

History of the Balboa Park Conservancy

In 2006, a number of community leaders and government officials grew concerned that Balboa Park, the crown jewel in San Diego's park system and an important tourism destination drawing millions of visitors each year, was not fully meeting visitor expectations. Day-to-day maintenance and a growing backlog of deferred maintenance in Balboa Park was alarming park enthusiasts. It was clear that city resources, especially in the midst of the Great Recession, were not sufficient to adequately care for the Park. Several Balboa Park-focused philanthropic foundations, park staff, and the Balboa Park Committee began working with then Mayor Jerry Sanders and Third District Councilmember Toni Atkins to address the best way to preserve the Park for the enjoyment of future generations.

These conversations with city officials led to the completion of two studies by the Trust for Public Lands. The first study, by the Legler Benbough Foundation, reviewed best governance and management practices for large urban parks similar to Balboa Park in the United States. The second study, commissioned by the Legler Benbough, Parker, and San Diego Foundations, [*The Soul of San Diego: Keeping Balboa Park Magnificent in its Second Century*](#) (January 2008), was specific to conditions in Balboa Park and included information on park usage, examples of capital and maintenance needs, and management and funding options.

In March, 2008, then Mayor Jerry Sanders and Councilmember Toni Atkins tasked the City's Balboa Park Committee (BPC) with examining the future of Balboa Park by answering the following questions:

- What is the city's ability to provide the necessary financial support for Balboa Park in the future?
- Even if the city can tackle the challenge on its own, should it?
- Should management and governance be expanded; and, if so, how?

After a series of public meetings gathering public input the BPC prepared and released its report (December 2008) recommending that the City of San Diego further study and consider the formation of a new public benefit nonprofit entity to assist the city with governance, fundraising, and management of Balboa Park.

The BPC also recommended that the Mayor and City Council support a second phase of this effort by creating a working group, the "Balboa Park Task Force," to expand public participation in the discussion and decision-making process and further refine the BPC recommendations. In October 2009 Mayor Sanders working with District Three Councilmember Todd Gloria appointed the Task Force.

In April 2010, after a series of public meetings, the Task Force issued its report to the Mayor and City Council (The Future of Balboa Park: Keeping Balboa Park Magnificent in its Second Century) recommending the formation of an organizing committee to form a new nonprofit entity. The Task Force report further delineated the tasks to be undertaken to establish the new

entity and identified the anticipated roles and responsibilities of the City and the new entity with respect to the Park. In September 2010 the Mayor appointed the members of the organizing committee.

In April 2011 the Balboa Park Conservancy was officially formed as a private public-benefit 501(c)3 nonprofit organization for the purpose of raising funds, developing public-private partnerships, and collaborating with Balboa Park stakeholders to identify and implement projects to address sustainability and accessibility needs within the whole of the Park. Approximately three years later, on July 1, 2014, the Balboa Park Conservancy and Balboa Park Central legally merged into a single organization, operating under the name “Balboa Park Conservancy.”

A natural outgrowth of the original Women’s Planning Committee for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, and originally formed in 1923, Balboa Park Central had served the Park for over 90 years. In 1937, the organization was asked by the City of San Diego to oversee the operation and maintenance of the House of Hospitality, built for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition. Balboa Park Central, a private public-benefit 501(c)3, promoted cultural and recreational use of Balboa Park and was the primary resource for information about the Park through the Balboa Park Visitors Center, Balboa Park Marketing, and the Balboa Park website (www.balboapark.org).

For decades, Balboa Park Central and its programs provided a valuable service to the city, the park institutions, the San Diego community, and visitors from around the world. Further, it had been responsible for the preservation and maintenance of the National Historic Landmark House of Hospitality building. All of these functions are continued under the aegis of the merged organization.

Moving forward, the Balboa Park Conservancy is focused on achieving its goals of sustainability, enhanced accessibility, and maximizing the Park’s potential through raising funds and advocacy to implement projects throughout Balboa Park, and through park-wide initiatives that improve the visitor experience.