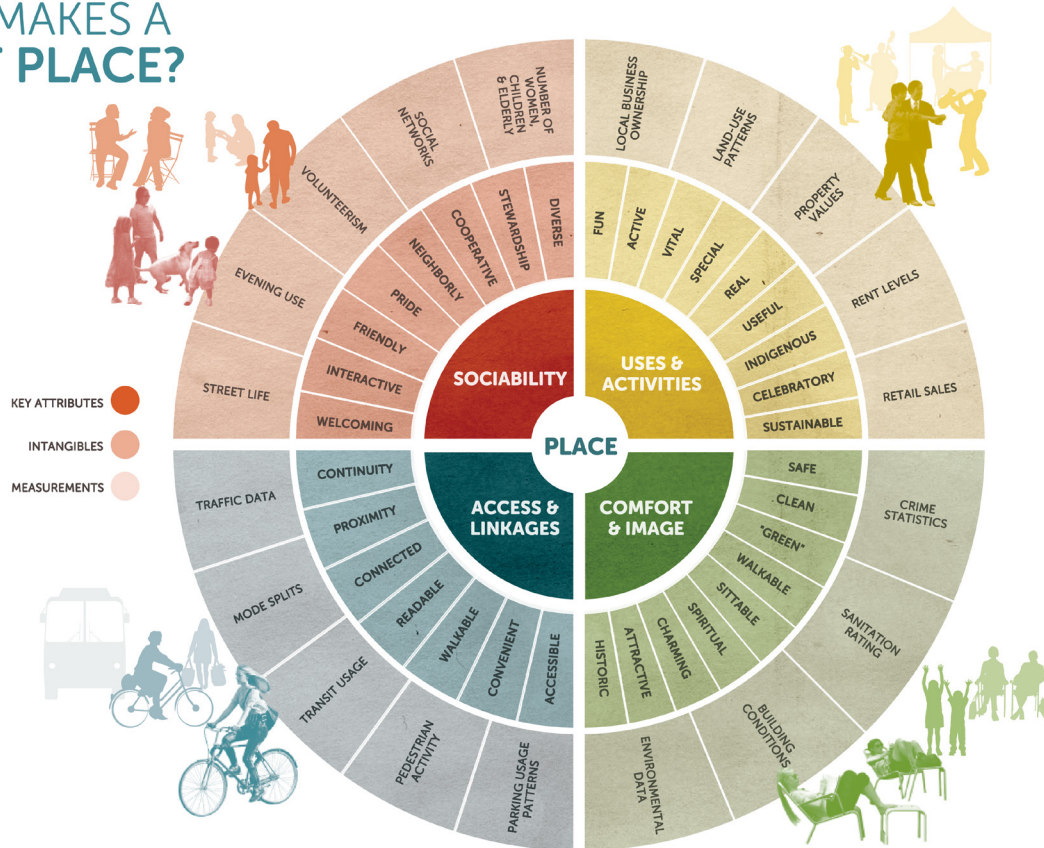
Public Spaces are dependant on the presence of various elements to be successful. The focus of our guidelines reflects this continuity by making recommendations throughout a district or area. These guidelines are organized in four sections borrowed from PPS's signature recipe for a great place.

- Access and Linkages
- Uses and Activities
- Comfort and Image
- Sociability

Most great places, whether a large district or a humble neighborhood park, share four key attributes:

- They are accessible and well connected to other important places in the area.
- People are drawn to participate in activities there.
- The space is comfortable and projects a good image.
- It is a sociable place where people like to gather, visiting it again and again.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?





ACCESS & LINKAGES

You can easily judge the accessibility of a place by noting its connections to the surroundings, including the visual links. A great public space is easy to get to, easy to enter, and easy to navigate through. It is arranged so that you can see most of what is going on there, both from a distance and up close. The edges of a public space also play an important role in making it accessible. A row of shops along the street, for instance, is more interesting and generally safer to walk along than a blank wall or an empty lot. Accessible spaces can be conveniently reached by foot and, ideally, public transit, and they have high parking turnover.



COMFORT & IMAGE

A space that is comfortable and looks inviting is likely to be successful. A sense of comfort includes perceptions about safety, cleanliness, and the availability of places to sit. A lack of seating is the surprising downfall of many otherwise good places. People are drawn to places that give them a choice of places to sit, so they can be either in or out of the sun at various times of day or year.



USES & ACTIVITIES

A range of activities are the fundamental building blocks of a great place. Having something to do gives people a reason to come (and return) to a place. When there is nothing interesting to do, a space will sit empty. That's the best measure that something is wrong. A carefully chosen range of activities will help a place attract a variety of people at different times of the day. A playground will draw young kids during the day, while basketball courts draw older kids after school, and concerts bring in everyone during the evening.



SOCIABILITY

Sociability is a difficult quality for a place to achieve, but once attained it becomes an unmistakable feature. When people see friends, meet and greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, they tend to feel a stronger attachment to their community — and to the place that fosters these types of social interaction.

1.2.3 POWER OF 10+

To be successful, cities need destinations that give an identity and image to their communities and that help attract new residents, businesses, and investments. A destination might be a downtown square, a main street, a waterfront, a park, or a museum. Cities of all sizes should have at least 10 destinations where people want to be. What makes each destination successful is that it has multiple places within it. For example, a square needs at least 10 places: a café, a children’s play area, a place to read the paper or drink a cup of coffee, a place to sit, somewhere to meet friends, etc. Within each of the places, there should be at least 10 things to do. Cumulatively, these activities, places and destinations are what make a great city. PPS calls this big idea the “Power of 10.”

It is the role of Placemakers to encourage everyone to think about what’s special in their communities. How many quality places are located nearby, and how are they connected? Are there places that should be more meaningful but aren’t? Answering these questions can help residents and stakeholders determine—both individually and collectively—where they need to focus their energies.

The Power of 10 offers an easy framework that motivates residents and stakeholders to revitalize urban life, and it shows that by starting efforts at the smallest scale you can accomplish big things. The concept also provides people with something tangible to strive for and helps them visualize what it takes to make their community great.



Balboa Park

1.2.4 LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER

Many of the best, most authentic and enduring destinations in a city, the places that keep locals and tourists coming back again and again and that anchor quality, local jobs, were born out of a series of incremental, locally-based improvements. The Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) approach is based on taking these incremental steps, using low-cost experiments, and tapping into local talents. The LQC process can be a creative, locally powered alternative to capital-heavy, top-down planning. These smaller scale projects are being implemented in a variety of environments, including on streets, squares, waterfronts, and even parking lots.



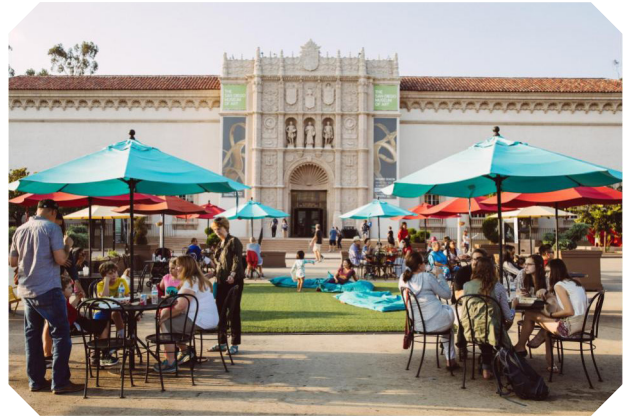
LQC projects transform underused spaces into exciting laboratories that citizens can start using right away and see evidence that change can happen. It creates an action planning process that goes beyond the short term changes that are made. This is an iterative approach and an opportunity to experiment, assess, and evolve a community's vision before launching into major construction and a long-term process. The LQC approach can be implemented across multiple scales to transform underperforming spaces throughout an entire city or district.



2. GOALS

In the initial application process for this Heart of the Community grant, the Balboa Park Conservancy developed a list of their desired outcomes of this round of Engagement and Visioning. By bringing different groups and users to collaborate together in a space where all voices can be heard, the Conservancy sought to achieve an inclusive consensus for the future of Balboa Park. The hope for these achievements is to catalyze a long-term positive change with lasting relationships in Balboa Park both internally and externally. The goals of this engagement are to:

- Achieve consensus amongst partners on activation strategies and development of underutilized and underdeveloped areas of the park;
- Conceptualize a shared holistic vision, foster more aligned and effective cross-sector partnerships, and develop a placemaking strategy;
- Create a unified sense of place;
- Engage surrounding neighborhood groups, many of which represent low-income neighborhoods;
- Agree on a set of core factors that define Balboa Park as a public space and visitor/user experience;
- Form a working group to begin a master placemaking plan;
- And inspire new model of park-wide collaboration and framework for planning and promoting placemaking.



3. COMMUNITY VISIONING PROCESS

3.1 STRATEGY, MEETINGS & TOOLS

The goal of the Southwest Airlines Heart of the Community 2018 Placemaking visioning workshop grants was to help grantees and their partners – institutional stakeholders, city departments, county and state agencies, business owners, property owners, area residents, elected officials, and other stakeholders – work together toward amplifying the impact of Placemaking in their communities. To achieve this for Balboa Park, Project for Public Spaces’ visioning proceeded in stages. The process began with individual interviews with focus groups and strategic partners and an initial engagement workshop with major stakeholders. As trust and understanding grew, PPS took what was learned to properly engage the public with surveys and a Community Conversation that would provide them with a meaningful ability to contribute to decision making.

3.1.1. Stakeholder Session

On April 24, 2019, Project for Public Spaces met with strategic stakeholders and partners in a series of focus groups and interviews. These partners included major funders and cultural organizations in the park, including the Parks Department, which currently controls Balboa Park, the Tourism

and Visitors Bureau, and the Cultural Partnership. Project for Public Spaces learned about the current involvement these groups have with Balboa Park and with each other, along with their own engagement with the community. It helped us understand the major players and also gave us an idea of the processes at work in managing and programming the park.

3.1.2. Visioning Workshop

The Balboa Park Placemaking Workshop held on April 25, 2019 provided an opportunity for a broader range of community stakeholders and partners to actively participate in evaluating and brainstorming ideas for Balboa Park. After an overview presentation from Project for Public Spaces on Placemaking principles and relevant case studies, tables were assigned different areas of the park to use the Place Game to evaluate strengths and weaknesses and discuss ideas for making the park a more connected network of active and engaging places for the whole community. The tables reported back to the entire group at the end of the session. These initial stakeholder



engagements helped focus the conversation on specific destinations and issues in the park, and informed the subsequent public Community Conversation that would reach out to constituents and communities that have lacked representation in the past.

3.1.3. Maptionnaire

After the initial Visioning Workshop, Project for Public Spaces shared a survey with the broader community to hear what people like and dislike about four focus areas of the park as it is, as well as what they would like to see there in the future. Using the online survey and spatial mapping service Maptionnaire, participants connected specific recommendations, ideas, and complaints to destinations in the park, and even mapped out the routes they take when visiting the park, the places they go to, and the way they navigate between them. They also told us what kinds of activities bring them to the park, as well as who they go with and how long they typically stay. Over 225 community members contributed to the survey which helped fine-tune the ideas heard at the workshop and set the stage for the public Community Conversation.

3.1.4. Community Conversation

On July 12, Project for Public Spaces returned to San Diego to present the findings from the initial workshop and survey to the public in a Community Conversation event. After sharing the results, we engaged attendees in groups to receive their feedback. They discussed their familiarity with the focus areas, prioritized ideas, proposed new programs or enhancements, and suggested partners. It is the goal of PPS and the Balboa Park Conservancy to keep the public involved to ensure that changes are made that serve the correct needs in the community. This ongoing engagement informed the recommendations made in this report.

The engagement with Project for Public Spaces, and the Visioning work has demonstrated that in the five years since its merger with Balboa Park Central, the Balboa Park Conservancy has developed many important capacities and has evolved into a highly capable, creative, action-oriented and inclusive organization. Following the interviews with Park and City officials PPS conducted, the Conservancy has signed a new Special Use Permit for its role in the park, and was selected to participate in the inaugural session of the Central Park Conservancy's Institute for Urban Parks as one of only five participants. These developments show that the visioning workshops truly achieved the goals they were reaching for bringing key public space issues and opportunities to the surface and laying the foundation of a shared vision, while demonstrating the Conservancy's capacity and expertise in moving the Placemaking agenda for Balboa Park further.

Last but not least, through visioning workshops, focus groups and surveys, PPS and the Conservancy were able to engage with community members and stakeholders who sometime feel excluded from discussions about the future of the park. These conversations helped move the planning framework beyond a binary understanding of Balboa Park as either a cultural and tourist destination or a city park fulfilling residents' recreational needs.



An example of Maptionnaire dots for every positive comment and examples of the responses that accompanied each dot at the Palisades.

4. EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES

The engagement with the Balboa Park Conservancy, partners, and stakeholders clearly showed that there is great enthusiasm for making improvements in the park and that, as the Conservancy had suggested, the time was right for considering healthy changes.

The Placemaking Visioning workshops and meetings coincided with a large coalition of park stakeholders looking to reposition their efforts after a major and polarizing infrastructure plan was cancelled following years of development. This loose coalition, including Conservancy staff and key board members, representatives of the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Balboa Park Cultural Partnership, City staff, and individual cultural organizations, as well as elected officials, was able to come together and brainstorm ideas for improving the park with a fresh new outlook. Project for Public Spaces facilitated workshops and focus group engagements, as well as interviews and conversations with a large number of these partners. These discussions gave us a good insight into some of the current challenges and opportunities in the park.

4.1 Overall Challenges

While collaboration is the cornerstone of transforming parks into great places and a fundamental principle of the Conservancy's work, Balboa Park is challenged by the complex relationships and roles of its numerous stakeholders. The roles of lead organizations, such as the Conservancy, the Cultural Partnership, the Friends, and the Parks Department, are sometimes

hard to discern and difficult to coordinate. In addition, while the Conservancy has been growing its capacities, others have encountered significant limitations. All this creates a confusion, and a certain amount of disharmony in propelling the park forward.

The lack of financial security paired with an imperative to be self-sustaining leads some of the cultural institutions to perceive their individual needs as isolated, and perhaps sometimes at cross-purpose with the good of the park as a whole or with the good of the public. This internal tension often results in a lack of synergy between organizations, and a difficulty in blending the indoor cultural spaces with the surrounding park environment. This tension also relates to the ownership and care of facilities, which falls in many cases to the Parks Department though the Department lacks a dedicated stream of funds for Balboa Park within San Diego's vast park system.

Defining the role of the park itself, within the framework of parks in the city of San Diego, and in the region, is also a challenge. As mentioned earlier, Balboa Park is serving many functions – a major cultural venue, an important tourist attraction, a central park for the city of San Diego, a city-wide center for active recreation, and a neighborhood park for many surrounding communities. However, these functions are fulfilled unevenly, by disparate and discordant partners in different areas of the park, lacking a unified sense of purpose or place. At the same time, certain major park stakeholders are committed to only one or another of these

functions, and this limits the vision and progress of the park. While the multiplicity of functions makes Balboa Park unique, considering all of its facets and paying equal attention to all these needs has been a challenge.

Certain audiences could be served much better in the park. Many stakeholders noted that families, for example, are underserved in the park and sometimes programs and facilities are not fulfilling their expectations. While people flock to the Zoo and come in droves during festivals, families and school groups are not encouraged to go further into the park. The large events that bring families to the park are seen as competition by some of the cultural organizations looking for paying visitors. Other audiences such as youth, groups engaged in active recreation, and residents of lower income neighborhoods near the park are also not given enough consideration.

Balboa Park lacks a contemporary, unified plan for the future. The current master plan is outdated, and in the words of one stakeholder is “being used to prevent the future.” However, a new plan that creatively addresses current challenges and looks to the future can hardly be developed without an empowered park leadership.



4.2 Park-wide Physical Challenges

Roofs & Restrooms

A number of structures in the park are in need of repair and are suffering from the effects of years of deferred maintenance. Park stakeholders spoke of leaking roofs, architectural details and ornamentation that need preserving, and other significant maintenance issues. All agreed that the state of repair and cleanliness of park restrooms is a great physical and operational challenge that hinders everyone’s enjoyment of the park.

Vehicle Traffic & Parking

Because of its sheer size, the fact that highways dissect the park in several key spots and the presence of major auto-oriented facilities such as the Naval Medical Center, Balboa Park suffers the negative impacts of high levels of vehicle traffic. Dangerous streets with heavy volumes of speeding vehicles and multiple roadways lacking pedestrian walkways and crossings create an intense conflict between pedestrians and vehicles in the park. In addition, the need for parking, a permanent corollary to heavy vehicle traffic, has further degraded the pedestrian environment and pedestrian safety. Cultural institutions located in the park are often in conflict with each other, and with other park stakeholders, over precious parking spaces, neglecting the negative effect of parking on pedestrians and the fact that every visitor has to complete at least a portion of their trip on foot. While recent plans to reconsider vehicle circulation and parking in the central core of the park failed to materialize, the challenges of traffic and parking in Balboa Park will continue to require attention and consideration.

Gateways and Wayfinding

Another major challenge for Balboa Park, not unrelated to its struggles with vehicle traffic, is the lack of strong, welcoming, and appropriate gateways and an aged, disjointed, and lacking wayfinding system. Most entry points into Balboa Park, with a few exceptions such as the historic Cabrillo Bridge, fail to create a sense of arrival, orientation, or a sense of place for pedestrians and drivers. In some locations, busy city streets cut into the park without any acknowledgement, resulting in drivers acting accordingly. In other spots, signage is only directed at vehicles, while pedestrians are left out.



Underutilized vs Overused Areas

Balboa Park struggles with uneven use of the park. There are overused areas, such as the Central Mesa with the Prado and its cultural institutions and attractions, and underutilized areas and facilities that are away from the central core. As mentioned earlier, this use pattern is the result of the park's complex and multiple functions.



Millions of park visitors swarm the Central Mesa every year, while areas like the Landfill, Golden Hill, Florida Canyon, or Morley Field are underused and often unfamiliar even to San Diego residents. The challenge is that overused destinations both attract and require significant management and maintenance efforts, while underutilized areas get less attention and risk spiraling into disrepair and misuse. This lack of balance is an obstacle to creating a cohesive sense of place for the park as a whole. It also produces a demand for all significant public events to be held in the Central Core, missing opportunities to use other locations and relieve the pressure on the core.



5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The significant and enthusiastic participation of partners, stakeholders, and neighbors in the Visioning Workshops, focus group discussions, interviews and online surveys demonstrated the strong desire and support for taking a proactive approach to improving the park. The Balboa Park Conservancy and Parks & Recreation have a profound understanding of the challenges and a knowledgeable sense of timing for this engagement. The Conservancy showed the necessary leadership working intentionally and tactfully to include disparate stakeholders and partners in the process.

5.1 Addressing Systemic Challenges

The Conservancy's Placemaking efforts, including this current Place Vision plan, are steps towards building a shared vision for short-term, incremental improvements that address ongoing challenges while laying the groundwork for long-term plans and broader planning updates. It is important to keep in mind that these "lighter, quicker, cheaper" improvements are also intended as dynamic experiments that give Parks & Recreation, the Conservancy, and its main partners the flexibility to monitor, assess, and improve interventions as they take root.

Systemic challenges in the park can best be addressed by a well structured and well funded organization with full support from the city. The Balboa Park Conservancy was created to take this role, like other peer conservancy organizations around the country. This public-private partnership is now being recognized by the City, the Park's Department, and peer organizations nationwide. The Conservancy has proven its commitment to collaboration with all



partners and the process of fully empowering the Conservancy to care for the park should accelerate.

5.2 Addressing Physical and Programmatic Challenges

Like the systemic challenges, many of the physical and programmatic challenges in Balboa Park are not new. Park reports and planning documents, dating back 20 years and more, refer to some of the same major questions: how to reduce the impact of vehicle traffic and its corollaries - parking and unwelcoming pedestrian environments; how to develop and reinforce destinations in the park beyond the central core; and how to establish stronger gateways and better wayfinding.

Over time, more items have been added to this perennial list, including issues of deferred maintenance, landscapes and buildings in need of preservation and repair, as well as the necessity to develop contemporary and inclusive programs that reflect the needs and interests of under-served audiences and neighboring communities.



Comfort and Image

After the controversial “Jacobs” plan to eliminate cars in Balboa Park was officially terminated in 2019, funds earmarked for that project were reallocated to address some of the most pressing issues of deferred maintenance including repairing leaky roofs and renovating several restroom facilities. This is a promising move in the right direction, but further examination of restroom options in the park is needed. If Balboa Park is to develop family-friendly destinations further afield, away from the Central Mesa, availability and quality of restroom maintenance will be key. The Conservancy and the Parks Department should consider standalone, easy to maintain options similar to the Portland Loo, and seek a California-appropriate equivalent.

Access and Linkages

The complexity of vehicle traffic in the park merits a separate circulation and parking study to better understand existing use patterns and propose the best ways to improve and minimize them.

This should not prevent the Conservancy and its partners from continuously refining and enriching transit options in the park. Existing trolley stops should be enhanced and more routes and stops added to expand the trolley’s reach. Improving trolley stops must go hand in hand with providing clear, reliable information to park goers about routes, schedule, frequency of service, and the destinations it can reach.

Offering more and better information about transit options in Balboa Park relates to the recent wayfinding plan developed by the Conservancy. Improving wayfinding in Balboa Park was a major need that is now being properly addressed.

Simultaneously, work must continue around improving key gateways into the park, and making key roads and destinations safer, more walkable, and more welcoming to pedestrians. Understandably, this work can’t happen everywhere





at the same time, but enhancing the pedestrian environment at key locations – gateways, trolley stops, focal points, activity areas, and other destinations – can be very impactful and greatly improve the visitor experience.

In the next section, we have outlined key recommendations for several places of focus that were discussed in detail by park stakeholders during the Visioning process. These recommendations focus primarily on short-term, “lighter, quicker, cheaper” improvements in four distinct places. Through a place-specific lens, they are examples of how these broader issues may be addressed such as how to create a gateway

and a sense of arrival, how to expand and frame a pedestrian walkway, how to activate outdoor destinations, how to create opportunities for cultural institutions to better connect to the park by bringing the inside out, and how to develop programs and attractions that help establish new places in the park and bring people to enjoy them.

6. LQC FOCUS AREAS

6.1 SEFTON PLAZA

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The West Mesa is located along 6th Avenue off a residential neighborhood, and extends to the north and south of Balboa Park. It is currently the main entrance to Balboa Park and one of its iconic, original features. The West Mesa has well recognized destinations such as the 6th Avenue playground, Redwood Bridge Club, San Diego Chess Club, Lawn Bowling, and Nate’s Point Dog Park.

A beloved feature of the West Mesa is the picture perfect view from the Cabrillo Bridge of the California Tower and the Plaza de Panama skyline, framed by the two historic guardhouses. As the only road entering the park from the West, the bridge is a point of contention. It is not wide enough for both pedestrian traffic and the constant flow of cars entering the Park. The Cabrillo Bridge is a vintage point for photos and to enjoy the panorama, though there is no opportunity to stop, sit, or not be worried about the incoming traffic as a pedestrian. Additionally, the noise of the roadway below is distracting and bothersome.

The West Mesa is already a multi-generational and very active destination with volleyball, cross fit, yoga, and more on the open lawns. The lawn to the south of El Prado is especially utilized for relaxing and people watching. Children have the 6th Avenue playground and Camp CaHiTo. There is senior oriented lawn bowling and bridge club. However, the poor state of restrooms, maintenance of the landscape, and public concerns about the homeless population sometimes dissuade these groups from using the area.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To make potential users of Balboa Park feel more welcome, there is need to create an iconic and formal sense of arrival into the park, that could also function as a front porch for residents. A gateway at Sefton Plaza could bring visitors and residents together, inviting the residents to the museums and extending the community experience to visitors. The front porch, service as well as the visitors' entry point, would benefit all users by serving food, providing information, offering comfortable seating for gathering and people watching, and extending use of the space through day and into evening.

The south lawn should be enhanced as a neighborhood park and relaxing play area. This would support the existing uses and extend and highlight neighborhood gatherings and wellness. By supporting, showcasing, and improving the several activities already taking place in the West Mesa, the area could attract more people from the nearby downtown and other new users.

In the short-term, Sefton Plaza could make an impact toward these goals with immediate steps to:

- Activate the two pedestrian plazas around the two El Prado historic guardhouses. The two existing paved areas are each 60'x90'.
 - Provide movable seating, café tables and chairs or other kinds of seating such as benches or communal platforms.
 - Provide shade and vertical elements (banners, trellis, planters) to mark the entrance to the Park.
 - Allow a coffee cart to provide food and a cart for games and activities.
 - Appoint an attendant that is dedicated to this area.
- Install lighting that is appropriate for Balboa Park as an historic and cultural attraction.
 - Position art in this very prominent location with lighting exhibits, road painting at the plazas, or other art exhibitions.
 - Close the street to visitor and resident vehicular traffic, while allowing for tram and other public transportation access.
 - Enhance the midway point of Cabrillo Bridge for people taking photos and admiring the view.





- Provide shade with vines or planters and pots.
- Provide a movable stage for small to medium performances to take place on a regular basis in lunchtime concerts or sunset performances.
- Provide activities that support the surrounding uses. For example on the North plaza there could be a meeting point for people that want to exercise and lawn game rentals for people that want to play. In the South plaza, activities could be related to dog owners, kids, and active visitors with toys, games, and exercise equipment.
- Host events to attract new residents and downtown workers.
- Start a more intentional wellness program for local and downtown residents. Provide walking, running, and biking opportunities and information for locals, especially for a youth and teen audience.
- Create wayfinding and interpretation for visitors to orient themselves, whether they want to take walks using the trail system or merely walk between multiple destinations within the park.





Apotheke

Juwelen - Anterschmuck

A&Co

RECOMMENDATIONS PLAN



- 1. North Plaza
- 2. South Plaza
- 3. Vertical Element & Gateway
Enter piece: Pergola+Vines, Column
- 4. Cabrillo Bridge Viewing Point

- 5. Lawn Bowl Plaza
- 6. Street Art
- 7. Lighting
- 8. Connection to Dog Park and South Lawn



SEFTON PLAZA VIEW

6. LQC FOCUS AREAS

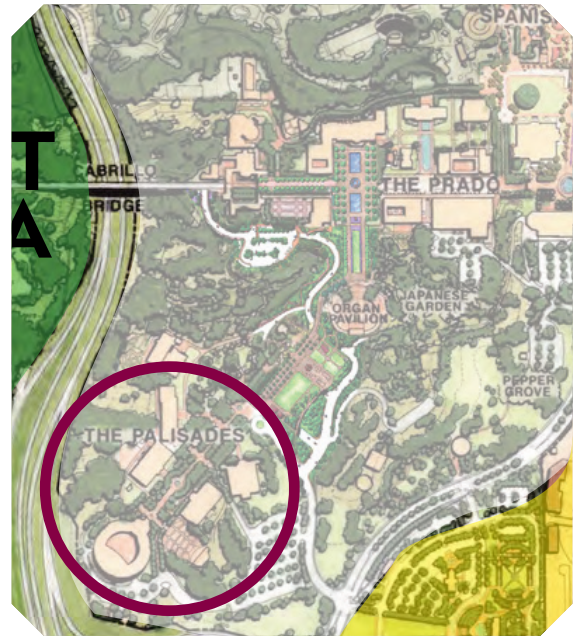
6.2 PALISADES

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Palisades area is located in the Southwest of Balboa Park. Included in this area are several destinations, such as the San Diego Air & Space Museum, the San Diego Automotive Museum, the recently relocated Comic-Con Museum, the Marie Hitchcock Puppet Theatre located in the original Palisade building, the cottages at the House of Pacific Relations, and the Old Cactus Garden.

The entry point into the Palisades from Pan America Road, or Presidents Way, is a vast parking lot with minimal directional signage or wayfinding to help visitors navigate the area and reach these destinations. Various workshop and survey participants mentioned that the "Palisades feel so separate from [the] rest of the Park" and that "it is difficult to access". The parking lot has several safety concerns, pedestrian/vehicular and ADA accessibility shortcomings, and no shade or safe routes for pedestrians. A positive note is the trolley stop located in the center of the Parking lot, though it, too, lacks shade and proper informatin.

The museums and other institutions are organized around the central parking lot, named the Pan American Plaza, and most of them do not have an outer presence at the front of their buildings. Very little seating exists in this area, with only a handful of backless benches on the Palisades Plaza and a few picnic tables on the side of the Cactus Gardens.



RECOMMENDATIONS

There are two major goals that informed recommendations for the Palisades. There needs to be a sense of arrival into the Palisades that is visible from Pan America Road and Presidents Way. Improving circulation through widening sidewalks, adding a pedestrian route to and through the parking lot, and creating a user friendly trolley stop with shade, seating, and information will help make this a much more welcoming place. The second goal is to activate some of the space with regular pop-up events and programs. These activities should be visible from access points and their liveliness will attract people here from the other more popular areas of the park.

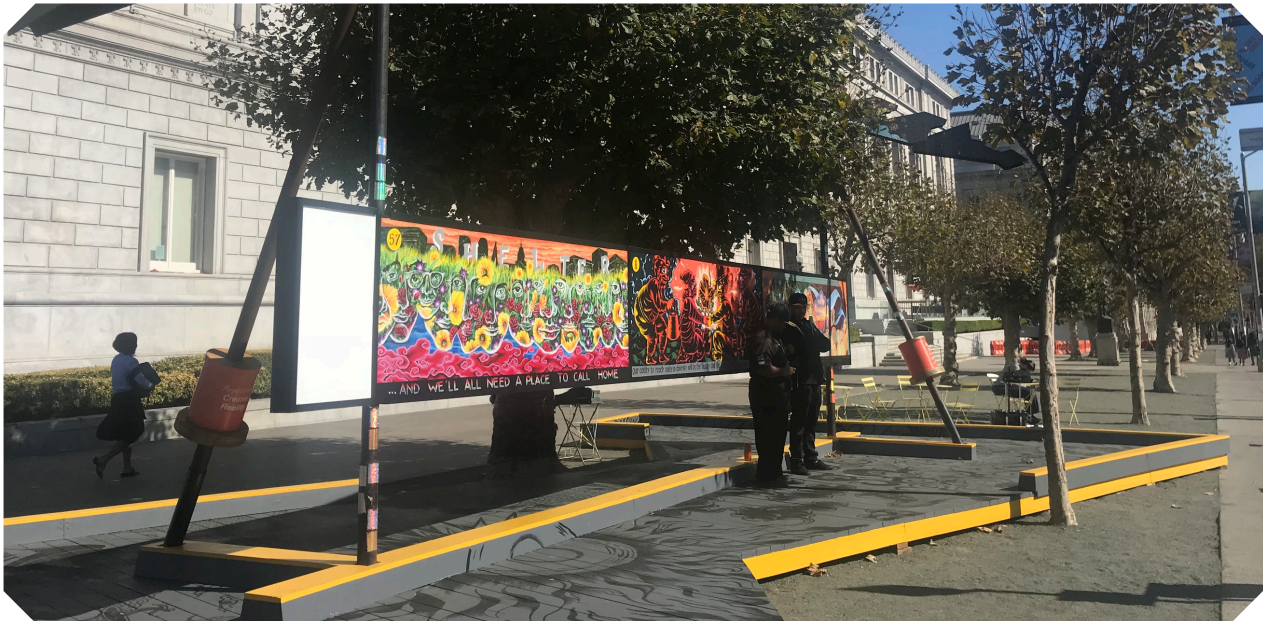
To achieve these goals, the Palisades can take immediate steps to:

- Pedestrianize an 80'x100' area of the parking lot near the access street. This area would provide shade and seating, host colorful surface treatment and planters, and create a space to relax while waiting for the tram or to learn about the activities offered at the Palisades.
- Provide food and beverage vending on a temporary basis during the day to support the museums. At night, install a beer garden or other activation to support the events in this part of the park.
- Host craft, book, art, or food markets and if necessary add an additional closure next to it.
- Activate the lawn in front of the Comic-Con Museum and the pathways to the building.
- Install attractive seating and wayfinding at the corner of American Road and Presidents Way with lighting and art to create synergy and act as the gateway to the Palisades.
- Widen existing sidewalks to provide an additional 4'-6' wide compacted gravel walking area.
- Add museum information with signage and façade improvements (banners and lights). Provide a cart with



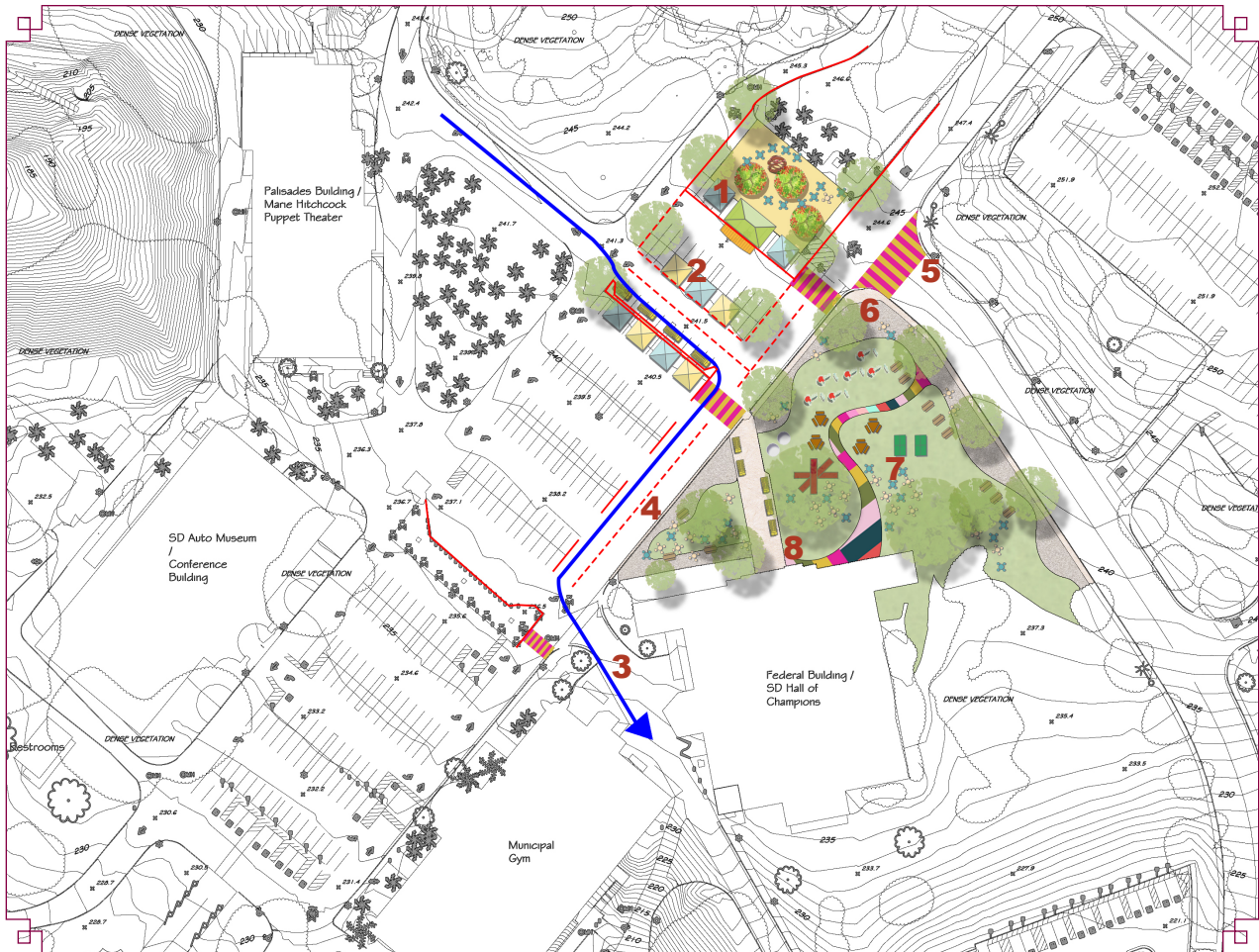
information at the entry pathway.

- Move the trolley stop closer to the access point at the Palisades to improve triangulation with the other two activation areas. This will make the stop more informative while being fun for people waiting and watching.
- Improve the existing parking with marked walkways, tree plantings, ambient lighting, and further connectivity to surrounding institutions.





RECOMMENDATIONS PLAN



1. Permanent parking area closure (80'x100' area) with shade, seating, painted pavement, food carts
2. Area of parking to be closed for special events and weekly markets
3. Tram stop relocation in proximity to the activation
4. Widen street to allow for two way circulation

5. Visible painted crosswalks at entry and at widen street
6. Corner activation, with focal point at Palisades entrance
7. Comic-con play area and gardens
8. Comic-con Museum entryway and information point



COMIC-CON ENTRANCE VIEW

6. LQC FOCUS AREAS

6.3 THE LANDFILL

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Located on the East Mesa, the Landfill is underutilized and seen as an area with great potential to become a stronger destination in the park. It currently has few attractions, which include the SDSU ball field, a velodrome, and a large open meadow. Much of the Landfill is used as a service area for the Parks Department including a fenced parking lot, unfenced overflow parking, and some modular office buildings. The City Park's nursery is located adjacent.

While the Landfill doesn't offer much in terms of facilities, it offers spectacular views of the Coronado Bridge and of downtown.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To turn the Landfill around, we need to look to three major goals for a long-term vision when resources are available and following the proper environmental review and safety precautions. Firstly, the Landfill should seek to be transformed from a working service yard into an active park destination. This is a place that doesn't have the historic look of other areas in the park, and could be appropriate for events, larger group activities, "messier" art, and youthful, experimental activities. This space can experiment with short-term, lighter interventions to attract people to the area and put it on the map in Balboa park. Experimental programs and interventions can be used to assess feasibility and establish new events. Lastly, giving the Landfill a more attractive name could be appropriate here and the naming process could be used as a way to raise awareness of the area.

There are several big opportunities for attracting people to the Landfill in the short-term that could be explored concurrently including:



- Building off of the existing ball field, add more opportunities for active recreation and make the area a focus for youth and athletes. Many active recreation ideas were mentioned in the Place Visioning process, and it will be up to the Conservancy and the Parks Department to find the right mix of uses and the right partners for implementation. Active recreation ideas included:
 - A temporary bicycle pump track that could be made out of dirt and focused on teen and young adult audiences from the surrounding areas.
 - Soccer fields, as these seem to always be in



high demand and can draw both youth and adults. The fields can also help connect to the Latino communities around the park.

— A temporary parkour and free running course, aimed again at attracting youth and athletes to this area of the park.

- Enhancing the natural character of the area with native landscapes, native habitat restoration, and potentially community gardens. Kumeyaay ethnobotany programs and classes can be featured here and used to attract native plant enthusiasts.
- Building, signing, and reinforcing existing trails to connect to the rest of the park. Trails can also be used to improve pedestrian connections, as the area is not pedestrian-friendly. Connectivity should be considered with wayfinding and

shuttle access from other parts of the park.

- Using the Landfill as an alternative festival venue that could host some of the large special events that overtake the Central Mesa. Workshop participants suggested relocating Earth Day to the Landfill as an example.
- Accommodating festival uses here with some temporary amenities such as porta potties, large tents and canopies, temporary food courts or beer gardens, and picnic areas, etc.
- Hosting other large events such as music and light festivals. These would also be more appropriate here, away from residential areas and the bustle of the Prado.
- Using the large open meadow's ample space for movable stages, natural amphitheater arrangements, and temporary camping and "glamping" areas, etc. When special events are not hosted here, smaller regular events can be held such as outdoor movies, concerts, parties, art installations, and exhibits, etc.
- Accommodating large scale site-specific art that would attract visitors to the area, like Christo's the Gates, Patrick Dougherty's Stickwork, or Orly Genger's Red, Yellow and Blue. If funding for this type of art becomes available, a competitive selection process can bring an artist of national or international renown to the area, all the while promoting it as a special place within Balboa Park.



6. LQC FOCUS AREAS

6.4 GOLDEN HILL

EXISTING CONDITIONS

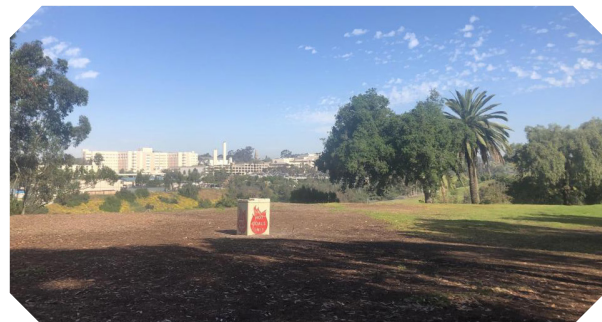
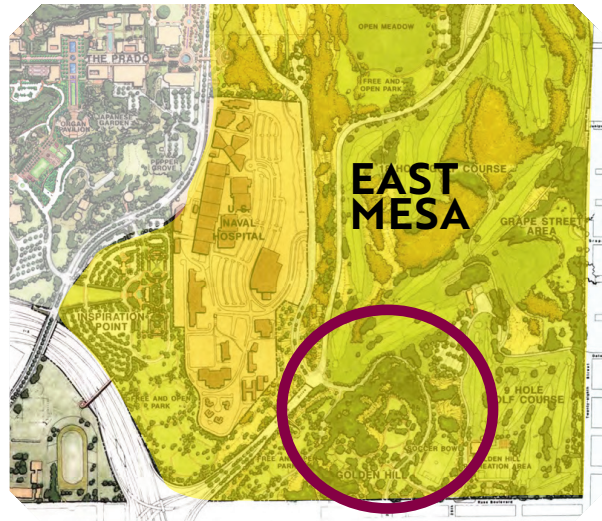
Golden Hill, in the Southeast corner of Balboa park, is named after the eponymous historic neighborhood directly to the south. This area has long served as the neighborhood park for the residents of Golden Hill, adjacent South Park, and downtown. The area is known for a popular loop drive, the historic stone fountain grotto, its mature trees, and lawn areas. The Golden Hill Recreation Center and the Golden Hill Community Clubhouse offer a gym, meeting rooms and ball fields to the neighbors. The Golden Hill Community Garden, established in 2004, is located within Balboa Park along Russ Avenue.

Viewed as a historic neighborhood park, the area offers little to engage either youth or adult residents of Golden Hill in a contemporary way. The neighborhood has a significant Hispanic population, larger than San Diego's overall, yet little is offered for families and multi-generational use of the park.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One major goal for Golden Hill is to enhance the area as a neighborhood park, with amenities and activities that appeal to and engage the surrounding communities. The Conservancy and its partners expressed a desire to strengthen relationships with community groups and neighbors, to amplify community voices, and Latino voices in particular, and better engage neighbors in visioning and decision-making processes.

Golden Hill could serve as an example for how areas in Balboa Park can become more attractive and more welcoming as community parks. With



that in mind, the short-term improvements below are focused on attracting the neighbors, while building up a sense of pride and ownership with local residents and community organizations. Recommendations are for the park to:

- Enhance the picnic area near the Golden Hill Drive loop with more, better quality picnic tables, shade and furniture. Consider



if providing grills would be appropriate here, along with amenities that would welcome multi-generational use such as:

- Benches, or loungers for adults and seniors;
 - Hammocks or swings for kids and families;
 - Volleyball nets or other lawn game sets that could be used by families who are picnicking;
 - Outdoor counter space, or long tables, with water if possible, for groups and families having parties and celebrations to lay out food, drinks, gifts, etc.;
 - And shaded picnic tables with umbrellas, or a gazebo-type shelter.
- Talk with neighbors to explore the idea of creating an alternative playground for children focused on nature and adventure play. In the

short-term experiment with an Imagination Playground set, and engage local organizations, to supervise and play with the kids.

- Like picnicking and family celebrations, play is another good opportunity for inter-generational activities. Adding sufficient seating space for supervising parents, and potentially engaging them in activities, is a great way to enhance the experience.
- Designate an area for group exercise such as pop-up fitness, cross-fit, Zumba, or yoga. Individuals who currently use the area for exercise, walking, jogging, and training can be approached to help spearhead group activities.
 - Consider if installing outdoor fitness equipment or more natural elements like rocks, stumps, and trees, etc. would be more appropriate for these users.
- Involve existing regular users of the area in the process of making it better. For example, neighbors who walk their dogs in the park can become strong advocates and care-takers since they tend to be regular users and know each other.
- Ensure that any enhancement to Golden Hill programs and amenities is envisioned, developed, and implemented with neighbors and stakeholders through workshops, conversations, bi-lingual invitations and appropriate signage.



7. NEXT STEPS

Placemaking is an iterative, community-based approach and in order to be successful with building and implementing a place-centered vision in Balboa Park, the Balboa Park Conservancy will need to continue convening park stakeholders and partners. The Conservancy has shown great leadership in initiating and implementing Place-based strategies. The visioning workshops demonstrated the many partners are eager to engage in positive and productive work for the good of the park.

As it continues its work in Balboa Park, the Conservancy will need to reach more partners, especially in the neighborhood context, and also look to sources that can help fund short-term and longer-term initiatives. With a park as large as Balboa, there is always much work to be done, but opportunities are endless.

Continue Work with Working Groups

An important step towards implementation of the LQC recommendations included in this report will be to assemble several Place-based working groups who would continue carrying these plans forward with guidance from the Conservancy. For the West Mesa and the Palisades, the partners and stakeholders that can turn ideas into reality are more clearly defined. The Landfill and Golden Hill will need a closer examination of existing and potential partners. This is especially important for Golden Hill, where neighborhood participation is key to success.



Continuous Engagement

The Conservancy can give the community opportunities to provide continuous input as plans evolve for the different areas. An intentional and open dialogue with involved neighbors, and those who have not participated in the past, will be key to successful implementation. This type of engagement also allows for quick course correction if programs or ideas fail to succeed.

Focus on Diversity

With the overall intention to attract and engage new community-based audiences in mind, the Conservancy should keep working to connect to younger, and more diverse audiences. This applies to potential park users, but also to park supporters. Diversifying supporters relates to their age, ethnic background, and even where they live.

The Balboa Park Conservancy's union with the Friends of Balboa Park as Balboa Park Forever has a new elevated role that will continue to grow. With bold new ideas and growing support, its placemaking ideas are taking root and becoming essential for a Balboa Park of the future.



