



# Memorandum

**TO: NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES  
AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli

**SUBJECT: SEE BELOW**

**DATE:** March 25, 2024

Approved

Date

4/4/24

**SUBJECT: PARKS, RECREATION AND NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES  
VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS ANNUAL REPORT**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the report on Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services volunteer management programs, accomplishments, and improvement initiatives.

## **BACKGROUND**

Like many other cities, San José has needs that are unmet by current resources. To bridge these gaps, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (Department) engages residents to increase its collective capacity to provide service to the community. The value added by volunteers in the City of San José (City) is significant and multifaceted. Volunteers contribute their time, skills, and energy to a wide range of organizations and causes, providing important support to many programs and initiatives.

The city has a rich history of volunteerism. Much of this volunteering happens under the umbrella of the Department. Volunteer service is aligned with the guiding principle of Stewardship in the Department's 20-year strategic plan, ActivateSJ. The Department's Volunteer Management Unit is responsible for supporting volunteer activities across all Department divisions and works closely with each division to identify volunteer needs and opportunities, recruit and train volunteers, and provide ongoing support and recognition.

The Department relies on volunteers in various capacities to support and enhance community programs, events, and park maintenance. Volunteers are utilized according to their skills and contribute thousands of hours of their time each year. Here are some ways in which the Department utilizes volunteers:

1. **Park Maintenance:** Volunteers help with maintaining parks by participating in clean-up events, gardening, landscaping, and general upkeep activities.
2. **Recreation Programs:** Volunteers assist in organizing and running recreational programs such as youth sports leagues, arts and crafts workshops, senior activities, and more.
3. **Events and Festivals:** Volunteers play a significant role in organizing and executing events and festivals held in the City's parks. This can involve event setup, staffing booths, assisting attendees, and cleaning up afterward.
4. **Community Engagement:** Volunteers often serve as liaisons between the Department and the community, promoting programs and events, collecting feedback, and advocating for neighborhood needs.
5. **Special Projects:** The Department may have specific projects where volunteers can contribute their skills, whether it's in marketing, graphic design, event planning, or other specialized areas.
5. **Trail and Environmental Conservation:** Volunteers might participate in trail maintenance, invasive species removal, and environmental conservation efforts in parks and natural areas.
6. **Youth and Education Programs:** Some volunteers may work with youth engagement programs, mentoring, or leading educational activities.

To get involved or find out more about volunteer opportunities with the Department, individuals can visit the City's official website, check for volunteer opportunities listings, or directly contact the Department for more information on how to volunteer and contribute to their community.

Overall, volunteers provide significant value to the Department and the community. Their contributions are essential to achieving the Department's goals of increasing equity and enhancing the livability of the City's neighborhoods. While the City and community gain from the volunteerism, the volunteers gain too: volunteerism allows community members to learn new skills and connect with those around them while increasing the livability of their neighborhoods.

**ANALYSIS**

The Department presents volunteer opportunities that are as varied as the programs it offers. Though the Department is moving towards high-level coordination of all volunteer programs coming from the Volunteer Management Unit, each program currently works to define individual volunteer roles, recruit volunteers, and train them to work within their programs. Volunteer roles can be found within the Parks, Community Services (BeautifySJ, Project Hope), and Recreation Divisions, as described further below.

The table below provides a summary overview of volunteer hours and the value of contributions in fiscal years (FY) 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. As shown, Department-supported volunteerism increased substantially in FY 2022-2023, as more community members have continued to feel more at ease with resuming volunteer activities with improving public health conditions.

*Figure 1- Number of Volunteer Hours and Their Value by Division and Program*

Volunteer Hours & Value*	FY 2021-2022		FY 2022-2023	
	Hours	Value	Hours	Value
<b>Senior Nutrition &amp; Special Events</b>	2,352	\$83,637.12	8,903	\$332,259.96
<b>Community Centers</b>	6,926	\$246,288.56	6,589	\$245,901.48
<b>Recreation Subtotal</b>	<b>9,278</b>	<b>\$329,925.68</b>	<b>15,492</b>	<b>\$578,161.44</b>
<b>Neighborhood Litter Program</b>	15,789	\$561,456.84	22,081	\$824,062.92
<b>Project Hope</b>	2,507	\$89,148.92	2,765	\$103,189.80
<b>Graffiti Removal Program</b>	175	\$6,223.00	74	\$2,761.68
<b>Community Services Subtotal</b>	<b>18,471</b>	<b>\$656,828.76</b>	<b>24,920</b>	<b>\$930,014.40</b>
<b>One-Day Events</b>	17,353	\$617,072.68	16,203	\$604,695.96
<b>Adopt-A-Park</b>	14,850	\$528,066.00	11,281	\$421,006.92
<b>Happy Hollow Park &amp; Zoo**</b>			6,316	\$235,713.12
<b>Placemaking**</b>			2,064	\$77,028.48
<b>Family Camp**</b>			1,206	\$45,007.92
<b>Parks Subtotal</b>	<b>32,203</b>	<b>\$1,145,138.68</b>	<b>37,070</b>	<b>\$1,383,452.40</b>
<b>Department Total</b>	<b>59,952</b>	<b>\$2,131,893.12</b>	<b>77,482</b>	<b>\$2,891,628.24</b>

\* The Independent Sector states that one (1) hour of volunteer time in California was valued at \$35.56 in 2021 and \$37.32 in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

\*\* Happy Hollow Park and Zoo, Family Camp, and Placemaking volunteer hours were added to the report for FY 2022-2023.

***Volunteering in Parks***

The Department offers several options for individuals or groups who want to volunteer to help steward the City's parks: one-day events and the Adopt-a-Park program, Viva CalleSJ, Happy Hollow Park and Zoo and even Family Camp, located in Groveland, California.

<sup>1</sup> Independent Sector Value of Volunteer Time by state: <https://independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Value-of-Volunteer-Time-by-State-2001-2022.pdf>

As the Department continues to prioritize community engagement in the enhancement of parks, it should be noted the significant role that volunteers play, particularly in low-resourced areas. Volunteerism not only fosters a sense of ownership and pride within communities but also contributes to the improvement and maintenance of our parks, ensuring equitable access to green spaces for all residents.

### ***One Day Events***

The Department recognizes the importance of one-day volunteer events to the park system, particularly in parks that have received a low score on their most recent annual Park Condition Assessment (PCA). In planning one-day events across the City, the Department utilizes the Healthy Places Index (HPI) to seek equity in prioritizing the areas of the City that may most rely on the green spaces that City parks provide.<sup>2</sup>

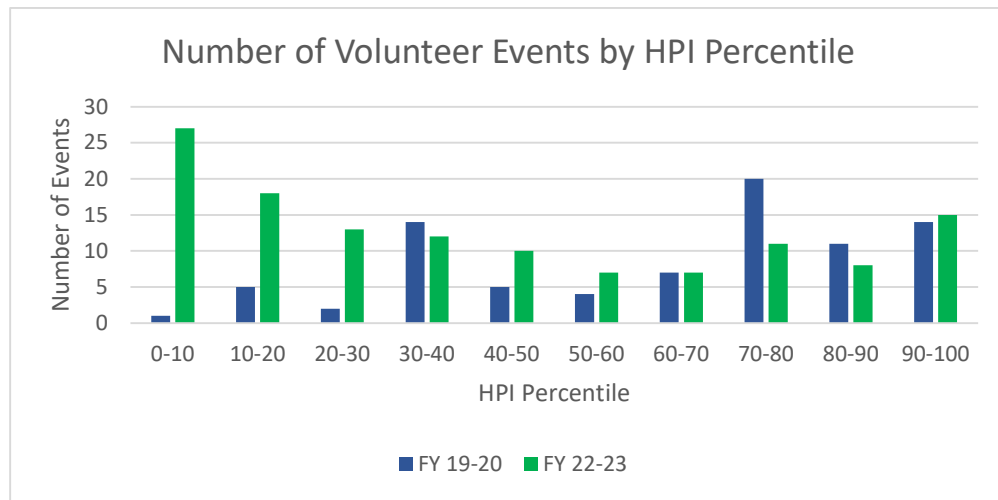
One-day events are organized by the Volunteer Management Unit and offer individuals or groups an opportunity to volunteer for a specific park stewardship or improvement project. These events can be organized around a particular holiday, such as Earth Day, or to make targeted improvements based on individual park needs. Volunteers typically spend two to three hours working and can see how small tasks can have a huge impact. The program is adaptable to all abilities and modifications can be made to ensure that everyone has a role to play. The goals of the program are to assist with various park maintenance projects and help implement special projects such as installation and ongoing care of specialized gardens, while fostering a sense of community and civic engagement.

The use of HPI data has dramatically altered one-day event planning. In FY 2019-2020, only 33 percent of volunteer events were held in a park that had an HPI percentile of 50 or less. By FY 2022-2023, however, 63 percent of events were held in a park that had an HPI percentile of 50 or less, meaning more resources were directed towards communities most in need. Figure 2 shows the number of one-day events at parks in FY 2019-2020 and FY 2022-2023, by HPI.

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<sup>2</sup> The Healthy Places Index can be found here: <https://www.healthyplacesindex.org/>.

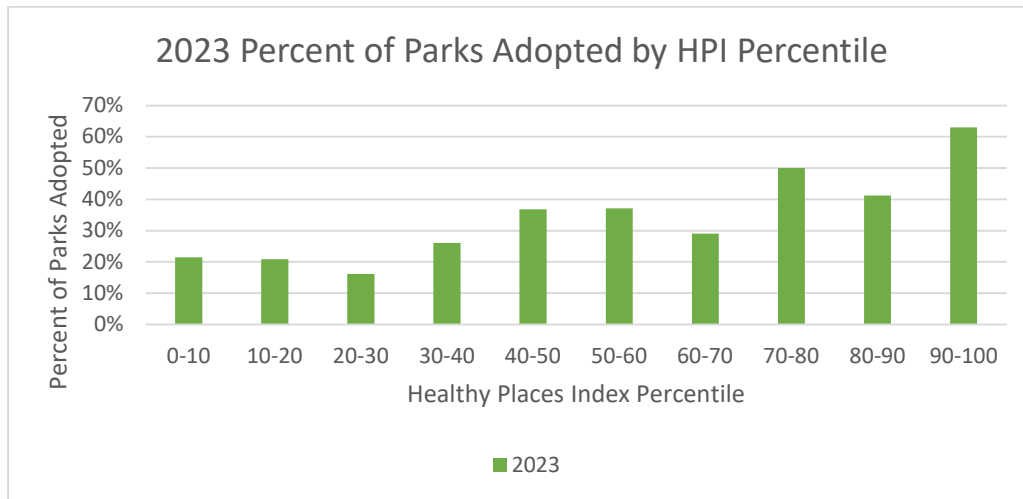
*Figure 2- Number of Volunteer Events by HPI Percentile*



***Adopt-A-Park***

The Adopt-A-Park program is a longer-term commitment that involves "adopting" a specific park and taking responsibility for some of its stewardship and improvement. The Adopt-A-Park program, first established in 2001, allows individuals, community groups, neighborhood associations, or "friends of" groups to help keep parks clean and safe. Adopt-A-Park volunteers have a one-year minimum commitment and are expected to volunteer regularly, performing tasks such as litter clean-up, weeding, and watering, as well as larger improvement projects, as needed. Adopt-A-Park volunteers are provided with training, tools, and support from the Volunteer Management Unit. As of July 2023, 90 of 212 City parks were adopted, which was an increase for 2023. Figure 3 shows the percentage of parks that are adopted, by HPI.

*Figure 3- 2023 Percent of Parks Adopted by HPI Percentile*



Within the past year, the Adopt-A-Park program has focused on maintaining quality standards amongst all groups to ensure the same service is provided to all adopted parks. In doing so, some groups better understood the program expectations and the actual time and effort it really takes to adopt a park. Five park adopters left the program, feeling it was time that another group have an opportunity to provide the park with the level of care needed. Staff has been working hard in ensuring that all participants understand the program standards and held the first in person Adopt-A-Park community meeting in March 2024 to review standards, educate on various processes and network with other groups.

The Department recognizes that fewer parks in low HPI areas are currently adopted. As such, it continues actively working on increasing park adoptions in these neighborhoods. Each year the team utilizes proven and innovative ideas to ensure surrounding residents are engaged with these opportunities. Engagement strategies utilized in the past year include:

1. Targeting outreach efforts to individuals and organizations within lower HPI neighborhoods. This includes building relationships with community leaders, communicating with the community’s native languages, sending targeted mailers or flyers to residents, and partnering with local schools, churches, and community centers to promote volunteer opportunities.
2. Providing training, tools, and resources to empower volunteers to contribute effectively and safely.
3. Engaging the community during park ribbon cuttings to understand their needs and interests in park programs and services and promote Adopt-A-Park.
4. Soliciting feedback from community members to ensure that its programs and services are meeting the needs of residents in lower HPI neighborhoods.
5. Coordinating and working closely with Council Offices on these efforts.

By taking these steps, staff believes the Department can increase park adoption in lower HPI neighborhoods, which can lead to increased livability in the community.

### ***Happy Hollow Park and Zoo***

Happy Hollow Park & Zoo welcomes volunteers to support the park in many ways. ZooTeens 14 to 17 years old work closely with education and animal care teams seasonally during school breaks or year-round. Docents 18 years and older volunteer in all areas throughout the year, and both groups assist with clerical/custodial chores and learn to assist with animal care and handling in addition to conservation education presentations. Volunteers can work in presentations for school classes, assemblies, Scout groups, camp programs, and community events. They help in the Learning Lodge and at the Meet and Greet Corner presenting Animal Ambassadors and Biofacts to park guests. They can choose to be Gardening Gurus, Special Event staff, or Animal Welfare Engineers who conduct “citizen science” studies of animal behavior. Some seasoned, adult volunteers can apply to become volunteer Keeper Aides who work alongside Zoo Keepers in the animal exhibits to provide daily animal husbandry. Volunteer beekeepers help with honey collection and the maintenance of the apiary and demonstration hives. Last fiscal year, Happy Hollow had 96 volunteers provide 6,316 hours of service.

### ***Viva CalleSJ***

Volunteers are also critical for the success of Viva CalleSJ, where more than 75 volunteers donate their time during each event. They work in collaboration with the San Jose Police Department by monitoring various auto-crossing intersections along the route. Volunteers on the safety team close and open intersections to allow vehicle traffic to cross the route in a safe and organized way.

### ***Family Camp***

Volunteers with the Friends of Family Camp assist Family Camp with beautification projects each year. They also participate in dining room service and recreation programming at the annual spring Fish Camp and other special rentals. Volunteers are a huge asset in getting the camp store set up for the season, the dining hall’s seasonal setup, and outdoor furniture placement at the beginning of each season. They also help at the end of the season by winterizing tents, signage, and camp buildings and conducting a store inventory.

### ***Volunteering with BeautifySJ***

Services provided by the BeautifySJ Program are focused on addressing blight, beautifying public spaces, and engaging residents to produce a cleaner and more vibrant San José. With two annual city-wide litter events, weekly dumpster days, reoccurring monthly litter pick-ups, beautification events, and single days of service, volunteer support is reinforcing the concept that every effort counts. The BeautifySJ Neighborhood Litter Program is entirely volunteer driven.

Volunteers coordinate with San José residents and community leaders to organize beautification events in every corner of the city.

The Neighborhood Litter Program continues to build its volunteer core through outreach at resource fairs, coordination with the Mayor and Council Offices, presentations at community meetings, and a combination of social media platforms. The program has been busy re-engaging volunteers and providing education and outreach to schools. Staff continues to present program information in multiple languages to neighborhood groups and associations, non-profits, and various recreational programs to help promote the importance of stewardship in the community and demonstrate the impact that volunteer time can have on a neighborhood. In FY 2022-2023, the Neighborhood Litter Program organized 209 events with 12,756 volunteers who collectively contributed 22,081 hours. These volunteers collected 12,146 bags of litter, equivalent to 212.55 tons of trash.

### ***Volunteering with Project Hope***

Established in 2016, Project Hope empowers community members in nine neighborhoods throughout the City to become civically involved and uplifts neighborhood associations by building the capacity of board members. Project Hope supports neighborhood associations in historically marginalized communities to address concerns that have contributed to persistent socio-economic, health, and educational disparities. As associations move through the five-phase Project Hope engagement model, many of them have started to successfully lead meetings and events on their own while building and strengthening relationships with City departments and county and community-benefit organization resources. An example of how associations mature into organizations for positive change is the Foxdale Neighborhood Association, which has adopted Sylvia Cassell Park for monthly cleaning and periodic beautification projects through the Adopt-A-Park program.

In FY 2022-2023, 2,765 Project Hope volunteer hours included event planning/hosting, monthly strategy meetings, neighborhood association meetings, engagement efforts, and special meetings with community stakeholders. These board members volunteer to improve their community's quality of life and Project Hope staff recruit and retain board members to achieve the following objectives:

- Sustainable, organized group of neighborhood leaders
- Safer and cleaner environment
- Informed residents who can access City services
- Community partnerships that support ongoing efforts



### ***Volunteering in Recreation***

The Department's Recreation Division provides many essential services to the community that allow residents to connect and engage in a safe and inclusive atmosphere. These services include Therapeutic Recreation, Community Center activities, and the Senior Nutrition Program (SNP).

SNP provides meals to older adults at 14 community centers across the City. These hot meals are designed by a registered dietician and meet County Health standards. In addition to hot meals, the program also provides information on transportation services, legal assistance, community resources, dental services, and health services. In FY 2022-2023, the program continued to support in-person volunteer opportunities for Senior Services including SNP, recreational activities, and special events. With the COVID-19 pandemic placing seniors at an increased risk, the return to "normal" activities was completed in phases, with many participants hesitant to resume in-person gatherings. In FY 2021-2022, there were a total of 167 volunteers who helped support the program, including SNP, activities, classes, and programs that helped seniors get active, along with special events including holiday celebrations and dance socials. The number of volunteers increased to 178 who contributed 8,903 hours in FY 2022-2023, showing the increased desire to return to in-person services. The Senior Services Team continues to ensure all safety protocols are in place and communicate with volunteers regarding all the precautions they have implemented to ensure their safety and the safety of the participants. The team continues to utilize the Age-Friendly Action Plan approved by Council in October 2020 and works closely with the Volunteer Management Unit to further develop the program and maximize opportunities to utilize volunteers in the senior service delivery model.

Beyond Senior Services, volunteers assist community centers in several ways such as supporting Gen2Gen events with youth and large events like the spring fling egg hunts. In FY 2022-2023, Community Centers had 442 volunteers with a total of 6,589 hours.

In FY 2021-2022, most Community Center volunteer hour contributions were from senior services of 6,926 hours. In FY 2022-2023, representing the continued efforts to increase opportunities from the prior year throughout the Recreation Division, Community Centers have brought back most of their activities and events combined with senior services, there has been an increase to 15,492 hours.

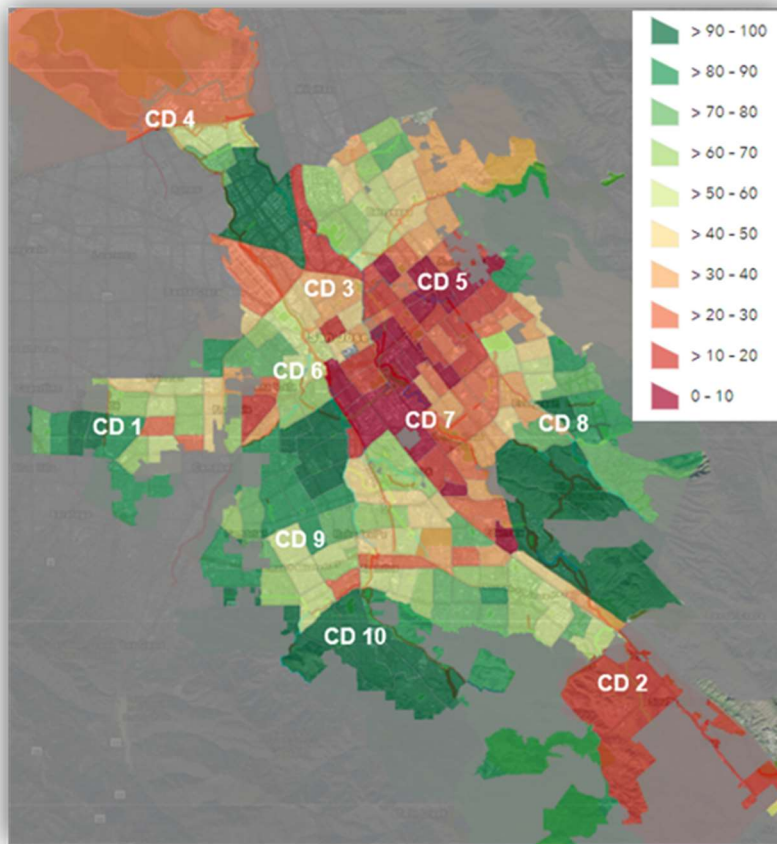
### ***Improving the Volunteer Experience***

Department staff partner with volunteers to make positive impacts in the lives of San José residents. These impacts are measured through both concrete data and anecdotal accounts. While the Department has many successes, volunteerism continues to face many challenges. One of the biggest is standardization and coordination to streamline efforts and increase the ease of volunteering. Each Department program currently works independently, for the most part, to recruit, train, and recognize volunteers. The Volunteer Management Unit Program Manager has helped establish guidelines and standard procedures for some programs but cannot centralize all Department volunteer management activities. Over time, the Department envisions unifying

these programs through greater oversight by the Volunteer Management Unit's Program Manager.

### *Racial Equity Impact Analysis*

In furthering equity goals through volunteerism, the Department utilizes the Healthy Places Index (HPI) percentiles to prioritize the areas of the City that may most rely on services offered by City programs. HPI is comprised of social condition domains such as education, job opportunities, clean air and water, and other indicators that are positively associated with life expectancy at birth. An HPI percentile is a Census tract-level ranking for the City of San José, where a higher percentile indicates more healthy community conditions. The following map shows San José neighborhoods with their corresponding HPI percentile among City Census Tracts.



*Map of City neighborhoods with corresponding HPI percentiles*

The Department volunteer programs seek to advance racial equity by designing volunteer opportunities that are accessible and welcoming to diverse communities, and that prioritize the needs of the community in which the events take place. Currently, one-day event locations are selected using HPI, and volunteer events are accessible to residents of all ages, cultures, and

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abilities. The Department is exploring incorporating childcare into volunteer events or providing meals to create a greater sense of community from the volunteer experience.

The Department also understands that once volunteers are recruited, it is important to provide them with culturally responsive training. As such, the Department is exploring providing education and training for volunteers on implicit bias, cultural humility, and racial equity. For example, a corporate group might be educated on unconscious bias and making judgments about a park or its users based on location, or providing an understanding of how different cultural groups utilize the park to allow volunteers to understand the importance of the outcomes of their efforts. By doing so, volunteers can better understand the needs of diverse communities and work towards creating a more equitable San José.

### **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  
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For questions, please contact Avi Yotam, Deputy Director of Parks, at [avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov).