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Contact: Hilary Nemchik at hnemchik@sandiego.gov or (619) 533-6176

Plaza de Panama Project Moves Ahead

Long-delayed plans for Balboa Park improvements finally advance

After six years of meritless court challenges, the Plaza de Panama project in Balboa Park will go forward.

The City Attorney's Office and Plaza de Panama Committee defeated the last remaining challenge to the project today when Superior Court Judge Gregory W. Pollack found legal the project's proposed bond funding mechanism and a cooperation agreement with the Committee, a group of citizens led by San Diego philanthropists Joan and Irwin Jacobs.

"Balboa Park truly is the jewel of San Diego, and I am excited that the City can finally move forward with its plans to revitalize the Park for the enjoyment of San Diegans and tourists alike," San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **"After years of costly delays, the City can begin the work of transforming Balboa Park into the cultural center and economic driver it is meant to be."**

"Today's court victory shows what can happen when we continue to push bold ideas and don't let a small group of naysayers stand in the way of progress," said Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer. **"This project will mark the largest investment in Balboa Park in decades and transform the plaza to its original grandeur with acres of new park space for San Diegans to enjoy. I want to thank the Plaza de Panama Committee and the City Attorney's Office for their diligent work in helping us clear this final hurdle."**

In 2012, the San Diego City Council voted to approve the Plaza de Panama project by a 7-1 vote. The project is designed to reduce traffic congestion and restore the Plaza de California and Plaza de Panama to dedicated pedestrian spaces by limiting vehicle access and improving parking. The project includes improvements that cover more than six acres of parkland, and increases access to the park to support the cultural institutions that make Balboa Park a world-class destination.

The City will work collaboratively with the Plaza de Panama Committee to design the project, but will take the lead on construction. Contractors will be selected through a competitive bidding process. The City plans to break ground on the project as soon as spring 2019.

A spokesman for the Plaza de Panama Committee, program manager Gordon Kovtun of KCM Group, said the park's estimated 12 million annual visitors will enjoy new park amenities and pedestrian-friendly plazas that will no longer be shared with vehicles and traffic jams.

“We’re pleased by the decision that helps this vital project get under way to reclaim more than six acres of parkland for pedestrian use and create more room for San Diego residents and visitors,” Kovtun said. “We’re grateful to be a part of this much-anticipated community effort and project to improve our City’s crown jewel.”

The City was defended by Deputy City Attorney Meghan Ashley Wharton, assisted by second-chair Deputy City Attorney Taylor F. Hearnberger.

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