



# ***San Jose Park Advocates***

April 20, 2018

Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers  
City of San Jose  
200 East Santa Clara Street  
San Jose, CA 95113

Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers:

RE: Council Study Session 4/26 on Cost of Development and Fees  
Council Meeting 5/1 Item 4.5 on Cost of Development and Fees

The upcoming sessions on the Cost of Development may bring calls for discounting of the Park Trust Fund fees and the elimination of land dedication requirements for signature projects. We are opposed. Parks are far more than large grassy turf areas. They are strategic partners in building a thriving, healthy community—when they are designed and placed properly through a strategic lens. The fees are a modest component of the overall cost of development and are not the driving factor in whether a project is financed.

We ask that the council

- 1) Affirm their commitment to the Park Trust Fund (PDO/PIO) at its current rates, and continue the requirement for land dedication for signature projects.
- 2) Direct staff to expend funds to locate park/public open space in or adjacent to the urban villages.
- 3) Direct staff to design park and public open space through the strategic lens of creating attachment and community cohesion between new residents and nearby residents by using elements that facilitate everyday public life as well as special events.
- 4) Direct staff to provide guidelines to development partners on designing public open space that meet the same strategic goals. Ask Planning staff to include within reports to the Planning Commission and Council a discussion of whether these public open spaces meet these goals and where they are deficient.
- 5) Direct staff to identify a resource and provide funding in FY18-19 that will help PRNS be more nimble at acquiring park land in and near urban villages, by using an outside real estate consultant or a member of the real estate group within OED.

Parks and Public Open Space will play a critical role in the success of the urban villages and must be a key element in creating **everyday public life**. Your recent study session showed the importance of public open space in creating “attachment,” a sense of belonging to a place where they engage to invest their hearts, their efforts, and their finances. Attachment is an important factor in determining whether the recent transplant will stay and continue to help San Jose’s firms to thrive.

Parks are critical in creating community cohesion where new residents and nearby residents can meet on equal terms. Parks must be located where they live and must be designed so they may interact every day.

Parks and Public Open Space with good design elements and placement within an urban village can make activation easy for both *everyday public life and special events*.

When Park Trust Fund fees are diverted to projects miles away from the urban villages, the opportunity to cohesion among the new residents and their nearby neighbors is lost. Every day public life and attachment to place is diminished. The opportunity for nearby special memory-making events is lost. When urban village residents must drive to a public space, the strategic value is diminished.

The Parks and Planning departments are encouraged to develop turnkey park and POPO (privately owned and public open) design guidelines to share with development partners. When facilities are well-designed, every day public life and special events can occur easily and spontaneously. Poorly designed facilities such as barren, hot and treeless facilities deter residents from using the location for their everyday public life interactions. And no event organizer would use it.

The urban villages are located in park deficit areas. There are no nearby parks or public spaces for every day public life. There is nothing for PRNS to use for a special event—nowhere to stage Viva Calle or Viva Parks. It is critical that council direct PRNS to aggressively seek land near the urban villages and provide funding/staffing for the real estate expertise. Do not allow Park Trust fund dollars to be diverted from the strategic aims of the urban villages.

San Jose has a long history of creating park deficit areas in response to pressures to build more housing. But a few city councils were more creative.

- 1960s City park bond passed and leveraged state park bond money
- 1980s Almaden developers given density bonus in exchange for Los Alamitos Creek trail
- 1988 City adopted Park Dedication Ordinance (PDO) authorized by state in 1965
- 1992 City adopted Park Impact Ordinance (PIO) authorized by state in 1987
- 1990s Evergreen is built out with many parks and trails
- 2006 Park fees updated to match current land values; automatic updates implemented

There's long been talk of a park bond to acquire more land, but nothing has come forward. Staff leverages state grants with PDO/PIO funds to do what it can.

Will this council choose to be like those of the 1950s and 1970s that encouraged population growth without parks? Or will this council choose to develop vibrant parks strategically, to develop attachment among residents, create community cohesion, and allow the everyday easy interaction of people to make more parts of San Jose a great place to live and work?

Sincerely,

/s/

Jean Dresden  
Coordinator

cc. David Sykes, Angel Rios, Kim Walesh, Rosalyn Hughey, Ru Weerakoon



COMMITTEE FOR  
GREEN FOOTHILLS



April 25, 2018

To: San Jose Mayor and City Council

Re: Study Session on Cost of Development in San Jose

Dear Mayor Liccardo and City Councilmembers,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments for the study session on the cost of development in San Jose. As impact fees for parks are included in the analysis of City fees and taxes in Staff's report on this issue, we wish to contribute our perspective as environmental organizations representing our members in San Jose.

Parks provide a variety of benefits to a community. Parks and other green spaces filter pollution from the air and reduce the "heat island" effect of glass, concrete and asphalt. Soil and vegetation filter stormwater runoff, resulting in cleaner water in creeks and the Bay; pervious soils also allow stormwater to sink into the ground, recharging the groundwater table and reducing the risk of flooding. Trees and other vegetation also slow the speed of stormwater runoff, which reduces the potential for erosion into creeks – erosion that can both damage riparian property and impair water quality in creeks, further increasing flood risk. Trees and other vegetation also provide habitat for wildlife; every tree and plant is a potential source of food and habitat for insects and birds, while tree-lined riparian corridors provide migration routes for birds and mammals.

The social benefits of parks are particularly significant. In cities with well-frequented parks, crime rates are lower (particularly juvenile crime). A neighborhood park is often the social center of the community – the place where family gatherings happen, where birthdays and special occasions are celebrated, and where friendships among neighbors are formed and strengthened. These social bonds among neighbors create a stronger sense of community and make it more likely that residents will look out for one another, increasing safety. Property values are increased in neighborhoods with parks; nationwide research has shown that wealthier neighborhoods have more trees and green spaces. Businesses prefer to locate in cities with good park systems, since access to parks is a major component of the "livability" of a city.

Finally, both physical and mental health are improved when people have access to parks and nature – not only do parks and trails encourage exercise, but people report lower levels of depression, anxiety and stress when they have the chance to get outdoors and enjoy nature. One study showed that levels of stress and frustration dropped when subjects walked through a tranquil park rather than a busy urban street.<sup>1</sup> Another 10-year study showed that surgical patients had faster recoveries when their hospital rooms had views of trees rather than of a brick wall.<sup>2</sup> People living in neighborhoods with more birds, shrubs and trees are less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and stress.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aspinall, P., Mavros, P., Coyne, R., and Roe, J., "The urban brain: analyzing outdoor physical activity with mobile EEG," *Br J Sports Med*, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> R. S. Ulrich, "View through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery," *Science* 224 (1984): 420-421, cited in Howard Frumkin, "Beyond Toxicity: Human Health and the Natural Environment, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 20, no. 3, (2001): p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel T. C. Cox et al, Doses of Neighborhood Nature: The Benefits for Mental Health of Living with Nature, *BioScience* (2017). DOI: 10.1093/biosci/biw173

In sum, a robust park system is an essential part of a thriving city. As San Jose grows and adds new residential development, it is essential that San Jose's park system grow in tandem with the population in order to adequately serve the community. One essential point to keep in mind is that one of the most important aspects of a functioning park system is accessibility. When residents live more than a short walk along a safe, walkable route to a park, those residents are not being adequately served by the park system. Having parks dispersed throughout residential communities requires availability of land. San Jose's PIO and PDO are intended to ensure that new parkland is dedicated at a rate that will achieve the Quimby Act standard of 3 acres per 1,000 residents.

As the Staff report states, San Jose still has 51 underserved neighborhoods that are not within 1/3 mile of a park, trail or recreational open space. Additionally, the City's parks, trails and community centers have a backlog of \$293 million in infrastructure repairs. Additional funding for the City's parks system is sorely needed, as was recognized by City Council a year ago when PRNS presented a report on Sustainable Park Maintenance. As the February 24, 2017 Memorandum from Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers Rocha and Jimenez stated, "at our current rate of spending, we will likely continue to fall behind on [infrastructure] maintenance as our parks decay and the cost burdens on our children only grow."

The Staff report states that city fees and taxes have only a marginal impact on development feasibility, with the major drivers of feasibility being construction costs and available return. Additionally, San Jose's development costs are in line with surrounding cities.

We believe that parks are as much an essential part of livable cities as police protection and road maintenance. San Jose needs to not only maintain but increase its current level of funding for parks in order to truly be a world-class city.

Legislative Advocacy Director  
Committee for Green Foothills

Katja Irvin, Conservation Committee Co-Chair  
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

Shani Kleinhaus, Environmental Advocate  
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society