



March 14, 2012

Elizabeth Shearer-Nguyen  
City of San Diego Development Services Dept.  
1222 First Avenue, MS 501  
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Ms. Shearer-Nguyen:

I am writing on behalf of the San Diego Air & Space Museum Board of Directors, staff and volunteers to offer comment to the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Plaza de Panama project. Our institution offers unqualified support for this visionary project to revitalize Balboa Park and improve visitor access to this important San Diego asset.

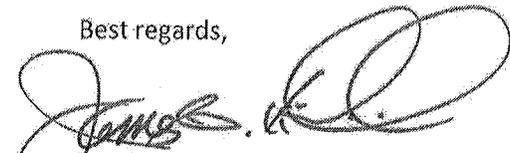
The project provides both an aesthetic and functional improvement to Balboa Park. The design for park space has been respectful of the Park's rich past and in fact brings back a number of historical elements through both restoration and rehabilitation. As was the case with the reclamation of the East El Prado from cars to a pedestrian area, the reclamation of the Plaza de California, West El Prado, Plaza de Panama, Esplanade and Organ Pavillon parking lot will beautify the park and reactivate its public spaces with pedestrians, making the park itself as much of an attraction as the institutions that reside here.

The Plaza de Panama project also improves the function of the park. Most importantly, it maintains vehicle access from the west side over the Cabrillo Bridge. Today, most people arrive to Balboa Park by car. Half of these people come from the west side. It simply won't work in today's environment to cut off an access used by almost half of the park's visitors. We certainly support increased transit access to the park, but the level of transit service planned for the park is not nearly sufficient to accommodate the 12 million visitors the park sees every year. The Centennial Bridge/Road system still allows us to accommodate vehicle traffic, but it provides a much more direct route to the parking areas in the park. With Balboa Park suffering from parking shortages on a regular basis, the additional 300 spaces provided in the parking structure will help us begin to meet parking demand.

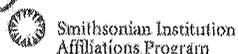
With the impending 2015 Centennial Celebration, implementation of the Plaza de Panama project becomes even more important. 2015 will see events and celebrations planned in the park throughout the year. Many of the plazas (that are now existing parking lots) will be used as event venues and will not be available for parking. With the Plaza de Panama project in place, these plazas will be available for event space, the new parking structure will ensure that parking is available, and vehicle access can continue to and through the park without placing an undue impact on the communities surrounding the park.

We appreciate the leadership of the Plaza de Panama Committee in proposing this project for the park. Thank you for the opportunity to add our comments to the Draft EIR.

Best regards,



James G. Kidrick  
President and Chief Executive Officer



Accredited by the American Association of Museums (AAM)