



San Jose Parks Advocates

December 8, 2019

Honorable Mayor Liccardo, Vice Mayor Jones,
Councilmembers Jimenez, Peralez, Diep, Carrasco, Davis, Esparza, Arenas, Foley, Khamis:

RE: Item 5.2, Activate SJ Strategic Plan
December 10, 2019

San Jose Parks Advocates offers our comments on this final version of the Activate SJ Strategic Plan. We thank the staff of PRNS for their work and diligence in performing significant outreach. Our members had the opportunity to participate in various outreach sessions. We have watched the document evolve in response to comments made by ourselves and others. Yet we wish to draw attention to key elements of the plan as well as gaps.

We agree that Stewardship and Nature are the foundational building blocks of PRNS. Well-maintained parks with natural elements provide significant health benefits and are attractive to people. They promote everyday public life which supports social connection.

Our members communicated:

- Maintain the system.
- Fund capital repairs with predictable revenue streams.
- Keep the park system safe for users; resolve policing issues.
- Design for nature in all parks.
- Address climate change and habitat preservation.
- Develop a plan for historic park deficiencies.
- Develop a workable strategy for parks serving urban villages; rewrite the Muni Code to allow smaller parks in urban areas.
- Focus on *everyday* public life

Some of our specific concerns in each area about this draft of Activate SJ:

1. Stewardship.

Maintenance. Well-maintained parks are full of life and naturally activated. Broken and worn amenities discourage use of the facilities.

- How will the ActivateSJ strategic plan's benchmarks shape the council and city manager's office understanding of financial needs and actions leading to improved maintenance?

Funding Capital Repairs. Receipts from the Construction and Conveyance (C&C) tax as well as the Park Trust Fund fluctuate wildly from year to year.

- How will the unstable nature of the capital revenue stream be addressed?
- What alternate funding will be made available? For what amenities? Which are critical? How many years is considered acceptable for no playground?

Personal Safety. Our members tell us that they feel unsafe in some parks and trails. They have been threatened and assaulted. They complain of quality of life violations and vandalism. They express frustration at jurisdictional issues between rangers and police. They perceive there is no one doing anything about the problems in the parks. Our community partners report the difficulty of getting police to help to keep clean-ups safe. We remember when there was no need for the public to try to discern jurisdictional boundaries. Historically, the public called and the SJPD Park Unit responded.

- How will these personal safety and quality of life problems be addressed? How will jurisdictional issues be resolved?
- How will the public know who to call, if anyone?
- How will this strategic plan help resolve the issue of policing in the parks?
- When will a SJPD Park Unit be re-instated?
- Is this strategic plan doing anything to work towards a solution beyond should the rangers carry guns?

2. Nature.

Health Benefits. Extensive research shows the natural environment—trees and greenscape--provides significant health benefits. Active recreation contributes to health.

- As parks change to smaller sizes in denser areas of the city, how will they be designed to maintain health benefits? Where is this addressed in the strategic plan?
- How will the smaller parks provide active recreation? What alternatives are under consideration?

Habitat. Parks—even small ones—provide islands of habitat for wildlife.

- How will parks be designed and maintained to provide this habitat?

Climate Change. Temperatures are increasing. Dense areas are hotter.

- Where is the strategic plan to use parks to offset heat island effect? To provide cooling facilities?

- The plan mentions a tree inventory, but where is the plan to address climate change using for significant tree planting—like many communities through the world?

3. Equity and Access.

Historic Deficiencies. Many parts of the city are not served by parks and are not experiencing significant development.

- How will these historic deficiencies be addressed? Will this be a focus of the regional master planning?

New Dense Neighborhoods: Urban Villages/Transit Corridors

- What is the strategy to acquire parkland within urban villages? How will “Floating Parks” be replaced with real parks?
- How and when will the City change municipal code limitations that restrict accepting or buying small parks—even though small urban parks make sense in an urban setting?

4. Public Life

Everyday Public Life. Research on public life and its prosocial benefits suggests that the greatest benefits are derived from **everyday** public life. Special events have economic benefits but do not create the same levels of community cohesion.

- How does the strategic plan balance investments in one day events and everyday public life?
- How does the ActivateSJ plan to fund the special events?
- How will ActiviteSJ provide public life events to every resident?
- Well-maintained parks have greater natural activation. How will San Jose measure the impact of poor maintenance/missing amenities on daily public life?

In summary, we appreciate the shift from a list of Capital projects to a more thoughtful discussion of the PRNS challenges and tasks to move towards solutions. However, many questions remain unanswered and many concerns do not seem to be addressed. We look forward to continued dialogue.

Sincerely,

Jean Dresden
Executive Director
San Jose Parks Advocates

cc

Jon Cicirelli, Director of Parks
Nicolle Burnham, Deputy Director of Parks

Angel Rios, Deputy City Manager
Dave Sykes, City Manager

From: Lames

Sent: Tuesday, December 10, 2019 5:21 PM

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Subject: I support Khamis' memo on Item 5.2 on today's Council agenda

Honorable Mayor Liccardo and Members of San Jose City Council,

I write as an individual in support of Councilmember Johnny Khamis' memo on Agenda Item 5.2, which endorses the memo by Mayor Liccardo and CM Jimenez, which supports PRNS's Strategic Plan ("ActivateSJ") with amendments.

CM Khamis' memo requests that the city look into enabling the city to acquire parkland piecemeal when large parcels are not available.

It is similar to when I go with friends to my favorite local restaurant: there's no way we'll find a table for eight on a Friday night, so when we see a single table open up, we grab it, hoping that the group to the left of us, or the right, or behind us, will finish and leave before our food arrives so we can combine tables to seat all of us. Sometimes, we may hold single tables in several areas of the restaurant, increasing the odds of assembling the larger table: we can always free up the unneeded tables.

In like manner, Khamis' memo asks that the city look into being able to acquire parcels for parks, even if they individually may not be of adequate size, in hopes that they may eventually be combined with the neighboring parcel(s) left, right, or behind if and when those owners wish to sell. And, if the city manages to find suitable parkland elsewhere before the neighboring parcels free up, the city could sell the unneeded parcels.

Adequate parks and park facilities are necessary for the physical and mental health and social welfare of our residents, but acquiring the needed land can be a challenge in an already developed area. Having the flexibility to purchase individual lots and then assemble them over time increases the probability of finding the needed land.

Thank you,

~Larry Ames
longtime park advocate.

cc: City Clerk, City Mngr, PRNS, SJ Parks Advocates