



Memorandum

TO: NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE **FROM:** Jon Cicirelli
Nanci Klein

SUBJECT: Placemaking and Public Life **DATE:** February 18, 2025
Status Report

Approved

Date:

3/5/2025

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the annual status report on Placemaking programs and events and public life in San José, including citywide efforts to activate and improve San José's public life.

BACKGROUND

Public Life is what happens in the public spaces of cities. It is what a group of people create when they spend time together outside their homes, offices, and cars. For example, everyday dog walking is as much a part of a vibrant Public Life as taking the family to a parade or farmers' market. Cities with robust Public Life attract and connect people. Public Life fosters a host of tangible benefits that support broader city goals. San José's vision for Public Life is to connect people to people and people to places by inviting all residents to create and participate in everyday experiences in public spaces, fostering community cohesion across neighborhoods. Planning, public space design and activation are the mutually reinforcing components of San José's guiding framework to foster robust Public Life. Placemaking is often thought of as the process of "creating quality places, wherein people want to live, work, play, and learn."

In San José, these initiatives are coordinated by multiple departments including Environmental Services, Fire, Housing, Library, Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs (OEDCA), Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS), Planning, Building and Code Enforcement, Police, and Transportation. These departments, along with community partners, have sought over the years to ensure that everyone in our community has access to lively public spaces and places that are beautiful, positive, clean, safe, interesting, and inclusive. OEDCA and PRNS coordinate, facilitate, and produce marquee events, programs, and public art for the community to engage in public life.

A key to the City's approach is engaging residents as stakeholders and instilling a sense of pride and ownership in public places. A Public Life strategy allows residents to define the character of a city, build civic pride, and encourage greater connection socially and with San José. Establishing mutual stewardship of places, public life and placemaking strengthens local leadership and engages communities in the creation, activation, and maintenance of San José's public spaces.

ANALYSIS

In 2023-2024, OEDCA and PRNS coordinated, facilitated, and produced hundreds of Placemaking and Public Life events, programs and efforts across the city. Below are highlights of the interdepartmental Placemaking and Public Life efforts from the past year and a preview of the year ahead.

PRNS Events, Programs, and Projects Promoting Public Life

PRNS contributes to welcoming and vibrant neighborhoods and Public Life by producing some of the most memorable events held across the community through the Placemaking and Park Activation Program. In 2023-2024, PRNS leveraged key partnerships to deliver three Viva CalleSJ activations on September 10, 2023, April 21, 2024, and June 9, 2024. Viva CalleSJ is a free open streets program that transforms miles of San José roadways into expansive recreational spaces three times a year. These events invite residents to walk, bike, skate, play, and explore some of San José's most eclectic and historic neighborhoods, promoting economic, health, and environmental benefits. Staff estimates that 400,000 people attended the three events combined.

Viva CalleSJ makes a significant community impact. PRNS partnered with San José State University's Mineta Transportation Institute to evaluate the most recent Viva CalleSJ event on September 8, 2024. The full report is included as an Attachment. According to the report's abstract, the "assessment employed a mixed-methods approach, including participant surveys, interviews with stakeholders, and observational analysis. Key findings highlighted the event's success in attracting a diverse audience, promoting physical activity, and driving economic benefits." Specifically, 77.7% of participants planned to spend an average of \$54.23 at local businesses, while many spent two to three hours engaging in activities such as visiting community resources (68.8%), dining (66.4%), and enjoying live entertainment (64.4%). The event encouraged attendees to discover local businesses (80.4%), fostered a stronger sense of community (76%), and inspired exploration of new areas (68.5%). If the survey results are extrapolated to the estimated 125,000 participants that day, with 77.7% spending an average of \$54.23 per person, then participants may have spent **\$5.25 million** during the event. Additional details about Viva CalleSJ, including event dates, routes, and activities, are available at www.vivacallesj.org.

A major highlight for 2025 will be the 10th anniversary of Viva CalleSJ. Plans are already underway for three celebratory events that will encourage residents to explore the city on car-free streets, promoting physical activity, community connections, and environmental awareness. To reduce the City's costs for holding these marquee events, PRNS has undertaken a fundraising and sponsorship campaign that generated over \$100,000 in 2023-2024 and, in partnership with the Department of Transportation, secured a grant that will pay for one Viva CalleSJ event that runs through east San José in each of the next two years.

Beyond Viva CalleSJ, the Placemaking and Park Activation Program hosted 105 events in 2023-2024, attracting 19,252 participants. Viva Parks, a seasonal citywide initiative, activates city parks and public spaces across San José. These events offer something for everyone, from lawn games and rock-climbing walls to live performances, movie nights, and the beloved Paint the CitySJ program. Of the more than 3,000 community surveys received during events, 71% of respondents agreed that they interacted with people they would not have otherwise and 81% agreed that attending a Viva Parks or Paint the CitySJ event enhanced their sense of identity and belonging within their community. Additionally, 88% reported feeling safe while visiting the park during the event, and 70% expressed that they would return to the park even without an event taking place. Finally, 62% of participants reported up to 2 hours of physical activity at events (events typically occur from 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.).

The Viva Parks program will continue its mission of transforming public spaces into vibrant community hubs, with 55 events planned between June and October 2025. These events will feature a variety of activities, entertainment, and social opportunities, ensuring an inclusive and enriching experience for all participants. Complementing these efforts, the Paint the CitySJ program will offer 20 free curated painting experiences across all 10 Council Districts. These sessions provide residents with a unique artistic experience led by local artists, fostering creativity and strengthening connections among neighbors while reflecting the city's cultural diversity. In total, PRNS will host 75 Viva Parks and Paint the CitySJ events in 2025 commensurate with the 2024-2025 Adopted Operating Budget and service delivery expectation.

With a commitment to equity, PRNS has focused on activating public spaces in areas where recreational opportunities are most needed. In 2023-2024, staff once again used the Healthy Places Index (HPI) to identify parks that could benefit from these events, prioritizing access to positive recreational experiences. To ensure inclusion, staff collaborated with Council Offices and PRNS's Project Hope Program to reserve spots for individuals without digital access to register for Paint the CitySJ events, fostering greater participation and outreach. Parks in Council Districts 3, 5, and 7 hosted a higher concentration of events, based on HPI data, with notable locations including Children of the Rainbow Park, Roosevelt Park, and Rock Springs Park.

Looking ahead, PRNS aims to further enhance its Placemaking programs in 2025. Collaborating with the San José Downtown Association and local stakeholders, the team will focus on activating St. James Park through large-scale and small-scale events that drive both community engagement and connectivity in downtown San José.

In addition to producing marquee and beloved community events, PRNS facilitates Public Life experiences for residents and visitors through its park reservations teams, including the Special Park Use (SPU) and Picnic/Wedding Reservations units. These teams take inquiries from residents and event organizers who are looking to host their special event in parks and guide them through the reservation process. In 2023-2024, the number of outdoor events permitted by SPU surpassed pre-pandemic levels, highlighting a strong rebound in community engagement. In 2023-2024, the SPU team permitted 447 events with an estimated total attendance of 681,475. These events significantly contributed to San José's cultural diversity and economic vitality. Additionally, the Picnic/Wedding Reservations Unit processed 2,076 picnic reservations and issued 42 wedding permits that, while not open to the public in most cases, contributed to community gathering and social cohesion.

As outdoor gatherings continue to grow in popularity, SPU remains steadfast in its mission to foster community connections and enrich public spaces through diverse, well-managed events. SPU has also made substantial program improvements in the last year. It made strides in customer service by improving processes and enhancing the overall user experience. Over the past year, the team has reduced process hurdles by working more closely with event organizers, employing innovative and efficient solutions to streamline the permit application process—skills refined through the City Manager's Customer Service Initiative. It also updated and implemented a policy change to increase the number of free uses of parks by City Council offices. Finally, in partnership with Park Rangers, the team responded to a rise in unpermitted events by adopting creative and educational strategies to engage with organizers, encouraging compliance with permitting requirements. This proactive approach led to many events becoming properly permitted while ensuring that non-compliant activities were either redirected or resolved, preserving the integrity of park operations.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate PRNS's ongoing dedication to enriching the lives of San José residents by creating spaces and experiences that bring communities together and celebrate the city's vibrant public life.

Office of Cultural Affairs Events, Programs, and Projects Promoting Public Life

Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA) takes pride in partnering with the creative community to promote its creativity, diversity, and public life. New special event opportunities showcased San José, while veteran event organizers continued to provide activities that make San José one of the Bay Area's brightest cities. Providing families with the opportunity to celebrate together was a popular theme again this fiscal year, with events like Christmas in the Park, Downtown Ice, San José Jazz's Summerfest, San José Rock

and Roll Half Marathon, and the Veterans' Day Parade bringing tens of thousands of people to the downtown core. The cultural diversity of our city is one of our strongest assets and the dozens of ethnic events continue to shine the light on how we stand apart from our neighboring municipalities. With two separate Vietnamese Lunar New Year Tet Festivals, multiple colorful Holi Festivals, the annual Nikkei Matsuri Festival, and many other cultural events, our city knows the value of acceptance through celebration and creativity. OCA has numerous programs and projects that aim to promote public life. Below are selected highlights.

Make Music San José 2024 – Make Music San José is an annual citywide celebration of music hosted by OCA on the summer solstice, June 21 every year. The 2024 celebration included over 100 local professional and amateur musical artists throughout 34 locations across San José which included the San José Mineta International Airport, the Mexican Heritage Plaza, Parque de los Pobladores in the SoFA district, Children's Discovery Museum, Almaden Community Center, Evergreen Village Square, Seven Trees Public Library and Community Center, and the San José Institute of Contemporary Art to name a few. This year, over 4,000 people participated and engaged in Make Music San José. Make Music San José returns on June 21, 2025. To date, over 20 city-wide venues will be returning to participate with over 40 performers signed up. Plans are underway with an international theme for Make Music San José 2026. Anyone can sign up to participate as a musician or host a location in this free city-wide event at <https://www.makemusicday.org/SanJose/>.

CityDance – A free public space activation offering San José community members a learning and socializing experience through dance and music, the 2024 CityDance series continued at the Circle of Palms in partnership with the San José Museum of Art on the Third Thursday in July, August, September, and October. Each event engaged over three hundred guests at each event, offering attendees free entrance into the museum in the evening. Several arts partners joined in tabling the event including: SV PRIDE, New Ballet, School of Arts and Culture at Mexican Heritage Plaza, San José Women's Club, More Más Marami, Creative Ambassadors, Teatro Vision, and more. The four-month 2025 series will kick off in June and showcase popular local dance instructors and musicians of popular dance genres.

#WeCreate408 Creativity Challenge – In April 2024, OCA brought back the #WeCreate408 Creativity Challenge during Arts, Culture & Creativity Month. San Joséans joined a month-long creative challenge, #WeCreate408, to build public awareness and support for the arts. Every day in April, a "creativity challenge prompt" was sent through email, social media, and online in English, Vietnamese, and Spanish. Daily prompts were designed to inspire people to create independently and attend #WeCreate408 events around San José. The #WeCreate408 campaign themes and development included participation from over 50 partners and highlighted cultural organizations and events throughout San José. During this month-long creative campaign, an audience of over 820,000 responded to the daily prompts and attended events connected to #WeCreate408. Creative prompts from 2024 can be viewed by

visiting the wecreate408.org/prompts-2024. Planning is underway for the 2025 #WeCreate408 Challenge scheduled for April during Arts, Culture & Creativity Month.

SJ PLACES (Public Life and Community Event Spaces) – The SJ PLACES program seeks to reduce barriers to implementing events and public life engagement opportunities by removing some permitting requirements and lowering costs for organizers of small-scale outdoor events at select locations in San José. Along with reduced fees, event organizers will be able to take advantage of consolidated processes, a simplified reservation form, and a reduced approval timeline for small scale events. The program launched its pilot phase in May of 2024 and concluded in October of 2024. Over the course of the pilot phase, OEDCA was able to permit 24 new small-scale events over the five-month period that attracted up to 3500 people to come and enjoy public spaces in the Downtown. Due to the success of the pilot, OEDCA is continuing to offer the program in its current format as an avenue activating public spaces while staff work to reshape the program for formal launch based on lessons learned and feedback from SJ PLACES participants.

Public Art – The City of San José Public Art Program inspires community through artworks and exhibitions. We expand community participation opportunities and impact the economic and visual dynamics of the city. Our priorities are guided by the goals and values of project partners and the community. Through active engagement between artists and project stakeholders, we celebrate diversity, innovative spirit, rich history, the present and envisioned future. The program facilitates projects that are recognized nationally and internationally for innovative programming. Highlights of recently completed projects of the OCA Public Art Program include: 15 murals citywide, including ten on parks facilities, all painted by local artists; Emergency Operations Center interior art commissioning 31 local artists to create artwork for the interior of the facility; completion of Pellier Park which was a collaborative design with artist Norie Sato; *Thank you America* monument by artist Tuan Nguyen; *Sheltering Wing* by local artist Roger Stoller installed at Heinlenville Park; the San José Mineta International Airport Art Window Pilot project featuring two local artists Samuel Rodriguez and Robin Gibson; and multiple City Hall exhibits including the very successful Pune Sister City Photo Exhibition, attended and enjoyed by thousands in our community.

Sonic Runway – In February, the OCA activated *Sonic Runway*, the public art installation on City Hall Plaza that demonstrates the speed of sound through dynamic light patterns, with a Valentine Day event called Sonic Loveway. The event featured a youth harp group, the Symphony San José Master Chorale, Opera San José, DJ Rhythm, and local vendors and artists.

2024 Creative Ambassadors – With generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the OCA commissioned five exceptional multi-disciplinary artists as 2024 Creative Ambassadors. Promoting the value of the arts and creativity, each ambassador

offered a unique public project and outreach into their respective multicultural communities and diverse networks. The 2024 Creative Ambassadorships were: artist and author Deborah Kennedy; dance and choreographer Alice Hur; mixed-media artist Rayos Magos; nationally acclaimed poet Yosimar Reyes, and multidisciplinary artist Pantea Karimi. Each 2024 Creative Ambassador received a \$9,500 stipend for their project engaging identified communities.

Through these programs, services, and projects, Public Life has recovered since the pandemic to promote social cohesion once again, belonging, well-being, economic prosperity, and cultural vibrancy in San José.

Looking Ahead to 2026

Anticipating an exciting and eventful 2026, featuring world-class events like the World Cup and the Super Bowl at Levi's Stadium, the City is committed to creating exceptional public life experiences and positioning San José as a vibrant and welcoming destination for visitors and residents. To this end, the City has hired a Sports and Special Events Director to lead efforts to bring these 2026 world-class events coming to the region to life in San José with city-specific programming, while also shaping a legacy of community pride, economic impact, and regional influence. The Director will engage across City departments, including PRNS and OEDCA, and coordinate with external partners such as the Bay Area Host Committee, the San Jose Sports Authority, Sharks Sports and Entertainment, San Jose Earthquakes, Team San Jose, San Jose Downtown Association, San José State University, and other key partners to execute on strategic initiatives that maximize the impact of these 2026 sporting events. To facilitate a vibrant environment for special event production, the Administration will be recommending new policies to the Council later in this fiscal year. OEDCA will be producing events in those time periods as well as commissioning new public artworks for residents and visitors to enjoy.

COORDINATION

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

/s/
Jon Cicirelli
Director of Parks, Recreation
and Neighborhood Services

/s/
Nanci Klein
Director of Economic Development
and Cultural Affairs

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For questions, please contact Kerry Adams Hapner, Assistant Director of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs, at kerry.adams-hapner@sanjoseca.gov or Avi Yotam, Deputy Director of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, at avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov.

ATTACHMENT:

San José State University Mineta Transportation Institute Assessment of the Viva CalleSJ Event in San Jose