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The Zoological Society of San Diego

December 16, 2010

Mayor Jerry Sanders
City of San Diego
202 C Street, MS 11A
San Diego, CA 92101

Dr. Irwin Jacobs
c/o Qualcomm
5775 Morehouse Drive
San Diego, CA 92121

RE: Plaza de Panama and Parking Options in Balboa Park

Dear Mayor Sanders and Dr. Jacobs:

The Zoological Society of San Diego has been closely following the progress of the proposal to restore the Plaza de Panama to exclusive pedestrian use and construct a parking garage behind the Organ Pavilion. The Society enthusiastically supports a pedestrian-friendly Plaza de Panama and more parking in Balboa Park.

With an average 3.5 million annual visitors to the San Diego Zoo, more than 630,000 individual Society members, approximately 2,200 Zoo employees and 1,500 volunteers, parking in Balboa Park is of vital importance to the Society.

The parking lot in front of the Zoo is the largest parking reservoir in Balboa Park and Park Boulevard is a key transportation artery. These facilities serve not only the Zoo, but the entire park, and they are limited in size and capacity. As a result, we have been gathering and analyzing Balboa Park parking and traffic information since World War II. As vehicle size, visitor expectations and traffic patterns have changed and evolved, the Society has responded with corresponding changes in parking lot design, vehicle space size and configuration.

Our numerous studies, surveys and operational observations have led to two inescapable conclusions: (1) attendance at the San Diego Zoo and other Balboa Park institutions has been flat for decades because of limited parking capacity, and (2) market demand demonstrates attendance would increase with additional parking capacity.

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Finite parking in Balboa Park has placed a de facto cap on attendance that threatens the financial health and wellbeing of all park institutions. Therefore, a parking solution that benefits the entire park is a welcome and necessary part of securing Balboa Park's success for future generations.

Frankly, we are thrilled that Dr. Jacobs has chosen to dedicate a significant portion of his time, experience, expertise and resources to solving Balboa Park's most vexing problem. After years of study and discussion, we are hopeful that a solution may become reality.

As the City analyzes the Plaza de Panama proposal, we would like to offer the Society's preliminary observations as part of the public discussion to assist with a comprehensive review of all potential issues and ideas to help ensure the final solution is the best possible for the entire park. We offer our comments and suggestions in a friendly spirit as part of the civil and open dialogue that should accompany any major proposal for significant change in one of the world's great parks. We already have shared some of our ideas with Dr. Jacobs' consultants and we hope this letter will be only one of many more opportunities for the Society, the City and Dr. Jacobs to engage in discussion and sharing of information.

PROPOSED PROJECT

Based on previous public presentations, we understand the proposed project consists of three main elements:

- (1) Close the Plaza de Panama to parking and traffic to restore pedestrian use and create a public gathering place;
- (2) Construct a bypass bridge from the end of Cabrillo Bridge to the Alcazar Garden parking lot;
- (3) Construct a parking structure in the parking lot behind the Organ Pavilion.

Among our suggestions and comments, we would like to identify three alternative parking solutions:

- (1) A smaller version of the approved Park Boulevard Promenade parking structure;
- (2) A surface parking lot on the Balboa Park landfill, with an endowed shuttle system;
- (3) Off-site employee and volunteer parking, with an endowed shuttle system.

PARKING STRUCTURE

In 2004, the City Council unanimously approved amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan and Central Mesa Precise Plan that would allow construction of an underground parking structure parallel to Park Boulevard between the Natural History Museum and Park Place. The

intent of the proposal was for the Zoo's entrance to move closer to Park Boulevard and join with a new promenade, the Park Boulevard Promenade, atop the parking structure linking the new Zoo entrance to the end of the Prado in front of the Fleet Science Center. The parking structure would include a transit center for public transportation on the first level and a maximum of 4800 spaces.

As part of its approval, the City required that the Park Boulevard Promenade not be implemented until completion of a parking and land use study then under way in Balboa Park. After two years of public input and review, that study ultimately concluded that parking should be removed from the park's interior and relocated to parking structures at Inspiration Point, the Archery Range and the Park Boulevard Promenade. Because of the City's financial situation, the required plan amendments have not been initiated and no financing plan has been put forward to do so.

The lack of funding, however, does not mean the study's conclusions were incorrect. Its conclusions were based on input from all key park stakeholders and other members of the public. Its suggestions remain valid from a planning and policy perspective.

The Park Boulevard parking structure is an approved part of the Balboa Park master and precise plans -- also adopted after years of public input. It was approved with a broad range of possible parking spaces, meaning it could be constructed in a much smaller version without any plan amendments.

We understand the proposed Organ Pavilion parking structure would result in a net increase of 272 parking spaces and approximately 6.2 acres of park land. We also understand the estimated cost for this proposal is approximately \$39 million, including the bypass bridge, the Plaza de Panama redesign and the Organ Pavilion parking structure. We question the wisdom of spending \$39 million for a net gain of only 272 parking spaces in a location that does not solve the park's overall parking problem.

For discussion purposes, our first alternative parking suggestion is a smaller version of the Park Boulevard Promenade -- approximately 2500 spaces. After closing the existing parking lots in the area and constructing the smaller Promenade underground garage, there would be a net increase of 1850 parking spaces and approximately 14 acres of park land. In addition, the promenade connecting the Zoo to the Prado would create the long sought link between the Zoo and its sister institutions.

This suggested alternative has several benefits:

- (1) Significantly increased, convenient parking for the institutions.
- (2) Recreating the historical promenade along Park Boulevard that existed in the 1915 and 1935 expositions.
- (3) Increasing the amount of open park land by 14 acres.

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(4) Creating a level, well lit, safe and easy access route from increased parking to all Prado institutions, including The Old Globe. In fact, the distance to The Old Globe from the Park Boulevard Promenade parking structure is the same as from the proposed Organ Pavilion parking structure.

We have estimated the costs of Plaza de Panama redesign, the bypass bridge and the Organ Pavilion parking structure would be about \$46 million. We estimate the costs of Plaza de Panama redesign, the bypass bridge and the smaller Park Boulevard Promenade, would be about \$106 million. Although the cost of our suggestion is twice the amount of the current proposal, we believe the significant long-term benefits to the park as a whole justify the expense and we are prepared to commit to working with Dr. Jacobs and his team to combine our resources and fund-raising capabilities to garner the required funding.

We realize this endeavor might seem unrealistic to many observers. However, we should not underestimate the ability of all the interested parties to achieve such a goal. And the result could have far longer lasting and more positive benefits for a much wider area of Balboa Park and its institutions.

We hope to engage in more discussions regarding this suggested alternative.

LANDFILL PARKING

Our second suggested parking alternative is the Balboa Park landfill.

The first year the San Diego Zoo exhibited pandas, we incurred a temporary, massive increase in attendance and consequent parking needs. For that short time, we used the top of the Balboa Park landfill across Florida Canyon for excess parking and used shuttle buses to transport visitors to the Zoo. The temporary parking solution was a tremendous success and resulted in a historic attendance of more than 4 million visitors. Our guests were pleased to find easy parking and a convenient shuttle to the Zoo.

With that successful history in mind, we suggest consideration of the landfill site as a surface parking lot alternative to either of the parking structures. We believe such a lot could include 5,000 spaces and its costs would be dramatically lower than either structure. Ongoing maintenance and operation of a shuttle system could be financed by a permanent endowment in an amount much less than the construction and operations cost of a parking structure.

Although not as convenient as the Promenade parking structure, this suggestion may have benefits as more financially realistic, while creating a dramatic parking increase.

OFF-SITE EMPLOYEE PARKING

Our third parking alternative is more of an operations and management system, combined with an endowed shuttle system.

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If all employees and volunteers of all institutions parked off-site or away from the center of the park and used a regular, reliable shuttle, we believe the problem of visitor parking would be resolved. This could eliminate the need for any additional parking. Identifying, improving and maintaining a location for employee and volunteer parking, along with an endowment for shuttle operations and maintenance could be the most financially efficient of any parking solution.

PAID PARKING

We have noted numerous comments in the media stating that the Organ Pavilion parking structure will require paid parking – if not for construction, then for ongoing maintenance and operations.

We have no opposition to paid parking per se. However, paid parking in only one portion of Balboa Park would have repercussions and effects on all remaining areas of free parking, especially the Zoo's parking lot. The Zoo parking lot already is impacted by vehicles parked daily by workers in nearby areas, including downtown. Drivers will naturally look for free parking elsewhere if a parking structure requires payment and the Zoo parking lot, the largest in the park, is a natural destination. This could have devastating impacts on the Zoo.

The lease agreement between the Society and the City allows the Society to charge for parking in the Zoo lot. To date, the Society has chosen not to exercise that right. However, the Society might be forced to require paid parking in the Zoo lot if one or more other areas in the park require payment.

We believe, therefore, the potential parking and traffic circulation impacts throughout all Balboa Park should be carefully considered and evaluated as part of any proposal for parking structure financing and operations. If paid parking throughout all the park is considered, the effects on surrounding neighborhoods also must be evaluated.

The Society does not support or oppose paid parking in Balboa Park. But if there is to be paid parking for any reason, its implementation must be carefully considered to minimize negative impacts and unintended consequences.

PLAZA DE PANAMA

Although closing Plaza de Panama to traffic will not directly affect the Zoo, we hope that any design will consider and resolve the access issues of our sister institutions near the Plaza—the San Diego Museum of Art, the Timken Museum of Art, the Mingei International Museum, The Old Globe -- and the occupants of the House of Hospitality —particularly the Prado restaurant. We are mindful of the operations and logistical issues each of these organizations faces on a daily basis and any change in the Plaza must ensure their continued success. Ease of public and delivery access must be maintained for the Plaza institutions so they continue their service to the public and Balboa Park.

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We understand that meetings are ongoing with representatives of these organizations and institutions. We strongly support a design solution that addresses their concerns. These groups are the physical heart of Balboa Park and redesign of the Plaza that fails to ensure and enhance their future would harm the Park as a whole.

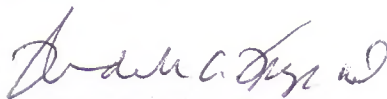
We are aware the Central Mesa Precise Plan calls for closing the Plaza to parking while maintaining one or two lanes of traffic around one corner of the Plaza – with decorative, movable bollards placed to change traffic volume and flow for different times and events. This seems a reasonable compromise that addresses the operational needs of the nearby institutions, while preserving the option of closing the Plaza completely for special events and circumstances.

However, if the current plan is not the preferred solution, we support any design that would address the concerns expressed by the affected organizations.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to identify several important items for discussion of Balboa Park parking solutions. This letter can only briefly summarize issues and information we have compiled from years of detailed studies and analyses. We are happy to share the details of our experiences and information with you. We look forward to ongoing conversations.

Sincerely,



Frederick A. Frye, President
San Diego Zoo Global



Douglas G. Myers, CEO/Executive Director
San Diego Zoo Global

Enclosure

CC:

Hon. Christine Kehoe, State Senator
Hon. Toni Atkins, Assembly Member
Hon. Todd Gloria, City Council Member
Stacey LoMedico, Park and Recreation Director
David Kinney, Chair, Balboa Park Committee
Vicki Granowitz, immediate past chair, Balboa Park Committee
Charles Hellerich, Chair, organizing committee, Balboa Park Conservancy
David Lang, Balboa Park Cultural Partnership
Michael W. Hager, San Diego Natural History Museum
Roxana Velasquez, San Diego Museum of Art
Louis G. Spisto, The Old Globe
John Wilson, Timken Museum of Art
Rob Sidner, Mingei International Museum

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CC Continued:

Alan Kidd, Hall of Champions
David and Lesley Cohn
Peter K. Ellsworth
Jessie J. Knight, Jr.
Donald Cohn
Tom Gildred
Dene Oliver
Iris Lynn Strauss
Mike McDowell
Darlene Shiley
Betty Peabody
Charles Daniels, Park and Recreation Department
Myra Herrmann, Development Services Department

16-Dec-10

**PLAZA DE PANAMA RESTORATION
with ALTERNATIVES**

	Plaza de Panama Redesign Project (Bridge exit, Plaza de Panama redesign and parking in Structure at Organ Pavilion)	Plaza de Panama Redesign with Park Blvd. Promenade (Parking structure at Park Blvd. Promenade instead of at the Organ Pavilion)	Plaza de Panama Redesign with Parking at the Arizona Landfill
Plaza de Panama			
Removes parking from Plaza de Panama	Yes	Yes	Yes
Park Improvements			
Includes new plazas	No	Yes	No
Approved Community Plan	No	Yes	No
New acres of open parkland provided	6.2	14.8	6.2
Zoo Entrance connected to Prado	No	Yes	No
Numerous donor naming opportunities	No	Yes	No
Parking Structure			
New spaces	785	2650	5000
Net spaces gained	272	1850	4134
Transportation Center	No	Yes	No
Walking distance to Old Globe	1800	1800	Does not apply
Cost Projection	\$ 45,955,000	\$ 106,635,000	40,825,000

Cost Projection						
Laurel Street Bridge Extension	\$	9,925,000	\$	9,925,000.00	\$	9,925,000.00
Alcazar Garden Revisions	\$	2,200,000	\$	2,200,000	\$	2,200,000
Road Extension to Organ Pavilion Parking Structure	\$	5,775,000	\$	5,775,000	\$	5,775,000
Organ Pavilion Parking Structure with park on top	\$	22,320,000	\$	-	\$	-
Plaza de Panama	\$	5,735,000	\$	5,735,000	\$	5,735,000
Park Blvd. Promenade plazas, landscape and miniature	\$	-	\$	30,000,000	\$	-
Park Blvd. Promenade Parking Structure only	\$	-	\$	53,000,000	\$	-
Parking at IWAG - all are per sqft Paving \$4.50 Vapor barrier \$3.50, Lighting \$0.50, Landscape \$0.85 Graphics \$0.20					\$	17,190,000
Total	\$	45,955,000	\$	106,635,000	\$	40,825,000