



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Ortiz

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: October 10, 2024

Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jen Ortiz".

SUBJECT: PARKS MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL FUNDING STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDATION

1. Direct the City Clerk and City Manager to schedule a City Council Study Session on parks maintenance, capital funding, and preliminary work plan for a 2026 Parks Funding Ballot Measure in January or February of 2025
2. Direct the City Manager to support the work already underway and led by Council District 5 to conduct regular stakeholder outreach, which should include, but should not be limited to:
 - a. A workplan that includes a comprehensive assessment of the current maintenance and repair needs in each park, as well as a clear timeline for when stakeholders can expect these issues to be addressed.
 - b. Town halls to discuss the current state of parks with residents to create open discussion and receive feedback from community members.

DISCUSSION

Our parks play a vital role in East San José neighborhoods by providing essential space for recreation, social interaction, and physical activity, all of which contribute to improved community health and well-being. Across the US, in areas where residents may face limited access to private green spaces or costly recreational facilities, parks offer affordable and accessible ways to enjoy nature, exercise, and unwind. They also serve as safe gathering places for children, families, and seniors—helping to foster social cohesion and a sense of community. Additionally, well-maintained parks can help mitigate environmental challenges, such as poor air quality and urban heat islands, which disproportionately affect low-income areas. By investing in

parks in neighborhoods like East San José, cities enhance residents' quality of life, promote equity and environmental justice, and invest in our future.

Like most of our services in San José, funding of park maintenance and capital is limited and must compete with other critical services the City has been able to incrementally restore since 2011 – such as police, fire, and critical infrastructure – and supporting our unhoused residents. The resources for the day-to-day maintenance of our parks come almost exclusively from the General Fund. Funds to rehabilitate existing or construct new parks come from a variety of sources, including the Construction and Conveyance (C&C) Tax that is impacted by the real estate market, fees from the Parkland Dedication Ordinance/Park Impact Ordinance (PDO/PIO) generated by new residential construction projects and that are, by law, geographically restricted, external grant funding, and extremely limited General Fund contributions.

As a City, we deploy these limited and volatile resources by using Park Condition Assessment (PCA) results to create maintenance plans for all parks in the hopes of incremental improvement. Parks with failing amenities and standards are prioritized for more resources. For specialized maintenance efforts, like furniture repair, pest abatement, and turf renovation, the City uses the Healthy Places Index (HPI) to focus limited resources and volunteer projects on the most in need.

Our past decisions around sources of funding and improvements to how those resources are deployed may have been sound decisions for previous councils. Yet, even with this thoughtful past approach, the end product for East San José and the outcomes our residents need is not good enough for a world-class city, and we need to explore opportunities for future improvement.

The FY 2025-2026 budget cycle will be challenging. As a council, we need to balance the many competing interests of our residents and focus on those city services we want to preserve, as we will most likely need to make service cuts to balance next year's budget. I know that addressing inequities in our parks will not be fully mitigated this year, and by no means do I propose we raid each other's funds, as parks are important for many neighborhoods across the City. However, my proposal is simply a starting point for us. I am proposing this path to educate us all and incoming Councilmembers on how our parks are funded and, most importantly, start our collective discussion on a path to a 2026 ballot measure for our parks.

In addition, the frustration felt in East San José is such that more conspicuous community engagement is necessary to create better understanding of acute needs in District 5 parks, as well as better understanding from residents on what barriers currently exist in delivering the desired level of maintenance.

I propose a two-handed approach to better democratize parks maintenance in District 5, led by my office with some support from the City Manager's Office and other relevant staff. First,

community town halls dedicated to discussing the current state of parks, providing a forum for community members to voice their concerns. Second, a quarterly District 5 Advisory Group consisting of neighborhood leaders and representatives of the Council Office and the City.