

## MEMORANDUM

April 2, 2025

From: Michael Stepner, FAIA, FAICP, Chair Design Review Exploratory Committee

To: Balboa Park Committee

Subj: The Necessity of Design Review and Assistance

***“In building the city, let us remember that the material things that express the spirit of man in art, in the art of landscape and architecture, the spirit of a city can be preserved for the ages.”***

***-George Marston. Dedication of Presidio Park. 1926***

***“While the process is often called ‘design review,’ it is ultimately about providing ‘design assistance’ toward improved outcomes.” “Design review is also typically focused on human-centered outcomes: how a building or place can better meet the needs of the people who will use it and of everyone who will be affected by it.”***

***-Balboa Park Prioritization Framework. AEA Consultants. 2025***

Dear Committee Members,

This matter is especially timely as the Balboa Park Committee recently discussed the Design Review proposals from the consulting firm AEA in their Prioritization Framework report. The recommendations in the AEA report parallel and complement the suggestions and recommendations in the Design Review Exploratory Committee report. [Attached].

The Balboa Park Committee of 100 provided a comprehensive assessment of the background and purposes of Design Review/Assistance in their letter dated February 1, 2025, which said in part:

“The Exploratory Committee (EC) was chaired by Mike Stepner, former City Architect, and included former members of the Balboa Park Committee (BPC), Connie Matsui of Forever Balboa Park, and René Smith of the Committee of 100. The Committee was formed based on discussions about the Sixth Avenue toilets at the August 2019 BPC meeting. The BPC said there needed to be a review of how they looked at projects in the park. The EC also included representatives of park interest groups, design consultants who have worked in the park, former Design Review committee members, and staff from the Parks and Recreation Department.

The EC’s recommendations include forming a Balboa Park Committee standing design review and assistance subcommittee. This Subcommittee could be modeled after a similar standing committee of the Historic Resources Commission. Also included is a process for early review of park projects. The Committee of 100 believes that design review and assistance offers one of the

most effective ways of constructively managing community feedback about projects connected to Balboa Park, facilitating a path to consensus.”

Further, it commented: “In the interest of thoughtful growth, the Committee of 100 advocates renewing a long-standing commitment to collaboration and cooperation through Design Review Assistance for all major projects planned for the park by the creation of a standing subcommittee of the Balboa Park Committee of the City of San Diego.”

***The Committee of 100 believes, as a thoughtful and engaged community devoted to Balboa Park’s future, that we can do better together.”***

The Design Review Exploratory Committee and the AEA report proposed a standing committee formed by the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Board subcommittee.

We support the Parks and Recreation Director’s recommendation for changes to the municipal code to create a standing committee modeled after the Historic Resources Board Design Assistance subcommittee.

I recommend the immediate creation of a one-year Balboa Park Committee Ad Hoc Committee on Design Assistance. It could be constituted of three members of this Committee. In addition to Design Assistance, the Subcommittee could provide formal recommendations to the Balboa Park Committee at the end of the one year regarding permanently institutionalizing Design Assistance. Such action supports the Design Review/Assistance action in the Parks Master Plan, which calls for the study of the feasibility of Design Review.

There is no other “Crown Jewel” in the City.

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***“Look at design review not as an approval or denial process - but as a tool to improve the design of a project with all elements/context understood and considered.”***

***-Matthew Carmona, University College London***

## **Background Information**

Independent legal opinion regarding Brown Act and Ad Hoc Committees.

### **March 6, 2022 Design Review Agenda information**

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/bpcagenda20220303-item501a.pdf>

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/bpcagenda20220303-item501b.pdf>

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/bpcagenda20220303-item501c.pdf>

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/bpcagenda20220303-item501d.pdf>

### **Minutes extracts:**

Mr. Blackson thanked Andy for the presentation. The design review might add time and money to a project after the time and money that we've wasted to get to this point to bring design review it makes me a little mad. This is a better way of doing it I look forward to it. I support it and I appreciate everything that your group and the Committee has done to get to this point thank you very much.

Ms. Chase commented that this is need in the park but there's a way to have a design committee that actually will help not only with the public process and review of some major projects and how it relates to the design and the impact. How do we get to this realization if the goal is a better design review process for projects in the park which also includes the public input? Knowing the appointment process it may take too long or take them longer than we need it to and so maybe and there is kind of makes more sense to have it be members of this Committee that we know already have design expertise.

### **Related information:**

#### **March 7, 2025 AEA Prioritization Framework Presentation**

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/bpcagenda20250306-item3a.pdf>

#### **November 7, 2019 Balboa Park Committee By Laws Agenda Information**

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/bpcagenda191107-item401-prboard-bylaws.pdf>

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/bpcagenda191107-item-401a-draft-bpc-bylaws.pdf>

**PARKS AND RECREATION COALITION (PARC) RECOMMENDATIONS July 29, 2021**

**E. DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Re-establishment of a Design Review Committee is essential to ensure a safe, secure and equitable park system, and high quality park designs.

REVISE this sentence, page 89, as follows, and

REVISE Policy PP13, page 93, accordingly:

“Park Design Review Board Committee Feasibility - In accordance with

Policy PP13, determine the feasibility and actions needed to form re-establish a Park Design Review Board Committee that is comprised of multidisciplinary members including Architects, Civil Engineers, Urban Planners, Community Planners and Landscape Architects, and Park and Recreation professionals, and citizens that who are representative and