



# Memorandum

**TO:** NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES  
AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli

**SUBJECT:** STATUS UPDATE ON CITYWIDE  
PUBLIC LIFE EFFORTS

**DATE:** March 25, 2019

Approved

Date

4/3/2019

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** Citywide

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department's status update on Citywide public life efforts, including recent citywide achievements and prospective opportunities in San José.

## **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 programs, partnerships, funding, and performance measurements. This report will inform the Committee on upcoming public life programs and activities planned for 2019.

## **BACKGROUND**

The City hosted its first Public Life study session on March 22, 2018, that provided the Council an overview and purpose for establishing a Public Life citywide initiative. This effort helped move forward the City Manager's third Enterprise Priority, "Safe, Vibrant, and Inclusive Neighborhoods and Public Life," which is supported by the coordinated efforts of multiple departments, including: Environmental Services; Fire; Housing; Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services; Planning, Building and Code Enforcement; Police; and the Office of Economic Development. These departments work together to ensure that everyone in our community has access to lively public spaces, and places that are beautiful, clean, safe, and inclusive.

The core vision of the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department (Department) is to “be a national leader in parks and recreation through the cultivation of healthy communities, quality programs, and dynamic public spaces.” This makes the Department an ideal fit for work that aligns with placemaking, and the Department has a lead role in coordinating the City’s overall Public Life effort as it seeks to advance public life and placemaking as key guiding principles for service delivery.

On March 22, 2018, the City Council held a study session to discuss public life in San José and the opportunity to maximize the impact of collective efforts of the City and community partners through a strategic, cohesive approach. One of the outcomes of the Citywide study session was to work with Gehl Architects to create “field guides” that would better define and measure the benefits of our public life programs and strategies. These guides, targeted for completion in spring 2019, focus on the following three areas: 1) Urban Planning; 2) Design of the Public Realm; and, 3) Programs and Activations. These field guides will inform the Department’s work on Public Life. Once the documents are final, PRNS plans to provide a report to the NSE Committee.

## **ANALYSIS**

A public life strategy allows residents to define the character of a city, build civic pride, and encourage greater social connection. By establishing mutual stewardship of places, public life and placemaking strengthen local leadership and engage communities in the creation and maintenance of public spaces that people use.

The concept of a community-based, people-focused approach to urban design began in the 1960’s when influential urbanists like Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte advocated for a city design that catered to a built environment that is people oriented. The term “placemaking” was introduced by urban planners and architects in the 1970’s to describe 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 is commonly described as the process of intentionally “creating quality places, wherein people want to live, work, play, and learn.”

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. This multi-departmental effort is dedicated to facilitating social interaction, developing valued public spaces, and improving the quality of life for residents, which is an integral part of the City’s efforts to be placemakers and curators of San José’s public life.

### 2018 Placemaking and Public Life Highlights

2018 was a busy year for Public Life programs. The City successfully delivered a significant number of Placemaking and Public Life program events that continue to create interest and energy among neighborhood residents who are increasingly motivated to reclaim their parks as vibrant and dynamic community gathering spaces. Below are some of the 2018 Placemaking and Public Life program highlights:

- Viva CalleSJ – The Department led the City’s fourth Viva CalleSJ open-streets event. This event was successful by all accounts and helped to bridge socioeconomic and geographic divides by bringing together 125,000 neighbors who walked, biked, and enjoyed each other’s company. The 2018 Viva CalleSJ open-streets event temporarily transformed six miles of city streets into the City’s largest urban park, which families got to enjoy – car free. The City continues to connect neighbors to neighbors and this event also highlights our diversity while building community through fun.

While we are awaiting the final publication of the fall 2018 Viva CalleSJ event study, conducted by the Mineta Transportation Institute and San José State University, it is important to note that the previous report concluded that the 2017 Viva CalleSJ event yielded positive community results in areas such as socioeconomic welfare, public health and recreation, and quality of life. In total, 860 surveys were collected from the estimated 130,000 attendees at the 2017 Viva CalleSJ. From this feedback, the study found:

- 77 percent of attendees participated in 60 minutes or more of physical activity;
  - 36 percent of attendees used a bike get to the event;
  - 59 percent came because it sounded like fun;
  - 37 percent of attendees estimated they would spend over \$21; and
  - 27 percent came from outside of San José.
- Viva Parks: Neighborhoods – This program provides ongoing community-building through positive programming, physical wellness, and civic-engagement opportunities for families in high-need areas across San José. In the 2018 summer season, the Department continued to activate underutilized parks identified in Council Districts 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8, with 52 program events hosted at 17 different parks. This constituted an expansion in the number of Viva Parks events that were delivered in 2018, with 10 additional programmed events offered in Council Districts 2, 8, and 10. Services were provided to over 10,000 community members, increasing access to recreational activities and resources for families in need.
  - Viva Parks: Downtown – This program continued the activation of downtown parks Plaza de Cesar Chavez and St. James Park, with a total of 26,650 participants enjoying more than 50 downtown activations in 2018. Park activations were designed around the availability of food, which allowed residents to grab a bite to eat in their parks, participate in free health and recreation programs, or step out of the office to hold

meetings in the shade on movable furniture. This atmosphere provided a perfect location for residents to connect with one another or unplug and enjoy public life in downtown. Residents continued to eat, relax, sit, and play in the parks. Many events were new and some continued opportunities that the community has been enjoying since 2014, including the Summer Concert Series and Doga (Dog Yoga). New recreational opportunities included Sunset Yoga; Wine and Painting in the Park; Open Mic Nights; and, the E.A.T. (Everyone At the Table) dinner event.

- *St. James Park and Urban Activation Grant Program* – Continuing the effort to connect community stakeholders with local public-space activation experts, the Department administered over \$90,000 in grants awarded to approximately 27 vendors that provided park activations such as movie nights, theatrical performances, and music. These grantees supplemented staff-led activations using St. James Park Management District Fund resources.
- *Make Music Day* – Make Music San José is an annual citywide celebration of music that was hosted on the summer solstice, June 21, 2018. This celebration presented 65 events at over 37 venues in all 10 Council Districts, wherein over 250 artists performed for the community. Make Music Day is currently in its third year of operation.
- *CityDance* – CityDance, a free public space activation at Plaza de Cesar Chavez, offers San José community members a learning and socializing experience through music and dance. Established in 2016, this event series is held every Thursday for eight weeks and includes a variety of dance genres such as Salsa, Country Two Step, Disco, East Coast Swing, Bollywood, Argentine Tango, Fox Trot, Rumba/Meringue, West Coast Swing, Nightclub Two-Step, Hip Hop, K-Pop, and Vogue. This event remains an open-air instructional dance series with professional instructors and live bands. Hundreds of dancers, residents, downtown workers, families, and friends are invited to gather to learn a variety of social dance genres. This event is designed to engage downtown employees in an “after work” event; attract SJSU students and downtown residents; and entertain downtown conventioners and business travelers by offering an inviting, fun, and free event. In 2018, this event attracted 2,800 participants and the same, if not more, participation is anticipated for this year. Staff have already begun planning for the fourth season of CityDance and looks forward to offering this engaging program again in 2019.
- *Let's Do Lunch* – In its fourth year, the City Hall South Plaza Pop-Up Project Employee Activation – Let's Do Lunch (LDL) program is a City Hall employee event hosted by a different City department each month. Offered again in 2019, this will be the fourth year of this type of activation. At noontime, employees are encouraged to enjoy various foods, refreshments, and activities, which feature live entertainment or pre-recorded music, food trucks, and a dessert truck during the summer months. The monthly activation provides employees the opportunity to engage and network with their peers while enjoying lunch outdoors. Guests can purchase lunch or bring their own lunch, and play interactive oversized retro games like Giant Jenga, Connect Four, Corn Hole, and Ping Pong. Featured themes such as NCAA March Madness, San Jose Sharks Stanley Cup Playoffs,

Green Challenge Champions, and Fire Prevention Month are presented in their respective seasons. Moving forward, staff will continue to implement the popular lunchtime activations again in 2019, with all but one month already reserved by a co-hosting department, and estimated total attendance is expected to match or exceed the 1,200 employees who attended in 2018.

- *Public Art Installations* – During the 18-week installation of Sonic Runway at City Hall, the Office of Cultural Affairs hosted 13 performances by local and nationally-acclaimed artists as part of the "Experiments in Sound" series.

### 2019 Placemaking and Public Life Program Updates

In preparation for the upcoming placemaking and public life activation season, the City has been working in collaboration with stakeholders from public and private sectors. Public life and placemaking events are being refined and expanded, and becoming more representative of the communities around the spaces being activated. The City of San José is excited about the potential to enhance and expand public space programming through innovative private-public partnerships, and additional pilot activation opportunities.

In 2019, the City plans to host two Viva CalleSJ events. One is currently scheduled for May 19<sup>th</sup> and is funded by the existing allocation for the Placemaking Team, and by recent grants and sponsorships. A second is being planned for September, subject to the City Council's allocation of resources in the 2019-2020 Operating Budget. These events are expected to attract over 100,000 participants each, based on prior attendance to Viva CalleSJ.

In addition, Viva Parks Downtown will return in summer 2019, with activations offered at St. James Park and Plaza de César Chávez from June through September. To complement these efforts throughout the City, Viva Parks: Neighborhoods will also be back with a planned set of 52 activations offered at 17 different parks throughout the City during the months of June through August.

CityDance will also be returning, with events that invite community participants to take social dance lessons and rub elbows with their neighbors during the 8-week series, which will run from August 15<sup>th</sup> through October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Furthermore, Make Music day is happening on June 21<sup>st</sup>, with activations taking place throughout San José.

### EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department will continue to collaborate with other City departments, partners, and stakeholders to develop placemaking and public life strategies. Staff will also continue the partnership with the Mineta Transportation Institute, which is evaluating Viva CalleSJ outcomes funded by a generous contribution of \$25,000 from the Knight Foundation. This funding will continue participant surveys to measure the socio-

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 25, 2019

**Subject:** Public Life Update

Page 6

economic impact of open-streets activations in San José. This study may expand to include other Public Life programs in the future.

**PUBLIC OUTREACH**

This memorandum will be posted on the City's website for the April 11, 2019 Neighborhood Services and Education Committee meeting.

**COORDINATION**

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office, the City Manager's Budget Office, and the Office of Economic Development.

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION/INPUT**

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

**CEQA**

Not a Project, Public Project Number PP17-009, Staff Reports, Assessments, Annual Reports, and Information Memos that involve no approvals of any City action.

/s/

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For questions, please contact Neil Rufino, Deputy Director, at (408) 535-3576.