

# Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

CTC Meeting: June 24, 2020

From: MITCH WEISS, Executive Director

Reference Number: 2.2c. (13), Action

Prepared By: Jose Oseguera  
Assistant Deputy Director

Published Date: June 12, 2020

Subject: Approval of Project for Future Consideration of Funding – Final Environmental Impact Report for the Balboa Park Master Plan and, the 2012 Addendum, including the 26<sup>th</sup> Street Trail Improvement Project, Resolution E-20-66

## **Recommendation:**

Staff recommends the California Transportation Commission (Commission), as a Responsible Agency, accept the Final Environmental Impact Report and the 2012 Addendum for the Balboa Park Master Plan, including the 26<sup>th</sup> Street Trail Improvement Project (Project) in San Diego County, and approve the Project for future consideration of funding.

## **Issue:**

The City of San Diego (City) is the California Environmental Quality Act lead agency for the Project. The Balboa Master Plan creates a nurturing environment to enhance the cultural, recreational, and passive resources of the park to meet the needs of the region and surrounding communities, while respecting the physical, cultural and historic environment. The plan includes multiple investments aimed at creating a pedestrian oriented environment through a system of interconnecting trails. The 26<sup>th</sup> Street Trail Improvement Project is one of those trail investments that will construct a 0.5-mile, multi-use trail of decomposed granite, including the installation of rock stairs, foot bridges, water facilities, fencing, and landscaping to connect with the existing trails in Balboa Park. The project is located in the general vicinity of 26<sup>th</sup> Street and Golden Hills Drive in the City of San Diego.

For all projects that are anticipated to be funded through a program under the purview of the Commission, full compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is required. The Commission will not allocate funds to projects for design, right-of-way or construction until the environmental document is complete, and the Commission has approved the environmentally cleared project for future funding consideration.

**Recommendation:**

On July 25, 1989, the San Diego City Council adopted the Final Environmental Impact Report and Statement of Overriding Considerations for the Balboa Master Plan, including the 26<sup>th</sup> Street Trail Improvement Project. The Final Environmental Impact Report determined that impacts related to land use, aesthetics, biology, and traffic would be significant and unavoidable.

The San Diego City Council found that there were several benefits that outweigh the unavoidable adverse impacts of the Balboa Master Plan. These overriding benefits include economic, legal, social, and technological considerations that outweigh the identified significant effects on the environment. Specifically, the Balboa Master Plan benefits include:

- Supports the creation of multiple trails to facilitate pedestrian traffic from parking structures to the natural habitat.
- Encourages expanded opportunities for access to multi-modal transportation options by enhancing the pedestrian, bicycle, and transit network.

On July 9, 2012, the San Diego City Council approved the 2012 Addendum to the Final Environmental Impact Report to minimize vehicular/pedestrian conflicts.

On May 22, 2020, the City confirmed that the Final Environmental Impact Report and Addendum remain valid and that there are no new identified impacts requiring mitigation. The City also confirmed that the preferred alternative set forth in the final environmental document is consistent with the Project scope of work programmed by the Commission.

The Project is estimated to cost \$338,000 and is fully funded through construction with Active Transportation Program Funds.

Construction is estimated to begin in Fiscal Year 2020-21.

**Attachments:**

- Attachment A: Resolution E-20-66
- Attachment B: Statement of Overriding Considerations
- Attachment C: Notice of Determination
- Attachment D: Project Location Map

**CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding**

**11 – San Diego County  
Resolution E-20-66**

- 1.1 WHEREAS, the City of San Diego (City) has completed a Final Environmental Impact Report and, the 2012 Addendum, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the Balboa Park Master Plan, including the 26th Street Trail Improvement Project (Project) in San Diego County; and
- 1.2 WHEREAS, the City has certified that the Final Environmental Impact Report and the 2012 Addendum has been completed pursuant to CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines; and
- 1.3 WHEREAS, the Project is located in the general vicinity of 26th Street and Golden Hills Drive in the City of San Diego; and
- 1.4 WHEREAS, the Project will construct a 0.5-mile, multi-use trail of decomposed granite, including the installation of rock stairs, foot bridges, water facilities, fencing, and landscaping to connect with the existing trails in Balboa Park; and
- 1.5 WHEREAS, the California Transportation Commission, as a Responsible Agency, has considered the information contained in the Final Environmental Impact Report and the 2012 Addendum; and
- 1.6 WHEREAS, on July 25, 1989, the San Diego City Council adopted the Final Environmental Impact Report; and
- 1.7 WHEREAS, on July 25, 1989, the San Diego City Council determined that impacts related to land use, aesthetics, biology, and traffic would be significant and unavoidable; and
- 1.8 WHEREAS, on July 9, 2012, the San Diego City Council adopted the 2012 Addendum; and
- 1.9 WHEREAS, on May 22, 2020, the City confirmed that the Final Environmental Impact Report, including the 2012 Addendum, remains valid and that there are no new identified impacts requiring mitigation; and
- 1.10 WHEREAS, on May 22, 2020, the City also confirmed that the preferred alternative set forth in the final environmental document is consistent with the

Project scope of work programmed by the California Transportation Commission (Commission); and

- 1.11 WHEREAS, the Commission, as a Responsible Agency, has considered the information contained in the Final Environmental Impact Report and the 2012 Addendum.
  
- 2.1 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission does hereby accept the Final Environmental Impact Report, including the 2012 Addendum, and approve the above-referenced Project for future consideration of funding.

D. Statement of Overriding Considerations

The City Council, having reviewed and considered the information contained in the Final EIR, City of San Diego Report to the Park and Recreation Board No. 202 issued April 1, 1988 and No. 201 issued June 20, 1988, Joint City Manager's/Planning Director's Report issued August 3, 1988, and the record, makes the following Statement of Overriding Considerations:

Although the introduction of parking structures into the central core area of the park would contribute to the overall "restricted" nature of the park and the retention of one lane of traffic on the Cabrillo Bridge would limit achievement of the goal of eliminating automobile/pedestrian conflicts in the central core area, there is no complete mitigation available which would:

- permit removal of parking from the Prado and Palisades areas and conversion of these areas to pedestrian use;
- retain the Cabrillo Bridge as the historic ceremonial entrance to the park;
- provide visibility of the central core area for motorists;
- provide convenient replacement parking for spaces lost in the Prado and Palisades area and provide increased parking to satisfy existing and future demand without utilizing structural parking or disturbing existing natural park land;
- maintain adequate east/west access through the park without adverse landform alteration and visual quality impacts; and
- satisfy the future needs of visitors to the central core area for access and parking in a cost-effective manner while at the same time implementing major goals of the Balboa Park Master Plan which are to remove parking from the Prado and Palisades areas and

eliminate automobile/pedestrian conflicts in the central core area.

Certain environmental benefits and mitigation measures are incorporated into the CM-PD's Recommendation which would substantially lessen environmental impacts associated with the proposed project. These include the following:

Mitigation Measures Associated with Parking Garage

a. The Organ Pavilion parking garage would be constructed on existing asphalt and no disturbance of existing natural areas would be associated with development of a structured parking facility within the park. This measure would avoid landform alteration impacts associated with the previously proposed Archery Canyon garage which would have been constructed in an existing natural area.

b. Construction of the Organ Pavilion garage would be closely linked to the removal of parking from the Prado and Palisades areas and the conversion of these areas to pedestrian malls. Conversion of the Prado and Palisades areas to pedestrian use is one of the primary goals of the Balboa Park Master Plan and of all alternative plans analyzed and is regarded as a significant environmental benefit.

c. The CM-PD's Recommendation regarding the provision of the Organ Pavilion parking garage is based on the conclusion that visitor needs for access to the central portion of the park cannot be satisfied through the provision of transit systems and implementation of parking management strategies alone. The CM-PD's Recommendation also includes, however, a commitment to aggressively pursue implementation of transit systems and other parking management strategies for Balboa Park beginning with implementation of a proposed demonstration shuttle service in

1989. It is also anticipated that individual museums and attractions will provide their own shuttle service in conjunction with specific events. Such a shuttle service was implemented by the Zoo during a recent panda exhibit in 1987-88. Parking management activities will include coordination of parking needs within Balboa Park with downtown parking management strategies and with potential future programs linking downtown parking reservoirs with Balboa Park.

d. Development of close-in parking lots would retain and enhance access to the cultural/community core of Balboa Park for all users, particularly the handicapped.

e. A pedestrian overcrossing will be constructed over the access road to the Organ Pavilion parking structure to ensure maintenance of the Prado and Palisades areas for pedestrian use and to avoid automobile/pedestrian conflicts.

f. The following specific measures would be incorporated into the design of the Organ Pavilion parking garage to reduce visual quality impacts associated with the garage.

1) The structure would be located within the footprint of the existing parking lot. The Organ Pavilion lot would be constructed below grade to the maximum extent possible to prevent view blockage and preserve existing views. The top of the structure would not exceed the elevation of the floor of the Organ Pavilion.

2) Ultimate design of the structure could be commissioned via a design competition to ensure high quality in the structure design.

3) Design of the structure will respect the architectural integrity of Balboa Park and make maximum use of landscaping as a visual buffer.

4) Specific plans for the parking structure will be subject to future environmental and design review. At the time specific plans are proposed for the structure, the need for the structure will be re-evaluated in the context of the current effectiveness of parking management programs.

5) If in the future a structure is proposed on the existing Zoo lot, it will be subject to the mitigation measures described in Items 1-4 above. The visibility of any structure on the Zoo lot will be reduced to the maximum extent possible.

#### Mitigation Measures Associated with Retention of Automobile Traffic on Cabrillo Bridge

a. Traffic on the Cabrillo Bridge would be limited to one lane of one-way eastbound traffic only whereas the bridge is currently operating as a two lane two-way facility. With implementation of the CM-PD's Recommendation a portion of the bridge would be available for bicycle or park shuttle purposes.

b. Under the CM-PD's Recommendation, the Cabrillo Bridge and associated one lane, one-way access road would limit traffic to one direction only over the Cabrillo Bridge. The existing two lane, two-way bridge and access road currently provide access via Laurel Street and Presidents Way between the Sixth Avenue area and Park Boulevard which encourages through traffic in both directions through Balboa Park. The CM-PD's Recommendation would reduce the current through traffic impacts.



c. The CM-PD's Recommendation would retain the Cabrillo Bridge as a ceremonial entrance to Balboa Park for motorists and would maintain visibility of park facilities in the central core area for motorists. For some visitors, particularly the elderly and the handicapped, this auto access may provide the only opportunity to view the central area of Balboa Park.

d. The CM-PD's Recommendation would maintain drop-off areas in proximity to the museums and cultural facilities in the central core area for handicapped individuals and others.

e. The CM-PD's Recommendation regarding the status of the Cabrillo Bridge is closely linked to the removal of parking from the Prado and Palisades areas and the conversion of these areas to pedestrian malls, a primary goal of the Balboa Park Master Plan.

f. The CM-PD's Recommendation also suggests that the matter of closing the Cabrillo Bridge to vehicular traffic be reconsidered in the future at such time as the proposed off-site joint use parking structure, shuttle service and mass transit facilities are determined to be providing adequate access to the park.

Therefore, the City of San Diego finds that since the CM-PD's Recommendation implements the major goals of the Balboa Park Master Plan by eliminating parking in the Prado and Palisades areas and reducing automobile/pedestrian conflicts in the central core area; mitigation measures are proposed to lessen the significant impacts caused by the Organ Pavilion parking structure; and other alternatives would not necessarily be environmentally preferable to the CM-PD's Recommendation; the benefits provided by the CM-PD's Recommendation override the significant adverse impacts which result from the proposed project.

**NOTICE OF DETERMINATION**

---

To: Office of Planning and Research  
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121  
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: California Transportation Commission  
Attn: Jose Oseguera  
1120 N Street, MS 52  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 653-2094

**Subject: Filing of Notice of Determination in compliance with Section 21108 of the Public Resources Code.**

**Project Title:** 26<sup>th</sup> Street Trail Improvement Project

State Clearinghouse Number	Lead Agency Contact Person	Area Code/Telephone
	Myra Herrman	(619) 446-5372

**Project Location** (include county): The project is located in the general vicinity of 26th Street and Golden Hills Drive in the City of San Diego.

**Project Description:** The project will construct a 0.5-mile, multi-use trail of decomposed granite, including the installation of rock stairs, foot bridges, water facilities, fencing, and landscaping to connect with the existing trails in Balboa Park.

This is to advise that the California Transportation Commission has approved the above described project on

(  Lead Agency/  Responsible Agency)

June 24, 2020, and has made the following determinations regarding the above described project:

1. The project (  will/  will not) have a significant effect on the environment.
2.  A Final Environmental Impact Report was prepared for this project pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.  
 A Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared for this project pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.
3. Mitigation measures (  were/  were not) made a condition of the approval of the project.
4. Mitigation reporting or monitoring plan (  was /  was not) adopted for this project.
5. A Statement of Overriding Considerations (  was /  was not) adopted for this project.
6. Findings (  were/  were not) made pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.

The above identified document with comments and responses and record of project approval is available to the General Public at: 9485 Aero Drive, MS 413, San Diego, CA 92123

MITCH WEISS	Date	Executive Director California Transportation Commission
<i>Signature (Public Agency)</i>		<i>Title</i>

Date received for filing at OPR:

### 26th Street Trail Improvement Project Vicinity Map

