



Overview of Parks Maintenance and Capital Funding

City Council Study Session | April 15, 2025

Overview of Parks Maintenance and Capital Funding

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DEPARTMENT HISTORY

The San José Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) Department has a long history of community service. In 1942, the City Council passed an ordinance to create a five-member recreation commission with a director—officially establishing the San José Parks Department.

Since then, San José's population has grown to nearly a million people, and the PRNS Department has continually evolved to meet the needs of its diverse community. Over the years, the department has introduced specialized divisions, most recently the Community Services Division in 2021, which focuses on neighborhood engagement, youth intervention, and beautification efforts.

In November 2000, San José voters approved Measure P, the San José Safe Neighborhood Parks and Recreation Bond. With its \$228 million in funding, PRNS improved or constructed 69 neighborhood parks, seven regional park projects, nine community centers, and five major trail projects—laying the foundation for a stronger, more connected park system. **Today, PRNS oversees over 200 neighborhood parks, 10 regional parks, and more than 65 miles of trails.**



The department has guided its planning through documents like the Greenprint¹, first adopted in 2000 and last updated in 2009. The Greenprint set service-level goals and outlined projects to meet the city's growing needs for parks, trails, and community centers. Since the last update 16 years ago, PRNS has made significant progress in park development while also addressing new challenges such as climate resilience, equity, and funding.

¹ [San José Greenprint 2000 and 2009 Update](#)

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In 2019, the City Council approved a new strategic plan for the department called ActivateSJ. This plan establishes benchmarks to sustain, enhance, and grow PRNS facilities, programs, and services in alignment with five guiding principles: Stewardship, Nature, Equity & Access, Identity, and Public Life. Sustainable funding for parks is essential to these guiding principles—ensuring well-maintained parks, preserving natural spaces, expanding access to healthy activities, strengthening community identity, and creating public spaces where people can connect, be active, and thrive. Investing in parks will lead to a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient San José.

WHY PARKS MATTER

Parks are essential to thriving communities and offer a wide range of benefits.



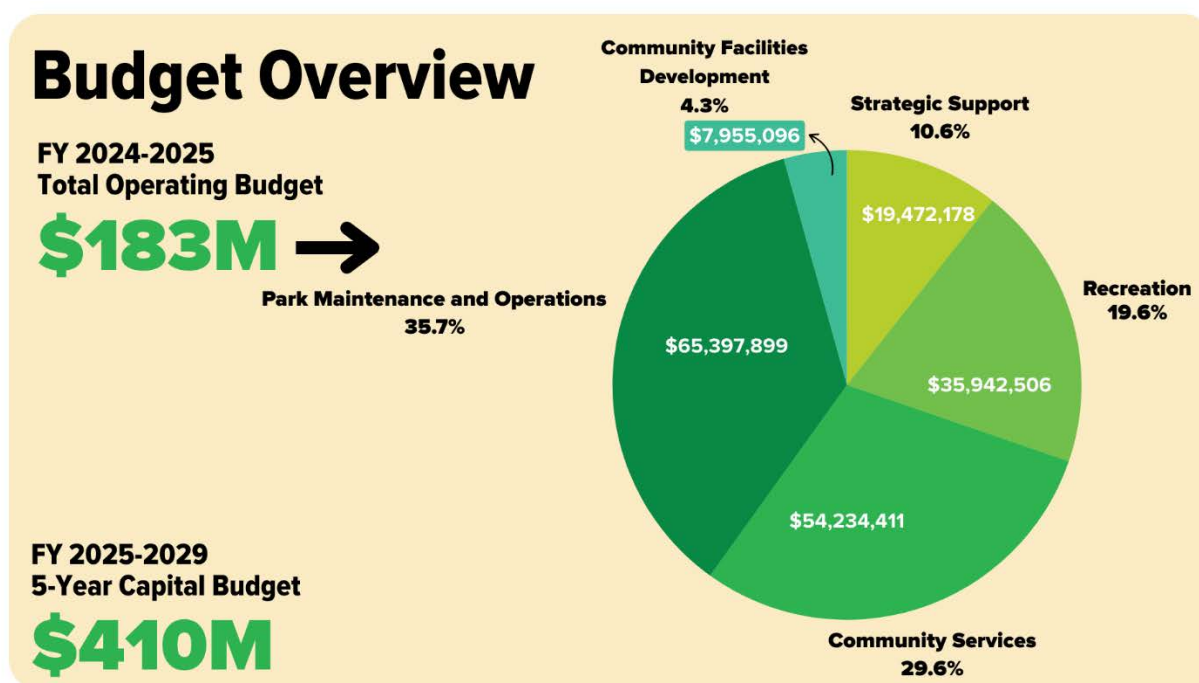
- **Environment:** Parks provide vital environmental functions, like improving air quality, reducing urban heat, and supporting local biodiversity.
- **Health:** Parks promote physical and emotional health by encouraging exercise, reducing stress, and offering peaceful spaces to recharge.
- **Community:** As gathering spaces, parks strengthen social connections, bring people together, and offer a sense of belonging.
- **Economic:** Parks contribute to the local economy by increasing nearby property values, attracting tourism, and supporting small businesses.

Parks make San José healthier, more connected, and more resilient.

HOW SAN JOSÉ PARKS ARE FUNDED

The department's park maintenance and operations, and community facilities development (capital) budgets are developed through a strategic budget planning process that aligns funding with community needs and City Council priorities. This includes assessing available revenue sources and identifying necessary maintenance, improvements, and new projects. Staff meet with multiple internal and external stakeholders, including City Councilmembers, to develop and align priorities each year. The budget is then reviewed and approved by the City Council as part of the City's annual budget process. Figure 1 below depicts the PRNS Department's Annual Budget by Core Service as well as the Five-Year Capital Improvement Budget.

Figure 1: PRNS Annual Operating Budget & 5-Year Capital Improvement Budget



San José faces persistent challenges in securing sustainable, long-term funding to maintain and improve parks. As of April 2024 and shown in Table 1, San José has a deferred maintenance and infrastructure backlog exceeding \$550 million², affecting critical park amenities like playgrounds, picnic areas, sports facilities, recreational turf, and restrooms. This backlog also impacts the City's community centers.

² [Status Report on Deferred Maintenance and Infrastructure Backlog, Transportation and Environment Committee, April 8, 2024](#)

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Table 1: PRNS Deferred Maintenance and Infrastructure Backlog (April 2024)

Park Component	Estimated Backlog
Park Grounds*	\$147,116,412
Park Yards	\$9,974,318
Trails	\$20,586,149
Regional Facilities	\$162,128,193
<i>Park Component Subtotal</i>	<i>\$339,805,000</i>
Community Buildings	\$94,378,915
Other Buildings (e.g., accessory buildings, leased-out buildings, and Corp Yard buildings)	\$115,932,022
Restrooms	\$4,202,916
<i>Building Component Subtotal</i>	<i>\$214,514,000</i>
Total 2024 Backlog	\$554,319,000

*Value is estimated from 2013-2014 data and extrapolated to reflect increases due to inflation and decreases due to work completed.

Additionally, the department has been thinly staffed for decades, making it difficult to meet the community's reasonable expectations for park maintenance and upkeep.

Several sources, including local taxes, development fees, and external grants and partnerships, fund San José's parks. Below in Table 2 is a list of the key funding sources, followed by more in-depth descriptions of how the department uses them to maintain, improve, and build parks.

Table 2: Description of Funding Sources

Funding Source	Description
Construction & Conveyance (C&C) Tax³	Generated from two taxes — a construction tax levied on residential, commercial, and industrial development and a conveyance tax that is levied whenever there is a transfer of real property. The conveyance accounts for approximately 99% of the total C&C taxes collected. Funds are distributed based on a percentage-based methodology that prioritizes equality and equity needs, which was approved by City Council.
Park Trust Fund (Development Impact Fees)	Generated from Parkland Dedication Ordinance ⁴ (PDO) and Park Impact Ordinance ⁵ (PIO), which require the dedication of land, development of park amenities and/or the payment of in-lieu fees from developers to meet the recreational needs

³ [Chapter 4.54 - CONSTRUCTION TAX | Code of Ordinances | San José, CA | Municode Library](#)

⁴ [Title 19 - SUBDIVISIONS | Code of Ordinances | San José, CA | Municode Library](#)

⁵ [Chapter 14.25 - PARK IMPACT REQUIREMENTS | Code of Ordinances | San José, CA | Municode Library](#)

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Funding Source	Description
	generated by new housing developments. Funds are not evenly distributed across the City due to residential development nexus thresholds ranging from $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to 3 miles.
General Fund	Generated from local taxes. Covers daily operations and park maintenance but can also pay for smaller capital projects (usually through the City Council Budget Document Process). City departments compete for General Fund allocations. The General Fund also fluctuates with the economy.
Gifts, Grants & Partnerships	Recent grants have funded new parks, trails, maintenance, and vegetation management projects. Public-private partnerships have supported both new park projects and existing park improvements.

The department also utilizes limited funding⁶ from previous General Obligation Bonds, such as Measure P, as well as Measure T—an Emergency Preparedness, Public Safety, and Infrastructure Bond. Additional sources include Commercial Paper proceeds and reimbursements from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA⁷). However, these funds are minimal and often restricted to specific uses, making them insufficient to meet PRNS's broader needs.

Construction & Conveyance (C&C) Tax

The Construction & Conveyance (C&C) Tax is a key funding source for San José's parks, trails, and community centers. It consists of a tax on new construction permits and a property conveyance tax on real estate transactions over \$100. The distribution of C&C tax revenue is complicated but follows a strict formula.

San José Municipal Code §4.55.410 determines how C&C tax revenue is divided into two main categories: park improvements and general city improvements. At least 64% of the total C&C tax revenue must be used for parks projects — this is called the Parks Allocation. Up to 36% of the total C&C tax revenue may be used for other types of improvements (e.g., libraries, fire stations, etc.) across the city — this is called the General Allocation.

Historically, PRNS has received the 64% Parks Allocation and 1.2% of the 36% General Allocation each year – totaling 65.2% of total C&C tax revenue. In addition, 15% of both the Parks Allocation and the General Allocation is transferred to the General Fund for park maintenance.

⁶ [Developers Page | City of San José](#)

⁷ [Home | FEMA.gov](#)

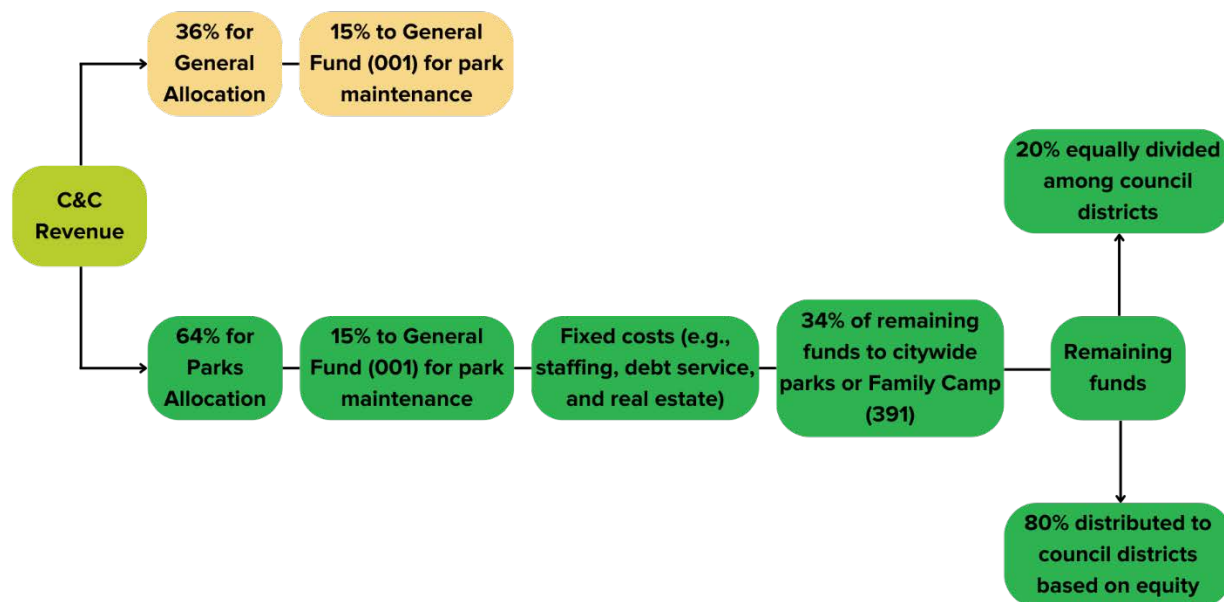
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Next, PRNS uses a portion of the Parks Allocation to cover fixed costs, such as staffing, debt service, and real estate. The amount set aside for fixed costs is determined in collaboration with the City Manager's Budget Office and varies from year to year. In 2024-2025, during the proposed budget cycle, these fixed costs are estimated to be around \$14.8 million. In 2023-2024, the fixed costs were estimated to be approximately \$17.8 million, \$3 million dollars more. After accounting for parks maintenance and fixed costs, 34% of the remaining Parks Allocation is put into a citywide fund for San José parks, including San José Family Camp at Yosemite.

Finally, the remaining funds are distributed to Council Districts using a blend of equity and equality considerations. Specifically, 20% is divided equally among all Districts, while 80% is distributed based on factors like park acreage, community center space, and the condition of existing parks and facilities. Total distributions to each Council District over the last 10 years range from \$5 million up to \$11 million.

The following flow chart (Figure 2) demonstrates the annual formula used to distribute C&C tax funds each year. This formula is set by San José Municipal Code §4.55.410.

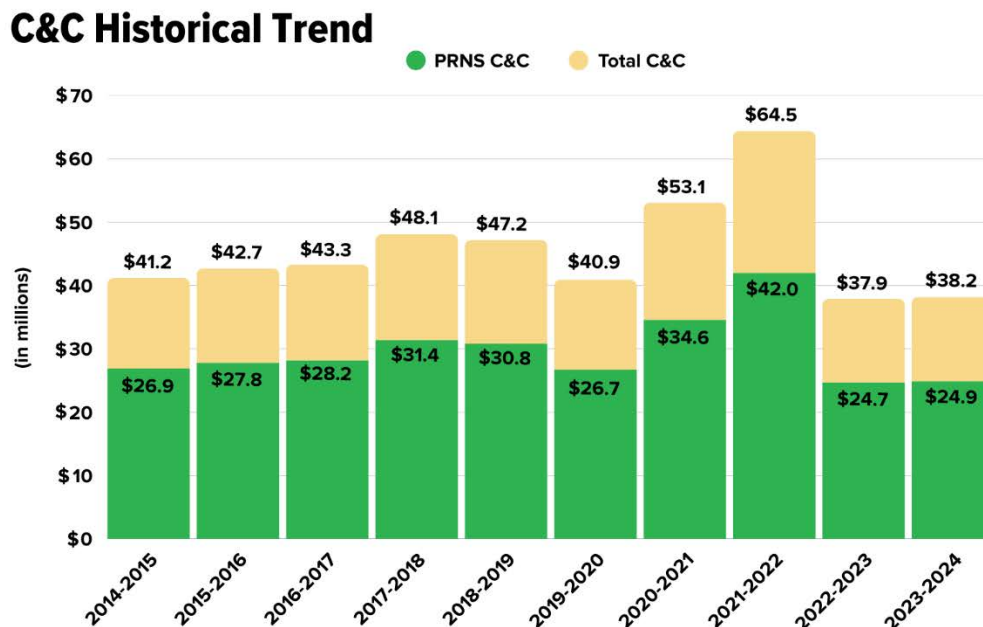
Figure 2: Annual C&C Allocation Formula Flowchart



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Figure 3 provides a breakdown of total C&C revenue over the past 10 years, including the amount allocated to the PRNS Department.

Figure 3: C&C Historical Trend Over the Past 10 Years



The next chart (Figure 4) and map (Figure 5) show the total amount of C&C tax funds each Council District has received over the past 10 years.

Figure 4: C&C Allocation by Council District Over the Past 10 Years

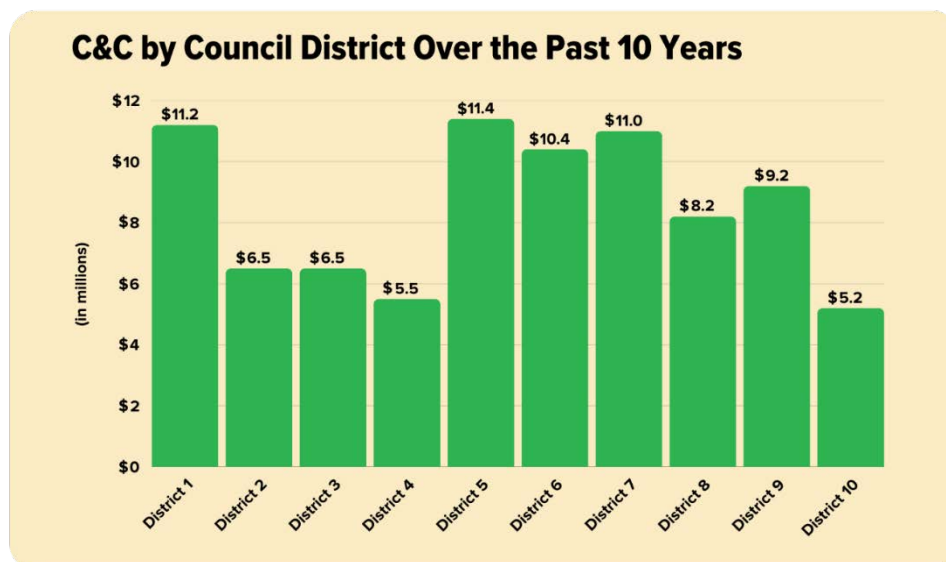
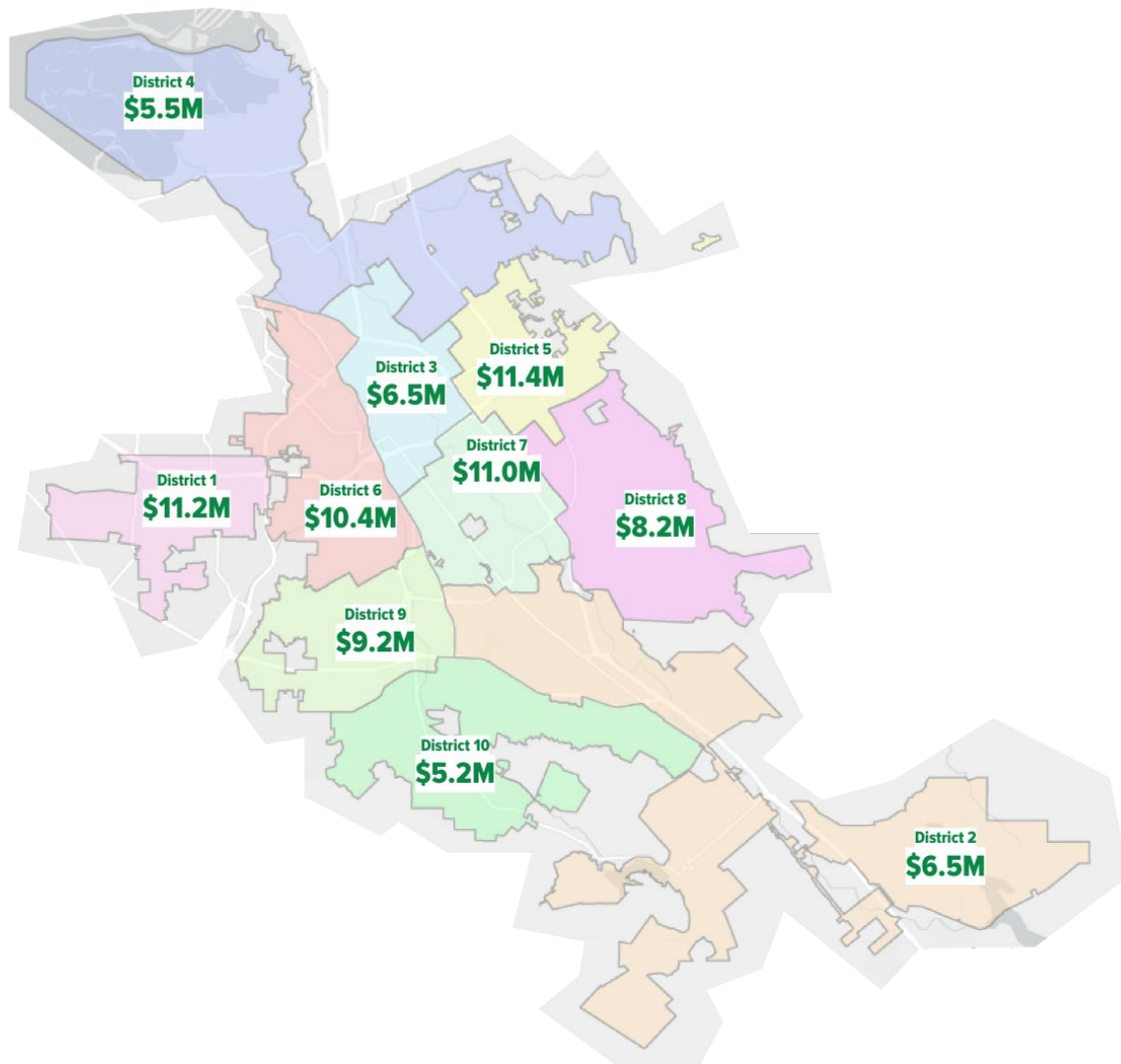


Figure 5: Map of C&C Allocation by Council District Over the Past 10 Years



Using this equality and equity approach ensures that areas of the city with aging amenities, fewer parks, and poorer park conditions receive more funding.

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Park Trust Fund: Parkland Dedication Ordinance (PDO) and Park Impact Ordinance (PIO) Fees

The Park Trust Fund, comprised of fees from the Parkland Dedication Ordinance (PDO)⁸ and Park Impact Ordinance (PIO), is a critical funding source for new parks and major renovation and improvement projects. Established in 1988 and expanded in 1992, this program provides a funding source generated by new residential development to mitigate the impact caused by new residents in the park system. Impact fees ensure that new residential growth pays for itself without placing an unfair cost burden on existing residents. Developers can fulfill their obligation by dedicating land, building new parks, paying an in-lieu fee, or through a combination of these methods.

Since state-imposed policies, like Proposition 13 (1978), limit how local governments can raise revenue through property taxes, municipalities rely on impact fees, including park impact fees, to fund public infrastructure and capital projects. Park fees enable the City to expand and improve parks, trails, and community centers, ensuring that new residential development contributes to public recreational infrastructure that serves the new population.

Park Trust Fund revenues are limited to being spent within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of the new development for neighborhood-serving projects or within three miles for community-serving projects, as stated in the Greenprint (2009 update) and dictated by the Quimby Act and Mitigation Fee Act. A neighborhood-serving project addresses the needs of residents living near the new development, such as a tot-lot or playground. In contrast, a community-serving project benefits a broader population, like a large park with multiple amenities, such as reservable picnic areas and sports courts. While park fees are essential for expanding park infrastructure, they cannot legally be used for ongoing maintenance and operations, placing a financial strain on the department's ability to take care of new parks.

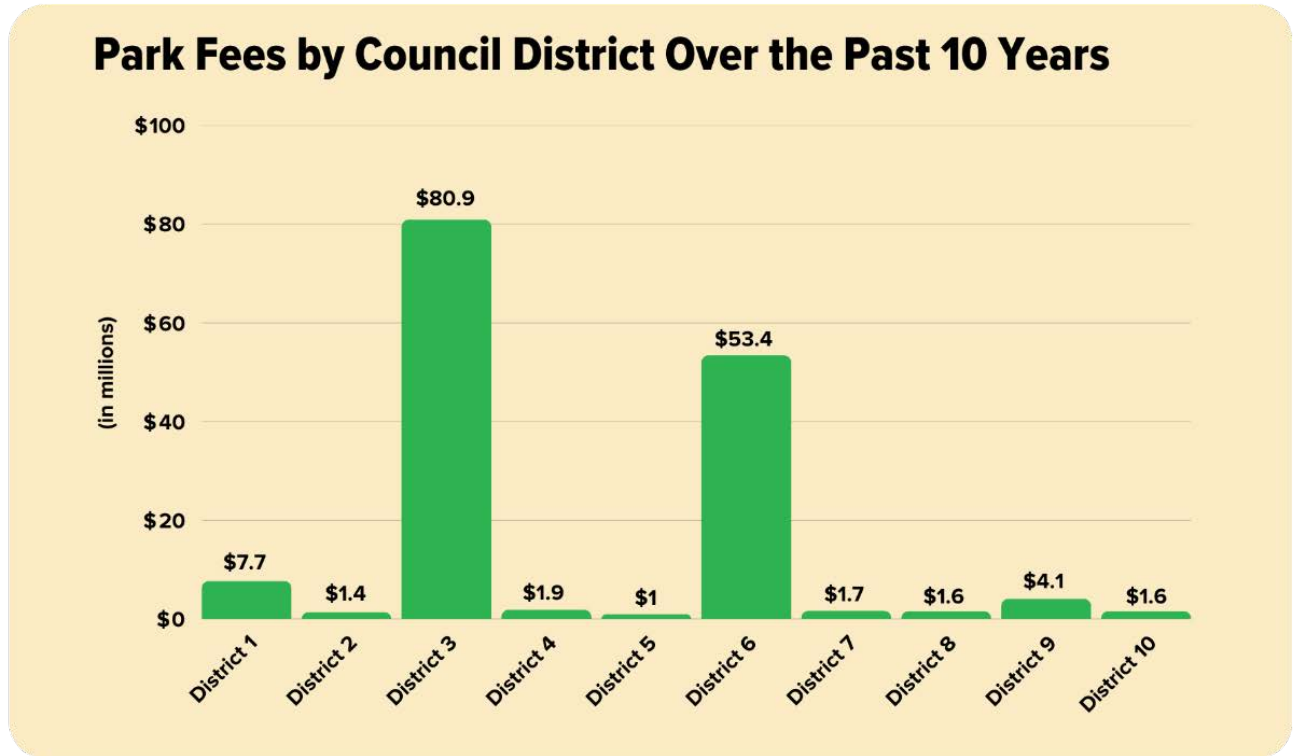
These spending constraints based on distance thresholds have created an inequitable distribution of park funds across the city because the fees must be spent close to the new residential development. Most new residential development—and consequently, most park fees—are concentrated in Council Districts 3 and 6, while other districts, particularly those with aging or insufficient park infrastructure, receive significantly less funding. Over the past 10 years, approximately \$80.9 million in park fees have been allocated to District 3 and \$53.4 million to District 6, while all other districts received between approximately \$1 and \$7.7 million each.

⁸ At the state level, PDO is known as the Quimby Act, part of the Subdivision Map Act. It allows cities and counties to require land or fee contributions for parks when approving new housing developments.

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The following chart (Figure 6) and map (Figure 7) show the total amount of park fees allocated to each Council District over the past 10 years. Figure 8 shows the parks develop as a result of these park fees.

Figure 6: Park Fees by Council District Over the Past 10 Years



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Figure 7: Map of Park Fees by Council District Over the Past 10 Years

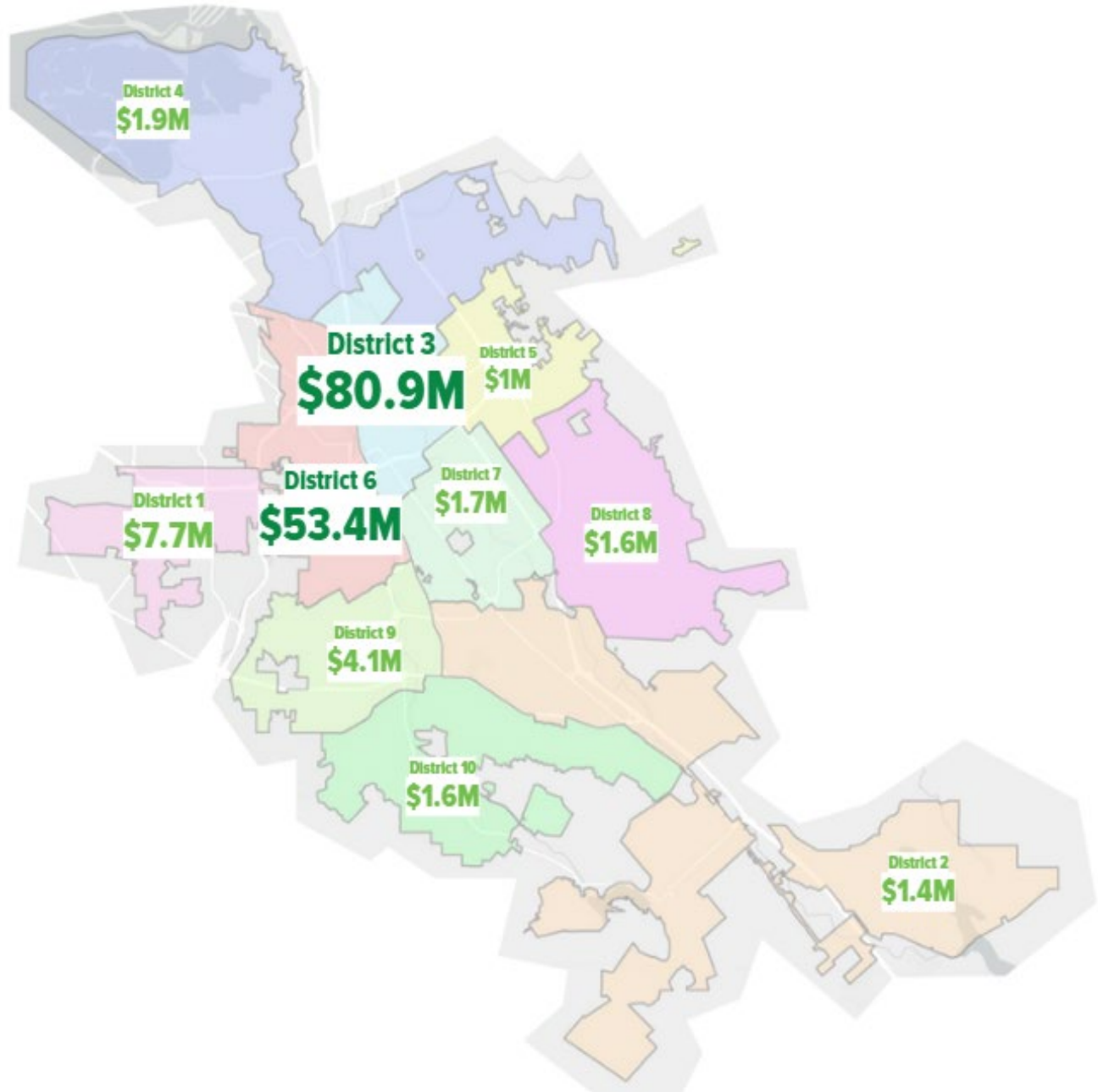
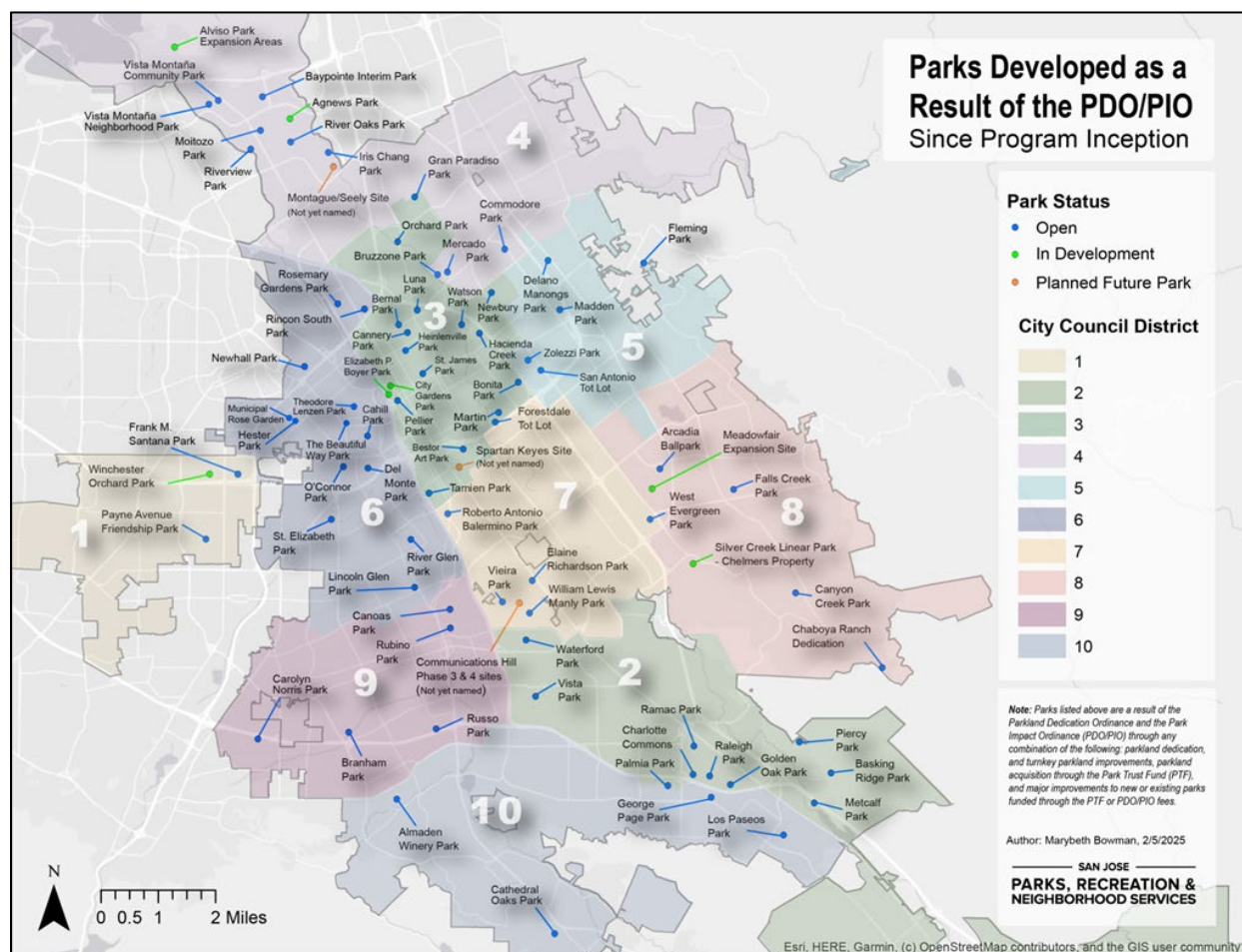


Figure 8: Parks Developed as a Result of Park Fees



This equity challenge is compounded by stagnant park development fee rates, which haven't been increased since 2017 to help support residential development. Last year, park fees were reduced for downtown high-rises⁹ and multifamily projects in North San José¹⁰. In addition, all new residential developments can reduce their parkland obligation by up to 50% if they include on-site recreation amenities (e.g. a swimming pool, recreation room, or picnic area), which primarily serve private residents. Affordable housing units automatically receive a 50% per unit reduction. Combined, these reductions can lower a project's park fees by up to 75%, significantly reducing the revenue received for parks. On average, most projects receive a 20% to 30% fee reduction.

⁹ [Downtown Residential High-Rise Incentive Program Extension, City Council, June 18, 2024, Item 8.2](#)

¹⁰ [Multifamily Housing Incentive Program and North San José Parks Fee Realignment, City Council, December 10, 2024, Item 8.2](#)

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Park fees are not sufficient to cover the actual costs of acquiring and developing new parkland. The PRNS Department is exploring opportunities to transition the Greenprint into a new Park Master Plan to better generate and distribute funds, increase flexibility on where funds can be spent, and ensure all neighborhoods receive the park investments they need.

General Fund

Meanwhile, most park operations and maintenance—like mowing the grass, maintaining landscaping, and collecting trash—rely on the City's already strained General Fund. PRNS's Parks Division competes with other essential City services for funding and has experienced significant budget cuts over recent decades, as have other City departments. Table 3 provides the General Fund allocations for parks operations and maintenance for 2023-2024 and 2024-2025.

Table 3: General Fund Allocations for Parks Operations and Maintenance

Park District or Responsibility	FY 2023-2024	FY 2024-2025
Park District 1	\$3,157,593	\$3,397,335
Park District 2	\$2,744,151	\$3,604,311
Park District 3	\$3,516,892	\$4,070,796
Park District 4	\$2,714,642	\$2,793,387
Park District 5	\$3,292,084	\$3,643,432
Park District 6 (Emma Prusch Farm Park and Happy Hollow Park & Zoo)*	\$2,275,733	\$2,003,789
Park District 7 (Action Sports Park, Arcadia, and PAL)*	\$1,287,083	\$1,242,716
Park District 8	\$5,369,868	\$5,897,916
Parks Contract Services	\$3,407,474	\$2,567,306
IPM/Turf and Mowing	\$2,385,248	\$2,049,963
Strike and Repair	\$1,804,273	\$1,203,071
Community Forestry	\$1,109,784	\$3,583,993
Total	\$33,064,825	\$36,058,015

* The Parks Division reorganized service delivery in 2020-2021, creating specialized teams focused on destination and sports facilities in "Park District 6" and "Park District 7."

During economic downturns, General Fund revenue typically declines, reducing the funds available for City services. Ironically, this is often when people rely more on parks

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and public spaces for affordable recreation, putting additional strain on limited resources. While the department improves asset management and finds efficiencies, these efforts alone will not replace the need for permanent and sustainable funding.

Gifts, Grants, and Partnerships

While PRNS relies heavily on traditional funding sources like taxes and fees, grants and partnerships also support San José parks. These external funding sources usually allow existing resources to stretch and expand the scope of planned projects.

The City manages a Gift Trust Fund (GTF)¹¹, which enables third parties—including individuals, community groups, businesses and developers—to contribute funding for special projects. The GTF provides a mechanism for public-private partnerships to improve park conditions and, in some cases, has been used to establish maintenance agreements for parks near new developments. These contributions, while valuable, are often limited in scope and do not provide consistent revenue for large-scale projects.

In addition to gifts and donations, PRNS actively pursues grant funding from local, state, and federal sources. Grants have been essential in advancing key capital projects such as trail development, all-inclusive playgrounds, and new park construction. In the past five years, PRNS has been awarded approximately \$21 million in grants for 26 different capital projects. Recent successes include:

- \$250,000 Open Space Authority Grant that helped fund Mariposa Park;
- \$5,312,633 Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Grant that supported the Coyote Creek Trail extension from Story Road to Tully Road; and
- \$4,671,250 Santa Clara County All-Inclusive Playground Program that contributed to new all-inclusive playgrounds, including Emma Prusch Park (\$2,000,000), Lincoln Glen Park (\$1,000,000), Rotary Playground (\$1,000,000), and Almaden Lake Park (\$671,250).

While harder to come by, grants have also played a vital role in maintaining San José's parks. In FY 2023-2024, PRNS secured \$2.8 million from the State of California for its Resilience Corps program, which provides young adults with employment and hands-on experience in park maintenance. Since 2021, PRNS has hired over 50 young people into part-time and full-time maintenance roles, helping to address critical staffing needs and support San José youth. Additionally, San José was awarded a \$1 million Urban and Community Forestry grant to fund vegetation management at Alum Rock Park and tree work at Overfelt Gardens. Unfortunately, the federal government suspended this grant on April 2, 2025.

However, grant funding is not without challenges—most grants require the City to front costs before receiving reimbursement, require matching funds, and have extensive

¹¹ [Budgeted Funds Guide | City of San José](#)

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applications and reporting requirements. PRNS does not have dedicated grant staff, which limits the department's capacity to pursue all potential opportunities.

State and federal earmarks offer another avenue for securing funds. Despite being highly sought-after and difficult to obtain, PRNS received a \$1.5 million federal earmark for water quality improvements at Lake Cunningham with support from Councilmember Candelas and Congressman Panetta. PRNS is working with the Intergovernmental Relations Team in the City Manager's Office of Administration, Policy, and Intergovernmental Relations to pursue additional state and federal earmarks for the Yerba Buena Bridge and Cahalan Park.

Additionally, nonprofit organizations such as the Happy Hollow Foundation, San José Parks Foundation, and Guadalupe River Park Conservancy provide valuable partnership opportunities through monetary and in-kind donations.

As demonstrated above, San José's parks rely on a complex and sometimes volatile mix of funding, yet long-term sustainable resources remain a significant challenge. Geographic restrictions, stagnant and reduced development fees, and reliance on a strained General Fund contribute to ongoing maintenance and equity issues. While grants and partnerships provide valuable support, they cannot fully address the City's growing maintenance backlog and operational needs. To ensure that all residents have access to safe, well-maintained parks, San José must continue exploring new, sustainable funding solutions that balance immediate needs with long-term resiliency.

HIGHER CONSTRUCTION COSTS

In addition to the inequitable distribution and inflexible allocation of capital dollars, the City also faces the challenge of climbing construction costs for capital projects—significantly reducing overall purchasing power.

Several factors contribute to these rising costs, including the increased price of materials and labor, prevailing wages and labor compliance (which ensure fair pay but add to costs), and higher soft costs like design and staff overhead. Additionally, complex processes often extend project timelines and drive total costs up. In one recent analysis, the cost of park development improvement, excluding land, was estimated at approximately \$3 million per acre. Current average land values range from \$1.2 to \$8.2 million per acre, depending on where the site is located, which means a new one-acre park with basic amenities like turf, a playground, and a walking loop could easily cost between \$4.2 to \$11.2 million.

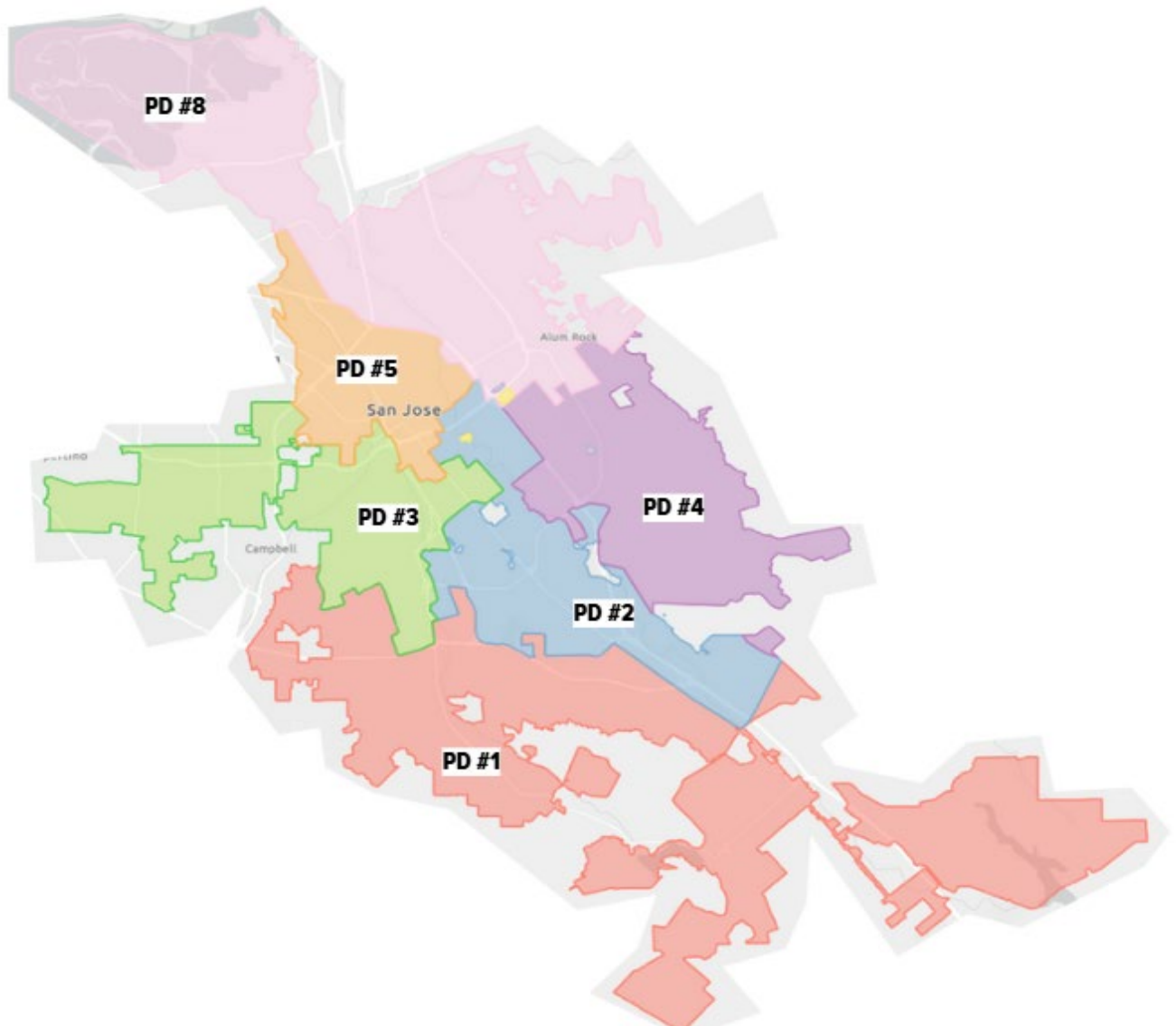
These financial pressures have prompted staff to explore efficiency strategies and process improvements, such as bundling projects, delivering minor projects in-house, increasing thresholds for service orders, and reducing overhead where possible. Any effort to improve and expand funding for parks will also consider opportunities to improve project delivery systems and maximize existing resources.

HOW SAN JOSÉ PARKS ARE MAINTAINED

Park maintenance is a collaborative effort involving park districts, specialized teams, contractors, and community volunteers. Staff work in crews of 2-4 employees, who are typically responsible for 6-8 parks and visit them 2-3 times per week. A limited set of destination parks have dedicated staff who provide more frequent service. Mowing is done biweekly except for sports fields, which are mowed weekly. Specialized teams handle tasks like pest and turf management, large-scale mowing, and infrastructure repairs. The Volunteer Management Unit engages community members and businesses to support maintenance efforts, such as weeding and litter removal, particularly in underserved areas. Additionally, contractors assist with maintaining small parks (less than 2 acres), restrooms, and large-scale tree care and weed abatement. Figure 9 shows the City's Park District map and Table 4 provides an overview of park maintenance staffing resources in the current year.

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Figure 9: San José Park District Map



Note: Park Districts 6 and 7 are not included on the map above because they represent specific parks and destinations within the system. Park District 6 includes Emma Prusch Farm Park and Happy Hollow Park & Zoo and Park District 7 includes Action Sports Park, Arcadia Ballpark, and PAL.

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Table 4: Overview of Park Maintenance Staff (FY 2024-2025)

District/ Team	Positions (FTE)	Total # of Parks and Civic Grounds	Approx. Developed Acres	Approx. Trail Mileage
Park District 1	17.69	31	240	12
Park District 2	22.28	35	258	6
Park District 3	20.36	21	190	6
Park District 4	16.93	20	320	15
Park District 5	17.82	22	216	10
Park District 6 (Emma Prusch Farm Park and Happy Hollow Park & Zoo)	13.34	2	82	0
Park District 7 (Action Sports Park, Arcadia Ballpark, and PAL)	8.02	3	39	0
Park District 8	25.81	34	306	16
Parks Contract Services*	3.00*	98*	150*	-
IPM/Turf and Mowing	22.40	-	-	-
Strike and Repair	13.00	-	-	-
Community Forestry	2.00	-	-	-
Grand Total	182.65	266	1,801	65

*The Parks Contract Services team (3 City FTE) manages the contracts for custodial services in restrooms (equivalent of 12 FTE) and pocket park maintenance (150 acres). This team also does citywide park inspections and coordinates with park districts regarding repairs needed in any park district.

Park Maintenance Standards & Park Conditions

San José's Park Maintenance Standards¹² ensure that parks are maintained at a consistent level across the city. Staff evaluate 20 different park features annually through the Park Condition Assessment (PCA) process, using a GIS-enabled tool to document conditions. Each park receives a score based on whether its amenities meet or fall below the established standards. The PCA scores provide a snapshot of park conditions at a specific point in time and, while informative, are not without limitations. Seasonal changes, staffing shortages, weather events, and other short-term factors can influence results.

To promote equity in park maintenance, PRNS integrates the Healthy Places Index¹³ (HPI) into its decision-making. The HPI includes data on education, employment, air and water quality, and other factors that influence community health. Parks in areas with lower HPI scores are prioritized for maintenance.

¹² [2023 Park Maintenance Standards](#)

¹³ [Healthy Places Index](#)

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In 2024, the citywide average PCA score was 87.4%, a slight decrease from 87.8% in 2023. When looking only at parks (excluding civic grounds¹⁴), the average score was 86.9%, compared to 87.3% the previous year. While the percentage of park acres scoring 90% or above declined, PRNS saw an increase in the number of acres scoring 80% or higher, rising from 64% of acres in 2023 to 79% in 2024. This indicates more consistent performance across the park system and a focus on lower-performing areas. Nineteen parks achieved perfect scores, covering nearly 5% of developed park acreage.

PRNS supplements PCA data by collecting public feedback through a citywide park user survey at various community events and other communication channels. In 2024, 292 park users participated in the survey. They rated park quality and safety and provided valuable input on specific areas for improvement. Drinking fountains, restrooms, and turf areas received the lowest ratings, while trees, hardscapes, and skate parks were among the most positively reviewed. This input provides important context to the PCA results and helps highlight the gap between technical assessments and community expectations.

PRNS remains committed to strengthening the PCA process while balancing the need to set realistic standards that reflect current staffing and funding levels because the reality is that PRNS is not staffed to maintain parks at the level the community expects.

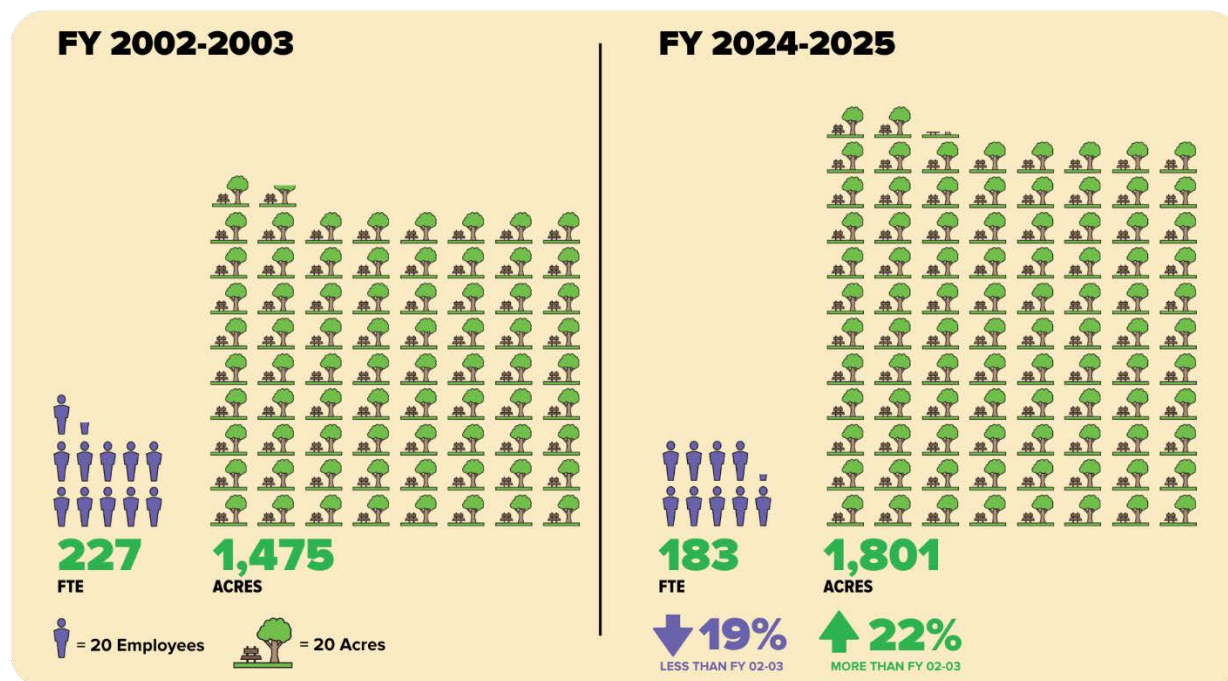
Staffing Analysis

A historical analysis of staffing levels shows a significant decline despite an increase in developed parkland. At its peak in 2002-2003, there were 227 full-time employees (FTEs) in key maintenance classifications responsible for maintaining 1,475 developed acres. As of 2024-2025, staffing has dropped to 182.65 FTEs, while the amount of developed parkland has grown to 1,801 acres—an 19% reduction in staffing alongside a 22% increase in acreage.

This disparity persists even after the City added about 57 FTE to park maintenance since its lowest point of 127 FTE in 2013-2014. Despite these additions, staffing levels have not recovered to historical levels. It is important to note that contractors provide the equivalent of 12 FTE of custodial services in restrooms and are responsible for maintaining 150 acres of pocket parks (more on this below). However, even with this support, resources remain stretched thin. Figure 10 shows the PRNS Department's staff-to-acres ratio in 2002-2003 as compared to 2023-2024.

¹⁴ Civic grounds refer to areas such as library grounds, community center grounds, and facilities like City Hall. These are City-owned spaces maintained by PRNS that are not classified as neighborhood or regional parks.

Figure 10: Staff-to-Acres Ratio in FY 2002-2003 and FY 2023-2024



Maintaining San José’s parks is further complicated by challenges such as increased usage, homeless encampments, and vandalism. High-demand parks experience significant wear and tear, while encampments create additional maintenance needs beyond typical park use. Vandalism also diverts resources, requiring frequent repeated repairs to restrooms, playgrounds, and other amenities. Additionally, unpermitted park events contribute to increased trash and damage to park infrastructure, adding to the strain on maintenance efforts. PRNS is also responsible for maintaining almost 1,500 acres of undeveloped parkland and open space, further straining limited resources. These challenges make meeting the community’s expectations for safe and clean parks even more difficult.

To accurately assess the staffing needed to maintain San José’s parks, staff attended the California Parks and Recreation Society’s Maintenance Management School. This week-long training teaches participants how to develop a maintenance management plan by identifying the resources required for effective park upkeep.

As part of the Information Technology Department’s Data Upskilling program, staff applied their training from Maintenance Management School to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the department’s resource needs using GIS software. This analysis mapped out all park amenities, ground cover, and corresponding square footage. Each amenity was further broken down into specific maintenance tasks—for example, maintaining a picnic table area involves litter pickup, blowing, weed abatement, and general repairs. By incorporating California Parks and Recreation

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Society productivity time standards and PRNS time trials, staff were able to quantify the time required to maintain each amenity effectively.

Based on this analysis, staff determined that PRNS was about 100 FTE short of the staffing needed to provide proper maintenance services at large parks three times per week and at smaller parks twice per week.

As mentioned above, PRNS has closed some maintenance gaps by transitioning certain services to contractors in 2011-2012. Under PRNS oversight, contractors maintain pocket parks and civic grounds and provide custodial services in park restrooms. The pocket park maintenance contract removes 150 acres from the inventory of developed parkland that staff maintains, and the park restroom custodial contractor provides about 12 FTE for its services. City staff are responsible for overseeing these contractors.

To supplement limited resources, PRNS has strategically leveraged outside support through volunteers and partnerships. Thousands of community members contribute their time each year through cleanups and beautification projects to help take care of parks and trails. In 2023-2024, parks benefited from about 28,000 volunteer hours through Adopt-A-Park and one-day events in parks, as well as about 18,000 hours contributed by individuals participating in the Sheriff's Work Program and Santa Clara County General Assistance Program under the supervision of park maintenance employees.

Parks and undeveloped parklands also benefit from programs like the Resilience Corps, which provides paid opportunities for young adults while supporting essential maintenance tasks across the park system. In addition, staff have partnered with nonprofits, community groups, and corporations to build stronger community ownership of parks, helping to stretch resources while fostering a shared commitment to caring for San José's parks.

HOW SAN JOSÉ PARKS COMPARE

Trust for Public Land

Each year, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) collects data¹⁵ on parks in the top 100 most populous U.S. cities. TPL evaluates park systems across 14 measures, grouped into five categories: acreage, investment, amenities, access, and equity. When assessing investment, TPL reports a three-year average to account for annual fluctuations. This investment is broken down into public spending (capital and operational/administrative), nonprofit spending, and volunteer hours within city limits.

¹⁵ [Trust for Public Land ParkScore Rating](#)

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San José ranked 32nd¹⁶ among the 100 largest U.S. cities, highlighting both PRNS's achievements and the opportunity for further improvement.

2024 Park Score Index^{*Out of 100}

San José, CA

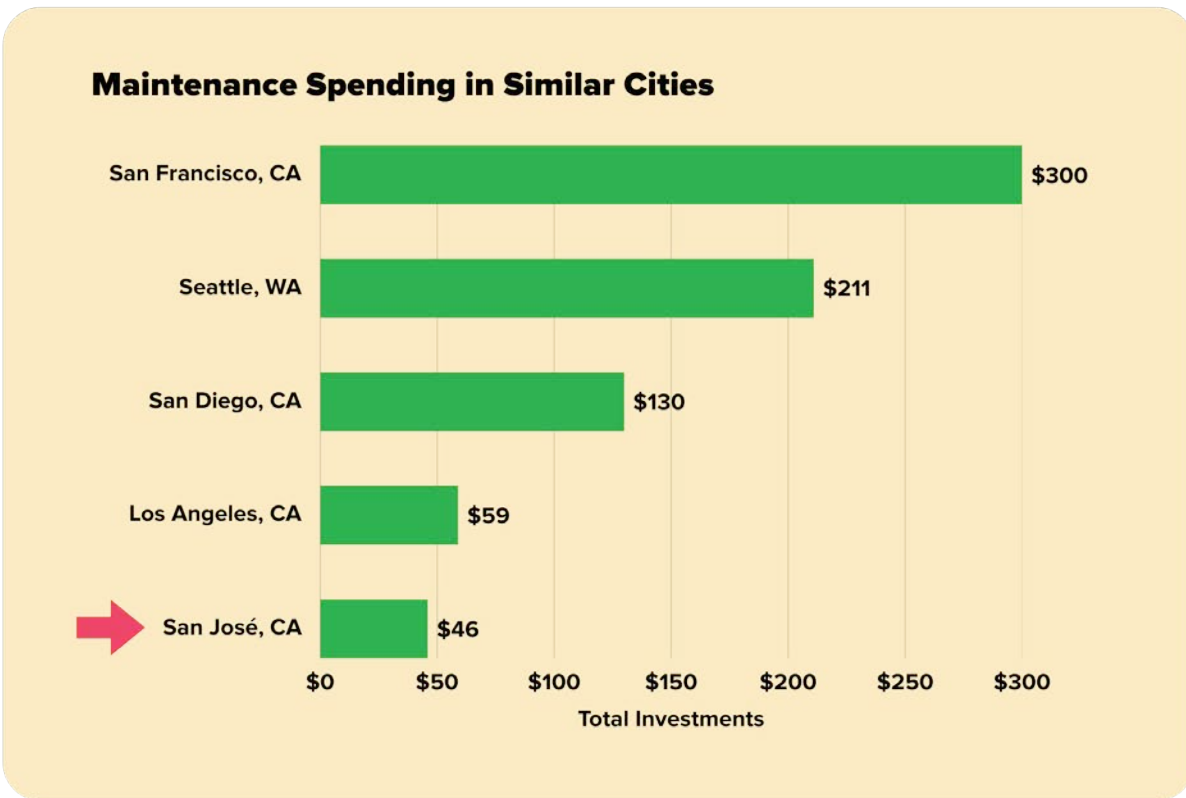


Rank #32
Points: 57.5

When compared to similar cities, such as San Francisco, Seattle, San Diego, and Los Angeles, San José ranks last in spending per capita on maintenance activities, as illustrated in the Figure 11 below.

¹⁶ [San José ParkScore Ranking](#)

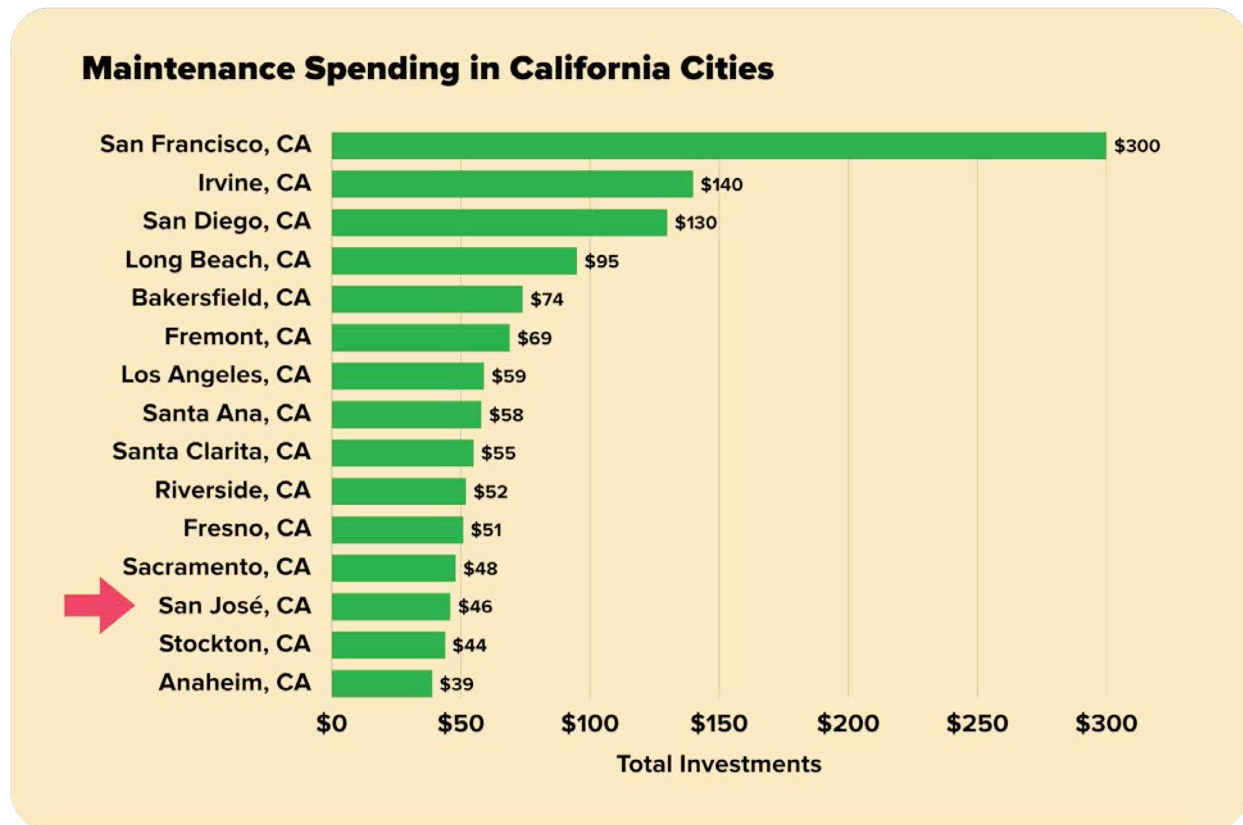
Figure 11: Comparison of Maintenance Spending in Similar Cities



When comparing maintenance spending to 15 other cities in California, San José ranked 13th with a total of \$46 per capita in spending, as shown in Figure 12 below.

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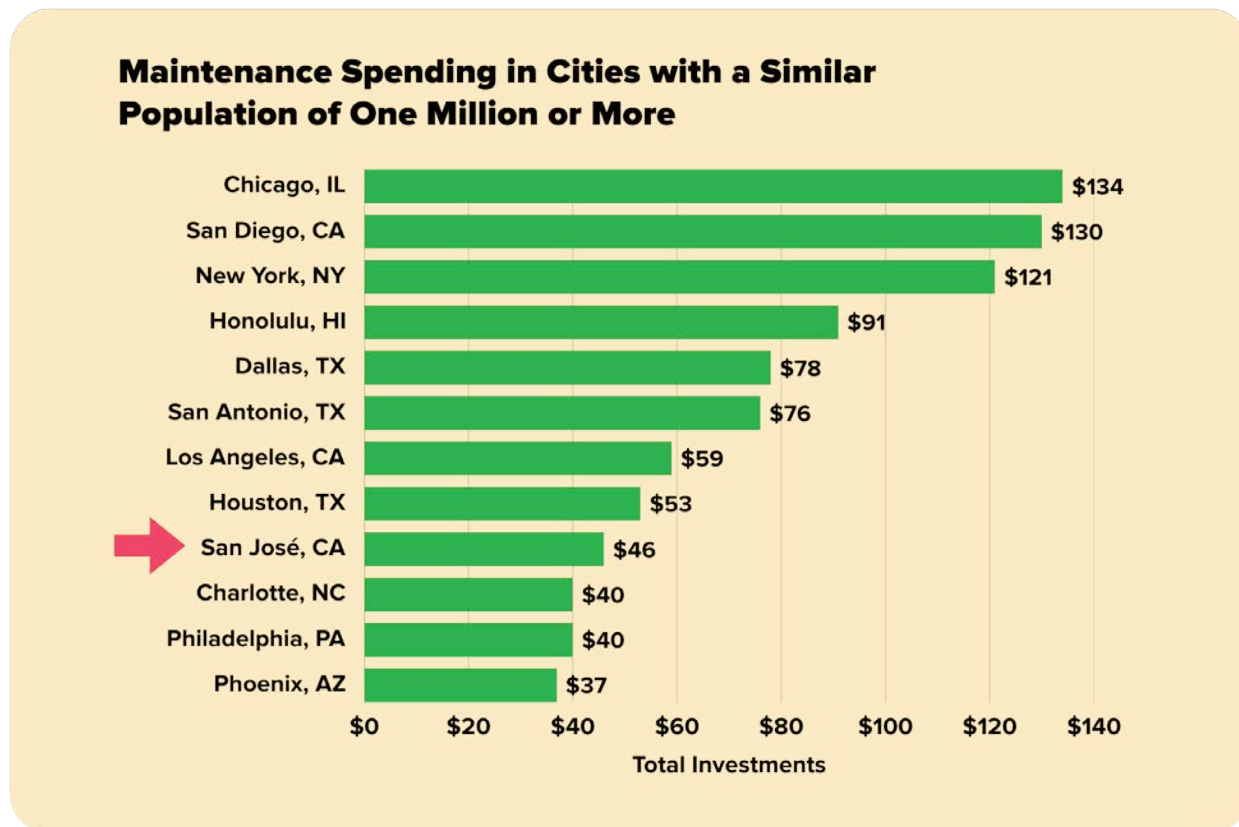
Figure 12: Comparison of Maintenance Spending in California Cities



When comparing the same data to other cities with a similar population of one million or more, San José ranked 9th out of 12, as show in Figure 13 below.

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Figure 13: Comparison of Maintenance Spending in Cities with a Similar Population of One Million or More



Many Bay Area cities fund their parks using a combination of General Fund revenue, development impact fees, user fees, grants, and donations. San José utilizes these same traditional funding sources; however, unique funding structures like Santa Clara County Parks and the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority create a different landscape for regional park funding.

Santa Clara County

Santa Clara County funds its parks through the Park Charter Fund, a dedicated portion of the County's General Fund. Established in 1972 and most recently renewed by Measure A in June 2016, this funding source is not a tax but instead guarantees a set percentage of the County budget for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department. Measure A allocates \$0.015 per \$100 of assessed property value to the Park Charter Fund—generating just under \$100 million annually to support the county's parks. Of these funds, at least 10% must be set aside for land acquisition, another 10%

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must be used for park development, and the remaining 80% funds operations and maintenance of the park system¹⁷.

Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority protects open spaces, natural areas, and working farms around the Santa Clara Valley. The Open Space Authority is funded through two property tax assessments:

- Measure T Parcel Tax: Initially approved as Measure Q in 2014 and extended indefinitely in 2020, this \$24 annual parcel tax generates approximately \$8 million annually.
- District 1 Benefit Assessment: Approved in 1994 and renewed annually by the Open Space Authority Board of Directors, this \$12 annual parcel tax for property owners within Open Space Authority's jurisdiction generates approximately \$4.2 million annually.

While the County's Park Charter Fund and Open Space Authority's property tax assessments benefit San José residents, these investments primarily support parks and open space on the outskirts of the city, requiring most residents to travel to access them. Meanwhile, neighborhood parks within San José serve as essential spaces for physical and mental well-being, cultural gatherings, and everyday recreation. Ensuring adequate funding to maintain these parks will help residents connect with nature close to home, build community, and enjoy recreational opportunities without barriers.

As PRNS explores sustainable funding for its park system, looking at how other major cities and counties approach park maintenance and capital investment can provide valuable insights.

Los Angeles County

In November 2014, Los Angeles County introduced Measure P, a proposed annual \$23 parcel tax to fund parks and recreational facilities in the county. The measure was presented as an extension of Proposition A from 1992 but ultimately failed at the ballot.

Recognizing the need for a more comprehensive approach, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation initiated the Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment in 2015¹⁸. This extensive study evaluated existing parks and recreational facilities, identified underserved areas, and prioritized future projects. The assessment involved significant community engagement and data collection, resulting in a detailed report released in 2016¹⁹.

¹⁷ [Park Charter Fund | Santa Clara County Parks | County of Santa Clara](#)

¹⁸ [City Parks Alliance Case Study LA County: Park Needs Assessment](#)

¹⁹ [Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment \(2016\)](#)

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Building upon the insights gained from the needs assessment, the County developed Measure A, the Safe, Clean Neighborhood Parks and Beaches Measure. Placed on the ballot in November 2016, Measure A proposed a parcel tax to generate approximately \$94 million annually for the development, maintenance, and improvement of parks, beaches, and open spaces. The measure emphasized equity by allocating more funds to areas with higher needs. Measure A was approved by nearly 75% of voters and has no sunset date²⁰. The Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District is responsible for implementing and administering Measure A to cities and other organizations in the county²¹. National parks and recreation organizations often cite this initiative as one of the most successful park measures.

Because TPL's ParkScore rankings only look at cities, a score for Los Angeles County is not included. However, the City of Los Angeles ranked 88th and is implementing a Park Improvement Plan to prioritize Measure A investments²².

Seattle

The City of Seattle²³ funds its parks through a combination of sources. In 2023, the City allocated \$116.7 million from its General Fund, \$112.3 million from voter-approved Park District revenue, \$24.4 million from Real Estate Excise Taxes, and \$75.5 million from other funds like fees, rentals, gifts, and grants.

The Seattle Park District was established in 2014 when voters approved Proposition 1, when the City's park maintenance backlog was approximately \$267 million²⁴. This dedicated funding source supports ongoing park maintenance, facility operations, and the development of new parks.

Seattle has also benefited from previous funding measures²⁵. The 2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy provided \$146 million over six years for park improvements, open spaces, trails, and athletic fields. A portion of these funds was allocated to an Opportunity Fund for community-identified projects. Additionally, a Maintenance Levy was created to adjust for construction cost inflation, ensuring sufficient funding for long-term maintenance and repairs.

Seattle ranked 6th on TPL's ParkScore²⁶, receiving 100 points in the investment category.

²⁰ [City Parks Alliance Case Study LA County: Park Needs Assessment](#)

²¹ [Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District website](#)

²² [City of Los Angeles Measure A Projects](#)

²³ [Seattle Parks and Recreation Annual Report 2023](#)

²⁴ [City of Seattle Ordinance No. 124468](#)

²⁵ [City of Seattle How Our Projects Are Funded webpage](#)

²⁶ [Seattle ParkScore Ranking](#)

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San Diego

The City of San Diego²⁷ primarily funds park operations and maintenance, including regional parks and open space, through its General Fund (\$71 million in FY 2025²⁸) but is actively seeking more sustainable funding solutions to address its \$213 million maintenance and capital backlog²⁹. A study revealed that nearly one in four city parks had a backlog exceeding 20% of the park's total replacement cost. Compounding this issue, between 2005 and 2019, the General Fund budget for San Diego parks declined by nearly 33%³⁰.

To address these challenges, the City introduced a new Park Master Plan in 2021 and recently adopted a citywide fee program called “One City, One Park System.” This program shifts the funding model from a restricted ½-mile or 3-mile radius service area to a citywide service area, allowing for greater flexibility in distributing funds, aligning with equity goals, and ensuring all city parks benefit all residents. The Master Plan also outlines strategies to explore additional revenue sources for deferred maintenance, operations, land acquisition, and park improvements.

San Diego ranked 26th on TPL's ParkScore³¹.

Understanding the various funding mechanisms used by other cities and counties will be crucial as PRNS evaluates solutions to improve San José's parks.

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE PARKS

Providing vibrant and safe parks for all residents will become increasingly difficult without greater investment.

Emma Prusch Farm Park Success

Emma Prusch Farm Park is a shining example of what's possible when a park is staffed at the level it truly needs. Located in Council District 5 on San José's East Side, this unique park benefits from a dedicated maintenance team—including a senior maintenance worker, a park maintenance repair worker, two grounds workers, and a gardener—who are on-site to address maintenance and repair needs as they arise. As a result, the park earned a perfect PCA score last year and is enjoyed by neighbors and visitors daily. In contrast, under San José's current staffing model, a single senior maintenance worker can be responsible for up to 26 parks, and just nine park maintenance repair workers are available to cover all remaining neighborhood and regional parks citywide. While not every park needs the same level of staffing as Emma

²⁷ [City of San Diego Park Master Plan \(2021\)](#)

²⁸ [City of San Diego Parks and Recreation FY 2025 Budget](#)

²⁹ [City of San Diego Park Amenity Assessment \(2019\)](#)

³⁰ [City of San Diego Park Master Plan \(2021\)](#)

³¹ [San Diego ParkScore Ranking](#)

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Prusch, it clearly demonstrates what's possible when park maintenance is properly resourced.

This year, PRNS will launch an education and engagement campaign to better understand community perspectives and priorities for San José parks. The campaign will educate residents about how parks are funded and raise awareness of the critical need for new funding. Community feedback will be collected through multiple online and in-person methods and will play a key role in shaping two major initiatives: a potential 2026 ballot measure to secure dedicated park maintenance funding and the development of a new Park Master Plan to replace the Greenprint.

2026 Ballot Measure

The department is working with the City Manager's Office to evaluate potential park revenue options before finalizing a possible ballot measure in 2026. If successful, such a measure could secure essential funding to maintain existing and new parks.

The City Manager's Office worked with a pollster to conduct initial polling on potential measures in January 2025. The polling results were shared with the City Council during the 2025-2026 Budget Priorities Study Session on February 11, 2025³². Those same results are included in Table 5 below.

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³² [City Council 2025-2026 Budget Priorities Study Session on February 11, 2025](#)

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Table 5: January 2025 Polling Results on Potential 2026 Ballot Measures

Measure	Description	Total Yes	Total No	Un-decide	Passage Threshold
Park Bond	Issuing \$550,000,000 in bonds to repair and upgrade aging and deteriorating park facilities, including playgrounds, sports fields, trails, restrooms, and community centers and recreational facilities	52%	42%	6%	66.7%
Parks Parcel Tax	Establishing a 2-cent per square foot parcel tax — generating approximately \$74,000,000 annually — to repair deteriorating park facilities, including playgrounds, fields, trails, restrooms, and recreational facilities; and provide ongoing funding to maintain park facilities, keep them clean, and fund recreation programs	46%	46%	8%	66.7%
Utility User Tax Extension	Expanding the City’s existing utility user tax of 4.5% to cover online streaming services — generating approximately \$8,000,000 annually — to fund local city services, such as police to reduce crime; fire protection; removing homelessness encampments impacting parks, neighborhoods, and waterways; emergency response; and park maintenance	35%	55%	10%	50%
Sales Tax Increase	Increasing the City’s existing sales tax by 0.25% — generating approximately \$60,000,000 annually — to fund local city services, such as police to reduce crime; fire protection; removing homelessness encampments impacting parks, neighborhoods, and waterways; emergency response; and park maintenance	40%	55%	6%	50%

The first two measures, a park bond, and parks parcel tax, would generate revenue restricted to parks purposes. The passage threshold for both measures is two-thirds. With 52% total yes for a parks bond and 46% for a parcel tax, neither of these measures currently polls above two-thirds. The Utility User Tax Extension and the Sales Tax Increase are general taxes that would not be restricted to parks purposes. The threshold for these measures is 50%. Neither measure currently meets this threshold.

Previous polling regarding a parks parcel tax has shown higher levels of support. In late 2019, two variations of a parks parcel tax measure were tested and 64% and 66% of surveyed voters said they would definitely or probably vote yes or that they were “leaning” toward voting yes³³. In spring 2024, two variations of a parks parcel tax

³³ [City of San José Information Memo January 23, 2020](#)

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measure were tested, with support ranging between 63% and 66%³⁴. Additional polling will take place later this year and in early 2026.

As noted above, PRNS will implement an education and engagement campaign this year related to San José parks. As this campaign progresses, staff will continue to poll on revenue measure options, with the next round of polling anticipated for fall 2025. Resident feedback through the engagement campaign and future polling results will help inform the development of potential measures, which the City Council could consider placing on the ballot in either June, or November 2026.

Park Master Plan

The PRNS Department will develop a new Park Master Plan that integrates capital projects and ongoing maintenance. This comprehensive approach will help prioritize resources, improve efficiency, and ensure that investments in new parks come with the necessary resources to maintain them.

Through the Park Master Plan process, like that of the City of San Diego³⁵, PRNS will explore ways to modify policies to allow more flexibility in distributing revenue from park development fees, enabling investment where it is most needed.

By reimagining how resources are generated and allocated, San José can build a stronger, more resilient park system that serves every neighborhood. PRNS remains committed to working with the community, City Council, and internal and external partners to ensure that San José's parks thrive.

KEY ACTION ITEMS IN 2025, 2026, AND 2027

- Launch an education and engagement campaign to better understand community perspectives and priorities for San José parks.
- Secure critical funding to maintain new and existing parks through a potential ballot measure in 2026.
- Develop a Park Master Plan that integrates capital projects with ongoing maintenance strategies, updates policies, and prioritizes identifying resources and funding.
- Modify policies to allow more flexibility in distributing revenue from park development fees citywide, enabling investment where it is most needed.

³⁴ [Potential November 2024 Ballot Measure Polling, San José City Council, June 7, 2024, Item 3.5](#)

³⁵ [City of San Diego Park Master Plan](#)