



# Memorandum

**TO:** NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES  
AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli  
Nanci Klein

**SUBJECT:** PUBLIC LIFE IN SAN JOSE  
ANNUAL REPORT

**DATE:** May 2, 2022

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Approved  Date 5/11/22

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the annual report on public life in San Jose, including citywide activities outlined in the City Manager's Enterprise Priority of "Safe, Vibrant, and Inclusive Neighborhoods and Public Life."

## **OUTCOME**

This report will provide the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee with an overview and understanding of the City of San José's public life priorities, programs and initiatives. This report will inform the Committee on 2021-2022 activities and upcoming public life efforts and activities planned for 2022-2023.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Office of the City Manager has eight City Enterprise Priorities that serve as focal points across City departments and services. Amongst these priorities includes:

*"Safe, Vibrant, and Inclusive Neighborhoods and Public Life:* The diverse mosaic of people who live, work, learn, and play in San José deserve vibrant, beautiful, accessible, safe, and inclusive public spaces that inspire friendship and connection across generations, cultures, and points of view. Our neighborhoods and public life must reflect the rich cultural history and lived experiences of our residents. Neighborhoods should serve as conduits for people to connect with one another, to build community, and provide pathways to opportunity, lifelong learning, and prosperity."

Public life initiatives are coordinated by multiple departments including: Environmental Services, Fire, Housing, Library, Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs, 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.

The mission of public life is to enhance service delivery through placemaking in public spaces. Key to this 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. By establishing mutual stewardship of places, public life and placemaking strengthen local leadership and engage communities in the creation, activation and maintenance of San José's public spaces. The term "placemaking" describes the process of working collaboratively with all stakeholders to create public spaces such as plazas and parks that are pleasurable or interesting, and reflective of the communities that use them. Placemaking commonly conjures intentionally "creating quality places, wherein people want to live, work, play, and learn."

## **ANALYSIS**

As the City activated the Emergency Operations Center and complied with the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City pivoted to support public life by prioritizing public health safety, community resiliency and economic recovery. However, with vaccines becoming widely available in 2021, and the subsequent high vaccinations rates in the County combined with a decline in cases and deaths, most restrictions have been lifted. In 2021, the City experienced a reopening of public life activities, San José Abierto, which was critical to our return from social isolation, social cohesion, community well-being and healing.

A large portion of the City's budget that supports public life is contingent on the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT), which has been significantly impacted by the steep decline in hotel occupancy and the average of daily hotel room costs. Through the San José Municipal Code, TOT funds the programs and services of the Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA), a division of Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs. The TOT funds are largely used to support the public life efforts of arts organizations and artists, which are a critical part of the City's community and economic recovery roadmap. Therefore, there continues to be a need to work with the City Council to augment the decline in projected TOT revenues in FY 2022-2023 to support the activities and programs of the OCA and its community-based organizations that serve our residents' needs for cultural programming.

As the City of San José safely welcomes the return of outdoor gatherings, the quantity of outdoor events permitted through the OCA's Outdoor Special Events Section and PRNS's Special Park Use Unit continue to trend towards pre-pandemic event numbers. For context, in 2019, the OCA authorized approximately 150 outdoor special events that were attended by over two million people, the majority of which are in the warmer seasons. The PRNS Special Park Use Unit that permits events in parks permitted approximately 250 events in 2018-2019, with an estimated 1.3 million attendees.

In 2022, spring and summer will welcome back popular events of years past, along with new and engaging events for families to enjoy. For example, Culture Night Market is a new community marketplace that uplifts culture and small businesses. The Culture Night Market gathers over 40+ small business vendors and local artisans, features live music and entertainment from local musicians and artists, and hosts a variety of great tasting foods from small business vendors and trucks attracting about 800 attendees. Culture Night Market activations currently take place on Coronado Avenue, Eastridge Mall and Westfield Oakridge Mall surface lots, with plans to expand to more locations. Exemplifying another new model, the long-standing San José 408K Race to the Row and the Silicon Valley Half Marathon combined to become the San José 8K and Half Marathon, weaving runners through the streets of downtown, Japantown, The Alameda, the Rose Garden, ending at Santana Row. The Nikkei Matsuri Festival in Japantown is a tradition that returned again to partner with the Japantown Fun Run/Walk. As we move into the prime outdoor event season, there is excitement about what creative events local organizers bring to San José.

### ***Placemaking and Public Life Highlights***

Below are highlights of the interdepartmental placemaking and public life efforts that were provided over the past year as well as highlights for upcoming programs.

**CityDance** – CityDance San José is an evening of socializing, music, and open-air dancing. After a 2020 hiatus, the OCA produced a 2021 CityDance series with a new partnership with the San Jose Museum of Art and new location at the Circle of Palms. This free public space activation features live bands and a professional dance instructor to teach the fine points of the evening's dance style. Each event welcomes hundreds of dancers, young and old, where families and friends can learn something new, tune their skills, and enjoy themselves at the San Jose Museum of Art. The 2021 series highlighted popular local dance instructors and musicians of popular Latin dance genres, welcoming up to 500 attendees on the first Fridays of August, September, and October.

Planning for the fourth season of CityDance is underway and promises to offer an engaging program in partnership with the San Jose Museum of Art, San José Downtown Association, and Envision Pro. To promote the museum's new schedule of being open on Thursday evenings, CityDance will take place on the third Thursday of each month beginning June through September, 2022. A variety of popular dance genres such as Salsa, Bollywood, Cumbia, and K-Pop will be featured.

**2022 Creative Ambassadors** – With the generous continued support of the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, the OCA has commissioned six exceptional multi-disciplinary artists as 2022 Creative Ambassadors. Promoting the value of the arts and creativity, each ambassador will be offering a unique public project and outreach into their respective multicultural communities and diverse networks. The 2022 ambassadors include:

- Stephanie Barajas, a San José-based Mexican actor, photographer, and arts administrator;
- Ricardo Cortez, a Chicano digital media artist exploring the intersections of technology, sculpture, and culture;
- Dana Harris Seeger, a printmaker and teaching artist, whose work is influenced by her experience growing up as a second generation Baltic American. Dana is the Co-Founder of the School of Visual Philosophy art studio and school located on The Alameda;
- Eric Hayslett, founder of e2Music Productions, Media & Education who created and teaches after-school workshops at schools located in the San José Unified and Berryessa School Districts;
- Amy Hibbs, a visual artist, and environmentalist whose work addresses themes of belonging and empathy through interaction with the urban landscape; and
- Brandon Luu, a poet born and raised in San José who serves on the Poetry Center San José' Board of Directors.

**Make Music San José** – Celebrated on the summer solstice on June 21 every year, Make Music San José coincides with festivities in more than one thousand cities worldwide as part of Make Music Day. The idea behind Make Music Day is to share the joy of making music, from professional to amateur musicians. Make Music San José 2021 was hosted in a hybrid format (in-person and virtual) by the OCA. The hybrid celebration included activation of music stages with participating partners and community-curated channels featuring 34 local music artists and groups. The event was enjoyed by those attending in-person programming at designated partner stages throughout San José: Parque de los Pobladores, School of Arts and Culture at Mexican Heritage Plaza, San José Jazz “Break Room,” SoFA Market, Nirvana Soul, San Pedro Square Market, and several San José Public Library neighborhood branches. Additionally, musical performances were streamed live via the Make Music San José online channel.

Plans are underway for Make Music San José 2022, which will be held once again on the summer solstice, June 21, 2022. This hybrid in-person and virtual celebration will include community-curated channels featuring local musicians, and activation of identified public spaces in downtown San José. OCA is currently developing partnerships to promote and produce this event aimed and celebrating creative expression through music.

**Public Art** – In FY 2021-2022, the OCA's Public Art Program completed six public art installations with approximately 65 active projects underway. Highlights of recently completed projects include: *Sonic Runway* at City Hall; the completion of the citywide installation of 500 artist designed and student poet inspired aluminum placards for the *Litter-ature* project; *Methanogen Polyptych*, a perforated metal façade by environmental artist Buster Simpson at the

Co-Generation Plant that portrays the microbes that power the Regional Wastewater Facility as they help clean water; *El Sueño de la Mariposa* (The Dream of the Butterfly) by muralist Morgan Bricca located at the CalTrans Soundwall at Midfield and Havana Streets; *Threshold* by artist Philip Beesley at the Norman Y. Mineta San José International Airport; and *A Million Times for San José* by artists Humans Since 1982, a clock at the airport that entrances viewers with choreographed and programmed movements.

**WeCreate408 Creativity Challenge** – With generous support from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, the OCA is looking to bring back for the fourth time the WeCreate408 Creativity Challenge in October 2022 to coincide with October being recognized as National Arts and Humanities Month. This month-long creativity challenge looks to engage arts partners and participants who are encouraged daily to celebrate the value of creativity in their everyday lives and enjoy creative offerings through our arts partners. All participants are encouraged to hashtag their creations using the #WeCreate408 hashtag. All marketing and community outreach efforts are communicated in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.

**Abierto, Viva CalleSJ, and Viva Parks Outdoor Events** – As proposed in the Mayor’s June Budget Message for 2021-2022 as approved by the City Council, the City funded the newly developed “Abierto” program managed by PRNS. This program was developed to provide funding for arts-based agencies affected by the pandemic when public space activation was suspended. Public health orders had a tremendous impact on arts organizations by leading to cancelled performances and limiting their ability to raise revenue to support their agencies. The City identified \$3,712,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act to fund the PRNS Placemaking Team to support the distribution of funds to arts-based agencies, four Viva CalleSJ activations, and 100 Viva Parks activations including two new activation series at Arena Green and Tully Community Ballfields.

In addition to doubling PRNS’s activation schedule from two Viva CalleSJ and 50 Viva Parks activations per year pre-pandemic, the Placemaking Team also amended contracts with four lead agencies – Filco, School of Arts and Culture, San José Downtown Association and San José Jazz – to inject \$1.2 million to smaller arts-based groups through a streamlined one-page request for funding. By creating a simple application process and providing lead agencies the authority to coordinate and fund requests, the Placemaking Team facilitated more than 60 additional small- and mid-size arts activations throughout San José. The public response and response from the arts sector was overwhelmingly enthusiastic.

PRNS has also leveraged partnerships to plan and deliver more than 100 Viva Parks activations in neighborhood and downtown parks by the end of this fiscal year, and four Viva CalleSJ activations (already held on September 17, 2021, November 7, 2021 and May 1, 2022, with another scheduled for June 12, 2022). For more and updated information about dates, routes and activities at Viva CalleSJ can be found at <https://www.vivacallesj.org>.

Looking ahead, anticipating the adoption of the 2022-2023 budget, the Placemaking Team has planned a lively and diverse series of Viva Parks activations across San José for the summer of 2022, as well as several Viva CalleSJ activations for the next year. Additionally, in the coming months PRNS will merge the Placemaking Team and Special Parks Use Unit that issues permits for special events and activities in parks and trails. This merger is designed to bring the two programs under a shared vision for a safe, vibrant and inclusive parks system that is a hub for public life.

Simultaneously, PRNS is evaluating Special Park Use Unit program rules, requirements and processes for alignment with this City Enterprise Priority, with a goal of redesigning them to be easier for event producers to request and for staff to ensure safe and fun special events in parks and trails.

## **CONCLUSION**

While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant community and economic impacts to San José's public life aspirations, the Public Life interdepartmental team rose to the challenge in 2021-2022 to reopen public life through inspirational and healthy events and art, which are bright spots of how the City and its community-based partners brought the community together in unanticipated ways, creating a more resilient San José. It is through these times that we have become better together, and our public life reborn through adaptive and authentic programs and services.

Comparable to the 2021-2022 Adopted Operating Budget, the interdepartmental Public Life team are seeking a second year of American Rescue Plan Act funding for 2022-2023 to support the City's outdoor special events, Abierto activations, and grants for art and culture.

## **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

The City will continue to collaborate across City departments, partners, and stakeholders to develop placemaking and public life strategies based on available fiscal resources.

## **CLIMATE SMART SAN JOSE**

The recommendation in this memorandum aligns with one or more Climate Smart San José energy, water, or mobility goals.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

This memorandum will be posted on the City's website for the May 19, 2022 Neighborhood Services and Education Committee meeting.

**COORDINATION**

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office.

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION/INPUT**

This memorandum is not associated with a commission recommendation or input.

**CEQA**

Not a Project, File No. PP17-009, Staff Reports, Assessments, Annual Reports, and Information Memorandums that involve no approvals of any City action.

/s/

NANCI KLEIN  
Director, Office of Economic Development  
and Cultural Affairs

/s/

JON CICIRELLI  
Director, Parks, Recreation and  
Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact Kerry Adams Hapner, Director of Cultural Affairs, at [kerry.adams-hapner@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:kerry.adams-hapner@sanjoseca.gov) and Avi Yotam, PRNS Deputy Director, at [avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov).