



# Memorandum

**TO: NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES  
AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**FROM: Jon Cicirelli**

**SUBJECT: SEE BELOW**

**DATE: May 11, 2023**

Approved

Date

5/4/23

**COUNCIL DISTRICT: Citywide**

**SUBJECT: PARKS, RECREATION AND NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES  
VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS ANNUAL REPORT**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept an annual report on Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services volunteer management programs, accomplishments and improvement initiatives.

## **BACKGROUND**

Like many other cities, San José has needs that are not met by current resources. To bridge these gaps, Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) staff engage residents to increase the collective capacity to provide service to the community. The value added by volunteers in the City of San José is significant and multifaceted. Volunteers contribute their time, skills, and energy to a wide range of organizations and causes, providing important support to many programs and initiatives.

The City of San José has a rich history of volunteerism. Much of this volunteering happens under the umbrella of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS). Volunteers are utilized according to their skills and contribute thousands of hours of their time, each year, working at community centers, in City parks, City trails, and in the community engaging residents. Volunteer service is aligned in the guiding principle of Stewardship in the Department's 20-year strategic plan, ActivateSJ. The Department's Volunteer Management Unit is responsible for supporting volunteer activities across all Department divisions. The unit works closely with each division to identify volunteer needs and opportunities, recruit and train

volunteers, and provide ongoing support and recognition. The unit works to engage and support volunteers in various programs and activities that support the Department's mission.

The pandemic forced many Department volunteer programs to scale back or even halt their operations, and some volunteers may have been unable or unwilling to participate due to health concerns. However, as public health conditions improved, the Department has seen a resurgence in community members willing to help.

Volunteers are involved in a variety of Department activities and programs, depending on their skills and interests. Examples of volunteer opportunities are:

1. **Community Center Support:** Volunteers may assist with program set-up and clean-up, greet and welcome participants, provide customer service, teach classes, and assist with program activities.
2. **Event Support:** Volunteers may assist with event planning, set-up, and clean-up, as well as assist with activities during the event.
3. **Park Stewardship:** Volunteers may assist with park activities, such as litter removal, trail clean-up, and planting and caring for trees and shrubs.
4. **Youth Programs:** Volunteers may assist with youth programs, such as coaching youth sports teams, tutoring, and mentoring.
5. **Community Outreach:** Volunteers may assist with outreach activities, such as distributing flyers, canvassing neighborhoods, and assisting with community events.
6. **Administrative Support:** Volunteers may assist with administrative tasks, such as data entry, filing, and answering phones.

Overall, volunteers provide significant value to the Department and the community. Their contributions are essential to achieving the Department's goals of increasing equity and enhancing the livability of San José neighborhoods. While the City and community gain from the volunteerism, the volunteers gain too: volunteerism allows community members to learn new skills and connect with those around them while increasing the livability of their neighborhoods.

## **ANALYSIS**

The Department offers volunteer opportunities that are as varied as the programs it offers. Though the Department is moving towards high-level coordination of all volunteer programs coming from the Volunteer Management Unit, each individual program currently works to define individual volunteer roles, recruit volunteers and train them to work within their programs. Volunteer roles can be found within the Parks, Community Services, (BeautifySJ, Project Hope), and Recreation divisions, as described further below.

The table below provides a summary overview of volunteer hours and the value of contributions in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. As shown, Department-supported volunteerism increased dramatically in 2021-2022, as more community members felt comfortable resuming volunteer

activities with improving public health conditions. On Thursday, April 27, 2023, the Department celebrated these volunteers at its first in-person volunteer recognition event since 2019.

Volunteer Hours & Value*	2020-2021		2021-2022	
	Hours	Value	Hours	Value
Community Centers	0	\$0.00	6,926	\$246,288.56
Senior Nutrition & Special Events	60	\$2,133.60	2,352	\$83,637.12
<b>Recreation Subtotal</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>\$2,133.60</b>	<b>9,278</b>	<b>\$329,925.68</b>
Graffiti Removal Program	466	\$16,570.96	175	\$6,223.00
Neighborhood Litter Program	11,009	\$391,480.04	15,789	\$561,456.84
Project Hope**	**	**	2,507	\$89,148.92
<b>Community Services Subtotal</b>	<b>11,475</b>	<b>\$408,051.00</b>	<b>18,471</b>	<b>\$656,828.76</b>
Adopt-A-Park	10,659	\$379,034.04	14,850	\$528,066.00
One-Day Events	10,651	\$378,749.56	17,353	\$617,072.68
<b>Parks Subtotal</b>	<b>21,310</b>	<b>\$757,783.60</b>	<b>32,203</b>	<b>\$1,145,138.68</b>
<b>Department Total</b>	<b>32,845</b>	<b>\$1,167,968.20</b>	<b>59,952</b>	<b>\$2,131,893.12</b>

\* The Independent Sector stated that in 2022, one (1) hour of volunteer time in California was valued at \$35.56.<sup>1</sup>

\*\* Project Hope volunteer hours were not reported in the annual report for 2020-2021.

### ***Volunteering in Parks***

The Department offers two main options for individuals or groups who want to volunteer to help steward the City's parks: one-day events and the Adopt-a-Park program.

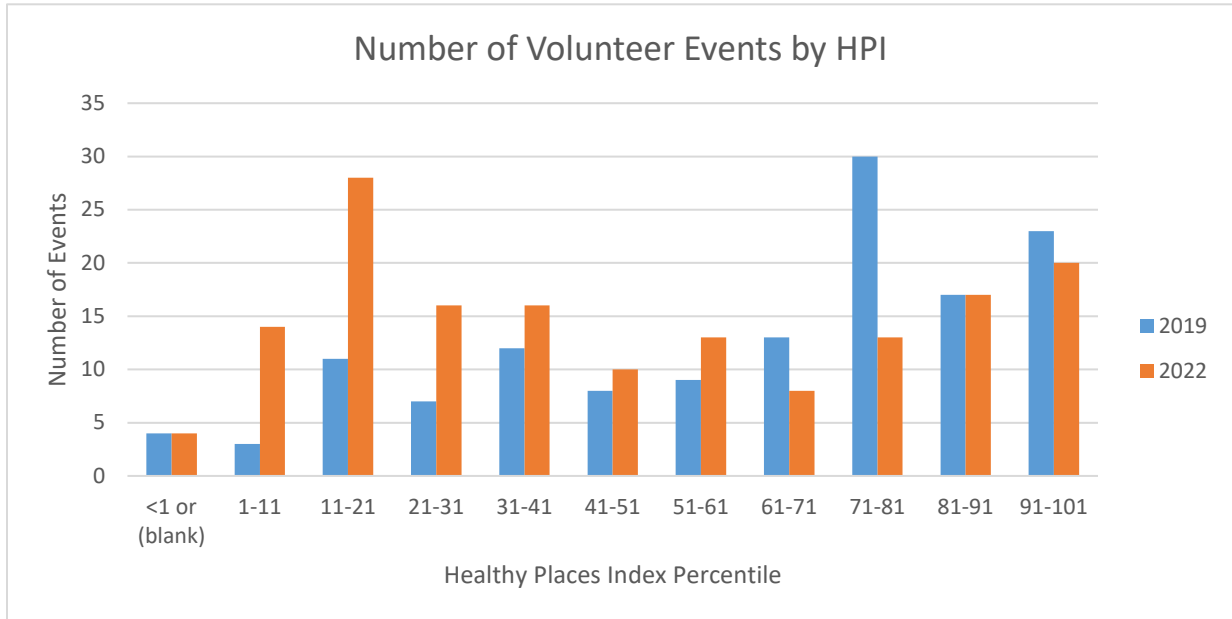
One-day events are organized by the Volunteer Management Unit and offer individuals or groups an opportunity to volunteer for a specific park stewardship or improvement project. These events can be organized around a particular holiday, such as Earth Day, or to make targeted improvements based on individual park needs. Volunteers typically spend two to three (2-3) hours working and can see how small tasks can have a huge impact. The program is adaptable to all abilities and modifications can be made to ensure that everyone has a role to play. The goals of the program are to assist with various projects and help implement special projects such as native garden implementations, while fostering a sense of community and civic engagement.

The Department recognizes the importance of one-day volunteer events to the park system, particularly in parks that have received a low score on their most recent annual Park Condition Assessment (PCA). In planning one-day events across the City, the Department utilizes the [Healthy Places Index \(HPI\)](#) to seek equity in prioritizing the areas of the City that may most rely on the green spaces that City parks provide.<sup>2</sup>

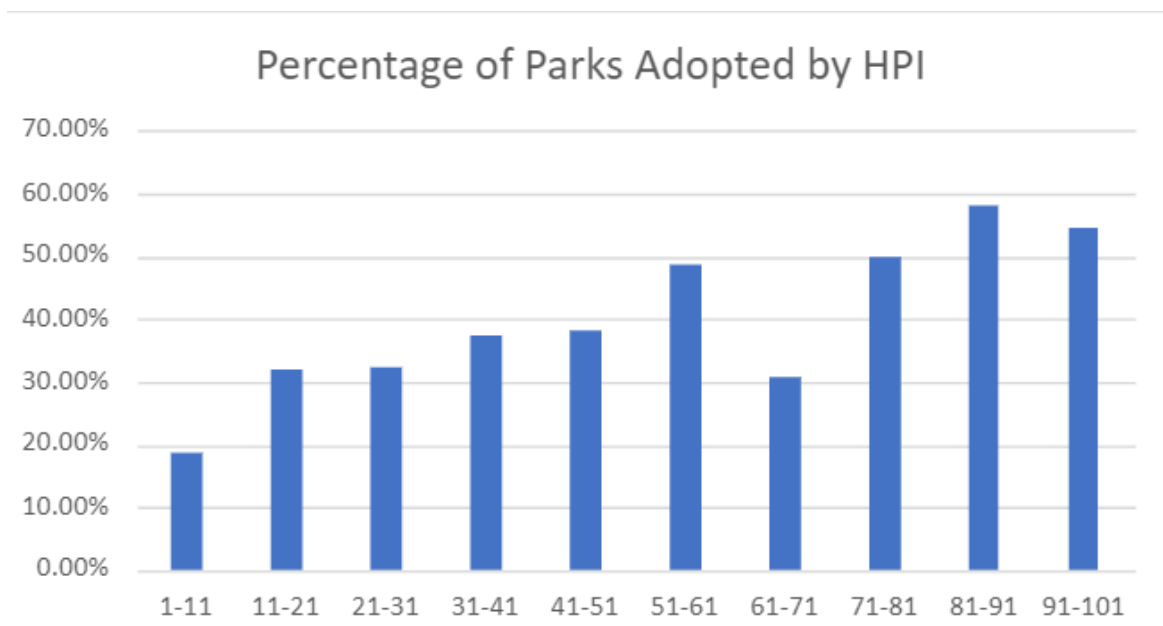
<sup>1</sup> Independent Sector Value of Volunteer Time by state: <https://independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Value-of-Volunteer-Time-by-State-2001-2021.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Healthy Places Index can be found here: <https://www.healthyplacesindex.org/>.

The use of HPI data has dramatically altered one-day event planning. In 2019, only 33 percent of volunteer events were held in a park that had an HPI percentile of 50 or less. By 2022, however, 55 percent of events were held in a park that had an HPI percentile of 50 or less. The first graph on the next page shows the number of one-day events at parks in 2019 and 2022, by HPI.



The Adopt-A-Park program is a longer-term commitment that involves "adopting" a specific park and taking responsibility for some of its stewardship and improvement. The Adopt-A-Park program, first established in 2001, allows individuals, community groups, neighborhood associations, or "friends of" groups to help keep parks clean and safe. Adopt-A-Park volunteers have a one-year minimum commitment and are expected to volunteer regularly, performing tasks such as litter clean-up, weeding, and watering, as well as larger improvement projects, as needed. Adopt-A-Park volunteers are provided with training, tools, and support from the Volunteer Management Unit. Currently, 86 of 210 City parks have been adopted, which the Department hopes to increase in 2023. The bar chart below shows the percentage of parks that are adopted, by HPI.



The Department recognizes that fewer parks in low HPI areas are currently adopted. The Department is actively working on a plan to increase park adoption with a specific focus on low-HPI neighborhoods. The plan includes:

1. Engagement with the community to understand their needs and interests in park programs and services. By soliciting feedback from community members, the Department can ensure that its programs and services are meeting the needs of residents in lower HPI neighborhoods.
2. Targeted outreach efforts to individuals and organizations within lower HPI neighborhoods. This includes building relationships with community leaders, communicating with the community's native languages, sending targeted mailers or flyers to residents, and partnering with local schools, churches, and community centers to promote volunteer opportunities.
3. Collaboration with local organizations to create partnerships that increase volunteerism in lower HPI neighborhoods. For example, partnering with local restaurants to offer discounts to volunteers who clean up a nearby park can incentivize volunteerism and foster community engagement.

The Department intends to coordinate and work closely with Council Offices on these efforts. By taking these steps, staff believes the Department can increase park adoption in lower HPI neighborhoods, which can lead to increased livability in the community.

### ***Volunteering with BeautifySJ***

BeautifySJ includes several services focused on addressing blight by engaging residents to create a cleaner and more vibrant San José. Its mission is *“to support residents’ efforts at reclaiming their public spaces and to empower residents to aesthetically demonstrate their pride in our city.”* The Neighborhood Blight Reduction team within BeautifySJ is involved in graffiti and illegal dumping removal, neighborhood dumpster days, and has a volunteer-driven program called the Neighborhood Litter Program. The Neighborhood Litter Program, formerly the Anti-Litter Program, assists with helping to coordinate San José residents to organize clean up events and efforts. The program also conducts school outreach and education and works closely with Council Offices and various community partners.

Before the pandemic in 2018-2019, the Neighborhood Litter program logged over 53,000 volunteer hours, completing its most successful year to date. The pandemic had a chilling effect on volunteer activity with the cancellation of events in 2019-2021 in compliance with County and State health orders. The Neighborhood Litter Program is busy re-engaging volunteers and providing education and outreach to schools. In the Spring of 2022, the school outreach and education initiative re-launched and is teaching elementary aged students the importance of keeping San José litter free. Staff presents the program to neighborhood groups and associations, non-profits, and various recreational programs to help promote volunteerism in the community

and demonstrate the impact that volunteer time can have on a neighborhood. In 2021-2022, the Neighborhood Litter Program organized 905 events with 4,007 volunteers who collectively contributed 15,789 hours. These volunteers collected 15,500 bags of litter, equivalent to 271.25 tons of trash.

### ***Volunteering with Project Hope***

Established in 2016, Project Hope empowers community members through the creation and capacity-building of neighborhood associations in historically marginalized communities that contribute to persistent socio-economic, health, and educational disparities. These neighborhood associations may not exist without staff support encouraging residents to build and use their voice through civic engagement to address crime/safety, blight, and other concerns.

In 2021-2022, 2,507 volunteer hours included event planning/hosting, monthly strategy meetings of board members, and neighborhood association meetings in the nine (9) Project Hope neighborhoods. These board members volunteer to improve their community's quality of life and Project Hope staff recruit and retain board members to achieve the following objectives:

- Sustainable, organized group of neighborhood leaders
- Safer and cleaner environment
- Informed residents who can access City services
- Community partnerships that support ongoing efforts

### ***Volunteering in Recreation***

The Department's Recreation Division provides many essential services to the community that give residents the opportunity to connect and engage in a safe and inclusive atmosphere. These services include Therapeutic Recreation, Preschool, After School programs, countless Community Center activities, and the Senior Nutrition Program (SNP).

The Senior Nutrition Program (SNP) provides meals to older adults at 14 community centers across the City. These hot meals are designed by a registered dietician and meet County Health standards. In addition to hot meals, the program also provides information on transportation services, legal assistance, community resources, dental services, and health services. In 2021-2022, the program was able to resume in-person volunteer opportunities for many Senior Services including SNP, recreational activities, and special events. With the COVID-19 pandemic placing seniors at an increased risk, the return to "normal" activities has been in phases, with many participants hesitant to resume in-person gatherings. In 2021-2022, there were a total of 167 volunteers who helped support the program, including the SNP, activities, classes and programs that helped seniors get active, along with special events including holiday celebrations and Lunar New Year celebrations. The Senior Services Team have gone above and beyond to ensure all safety protocols are in place and communicate with volunteers all the precautions they have implemented to ensure their safety and the safety of the participants. The Senior Services Team is committed to returning to pre-pandemic models while adapting to participants' level of comfort. The team continues to utilize the Age-Friendly Action Plan approved by Council in October 2020 and works closely with the Volunteer Management Unit to

further develop the program and maximize opportunities to utilize volunteers in the senior service delivery model.

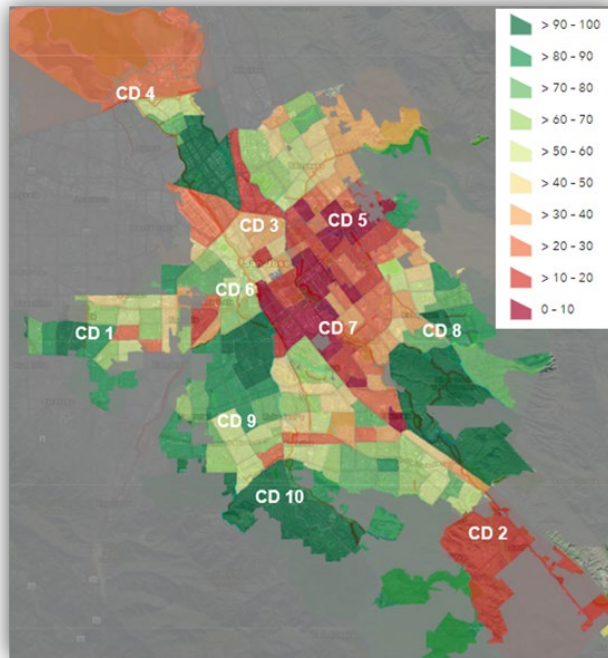
Beyond Senior Services, volunteers assist community centers in a number of ways such as supporting Gen2Gen events with youth. In 2021-2022, community center volunteers contributed 6,926 hours of their time, a huge increase from the prior year.

### ***Improving the Volunteer Experience***

Department staff partner with volunteers to make positive impacts in the lives of San José residents. These impacts are measured through both concrete data and anecdotal accounts. While the Department has many successes, volunteerism continues to face many challenges. One of the biggest is standardization and coordination to streamline efforts and increase the ease of volunteering. Each Department program currently works independently, for the most part, to recruit, train and recognize volunteers. The Volunteer Management Unit Program Manager has helped establish guidelines and standard procedures for some programs but does not have capacity to centralize all Department volunteer management activities. Over time, the Department envisions unifying these programs through greater oversight by the Volunteer Management Unit's Program Manager.

### ***Racial Equity Impact Analysis***

In furthering equity goals through volunteerism, the Department utilizes the Healthy Places Index (HPI) percentiles to prioritize the areas of the City that may most rely on services offered by City programs. HPI is comprised of social condition domains such as education, job opportunities, clean air and water, and other indicators that are positively associated with life expectancy at birth. An HPI percentile is a Census tract-level ranking for the City of San José, where a higher percentile indicates more healthy community conditions. The following map shows San José neighborhoods with their corresponding HPI percentile among City Census Tracts.



*Map of City neighborhoods with corresponding HPI percentiles*

Based on analysis of need, Department volunteer programs seek to advance racial equity by creating programming that is equity centered by designing volunteer opportunities that are accessible and welcoming to diverse communities, and that prioritize the needs of marginalized groups. Currently, one-day event locations are selected using HPI, and volunteer events are accessible to residents of all ages, culture and abilities. The Department is exploring incorporating childcare into volunteer events or providing meals to create a greater sense of community from the volunteer experience.

The Department also understands that once volunteers are recruited, it is important to provide them with training that is culturally responsive. As such, the Department is exploring providing education and training for volunteers on implicit bias, cultural humility, and racial equity. For example, a corporate group might be educated on unconscious bias and making judgements about a park or its users based on location, or providing an understanding of how different cultural groups utilize the park to allow volunteers to understand the importance of the outcomes of their efforts. By doing so, volunteers can better understand the needs of diverse communities and work towards creating a more equitable San José.

## **COORDINATION**

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office and the City Manager's Budget Office.



NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

May 11, 2023

**Subject: Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Volunteer Management Programs Annual Report**

Page 9

/s/

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Neighborhood Services

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