



May 31, 2017

Honorable Mayor, City Councilmembers
City of San José

San Jose Parks Advocates offers these comments on the proposed operating and capital budgets for FY 2017-18. Thank-you for the transparency and prompt posting of all proposals. Members of our group attended many of the budget meetings throughout the City and asked and received answers to their questions.

San Jose Parks Advocates is an all volunteer group of neighborhood association leaders, Adopt A Park volunteers, “Friends of” group members and community members from throughout the City. Our experienced leaders serve as mentors to less experienced groups facing similar issues citywide. We are separate from but collaborative with the San Jose Parks Foundation.

We envision a City where quality parks and trails for all of its residents is universally supported as a core city service essential to health and quality of life of residents, workers and visitors and a source of civic pride. Our Mission is to bring parks into the public political consciousness, to make parks an issue in all discussions of civic priorities, neighborhood services, and community interactions with the City of San Jose leaders and staff.

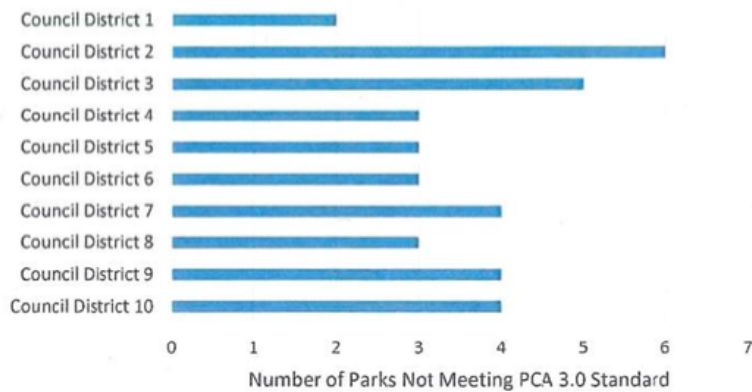
Parks are the face of the City in our neighborhoods and serve as the sole public realm and gathering space in many neighborhoods. Parks must be safe, maintained and inviting to serve their role as a community building area and source of neighborhood civic pride.

Park Maintenance remains a primary concern for SJ Parks Advocates. Although we appreciate and are thankful for the City Manager’s budget proposal¹ for 9 additional FTEs and the 2 vehicles to support their work, we remain convinced that additional workers will be needed to bring ALL parks to a minimum acceptable level. We urge on-going discussions of how to fund additional maintenance workers through a combination of sustainable funding mechanisms generated by the Funding Feasibility Study and budget adjustments that may come through a budget analysis similar to the one suggested by Mayor Liccardo in his book *Safer City, Smarter Government* and Councilmember Rocha in a memo to Council March 28, 2017.

¹ Manager’s Budget Addenda (MBA 13) May 24, 2017

We note that last year’s Park Conditions report² indicated that 37 parks did not meet minimum acceptable levels—all council districts are affected.

Exhibit 5. Number of Parks By Council District Not Meeting PCA 3.0 Standard



We support allocating the new maintenance personnel to the worst parks. We support PRNS in their equitable allocations of remaining personnel using existing criteria. We do not support budget allocations from the general fund to specific parks that would create parks that “have” vs. those that “have not.”

We encourage caution in moving personnel from better maintained parks to low-ranking parks. Some higher-ranked parks have a committed volunteer base. When resources are shifted from community-supported parks, neighbors will feel taken advantage of and will become discouraged. The City wishes to grow its volunteer program as a strategy to stretch maintenance dollars; it is important to remain aware of the feelings and attitudes of volunteers. Neighbors should perceive they are receiving more services and a better park as a result of pitching in—not less.

We congratulate PRNS staff on its implementation of innovative solutions to address limited resources and vacancies, such as: a) “flash hiring” days, b) moving many hiring tasks into PRNS—reducing the bottleneck in HR, c) Business Intelligence Analytics to move towards optimization of resources, and d) changes to equipment and park facility design to reduce personnel cost.

Park Activation

Successful park activation depends on a well-maintained park which will naturally attract more users. A one-day event can overcome a poorly maintained park, but ongoing park activation and community building requires the parks to be inviting, clean, safe and well-maintained. We congratulate staff for using grants to offset the costs of formal park activation in targeted neighborhoods. We encourage staff to seek additional grants so that park activation can be spread to more diverse neighborhoods.

² Staff report to Council, March 14, 2017. Item 5.1.

Flood Repair

We support the City Manager’s proposal to use “Commercial Paper” to finance flood repairs—especially since FEMA and insurance proceeds will help pay the debt. Shifting capital funds from all over the city would delay some long-planned projects, including some with health and safety components. Commercial paper is more flexible and would allow better utilization of the proposed “Flood capital projects manager” which we support. A “Pay as you go approach” would not utilize this person as well and would keep some facilities in a blighted condition for an unacceptable length of time.

Golf Course Debt Payment/Hayes Mansion Sale

We support the staff recommendation to apply the proceeds of the Hayes Mansion sale to the Golf Course debt. We thank budget staff for closing the gap between the proceeds and the debt payoff amount. The sale has not yet closed. If escrow does not close, how does staff propose to make the debt payments? We are adamant that the increased park maintenance positions not be cancelled. Park maintenance is a **core** service.

Capital Funds

With limited capital funds, we support the allocation of capital funds through a transparent process that is driven by well-articulated standards. We are opposed to proposals to shift funds away from those standards. We are especially concerned when projects that are classified as “nice to have” are leapfrogged over already scheduled projects long-promised to the community. We believe that this sort of re-arranging of resources should be done transparently through a community meeting process. The allocation of these funds must be monitored carefully by the council to be certain that there is no appearance of bias or favoritism.

Rangers

We support the continuation of the watershed ranger program. We reiterate our concern about ranger retention and the inadequate salary compared to other local jurisdictions. We look forward to the implementation of the new career ladder and salary schedule.

San Jose Parks Advocates views parks as essential to the social and physical health of the city. Maintenance is critical. We look forward to a 2017-18 budget that demonstrates that parks are a **core** service. Thank-you again for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,
/s/

Jean Dresden
Coordinator
San Parks Advocates

cc.
City Manager
PRNS Executive Staff
San Jose Parks Advocates Executive Committee
San Jose Parks Foundation