
CITIZENS COORDINATE FOR CENTURY 3



C-3 SPEAKS – JULY 2018 BREAKFAST DIALOGUE RECAP

Canyons, Plazas, and Parks: Meeting our Changing Needs for Public Spaces

Parks and open space are a critical component of our quality of life. How should they be addressed in the update of the 60-year old city of San Diego parks master plan now underway?

C-3 has long been an advocate for activating the public realm: creating parks and preserving open space. This is part of the legacy of C-3's founder Lloyd Ruocco, and their importance is reflected in the observations of Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard in their 1974 "Temporary Paradise?" report

The city of San Diego has begun a new parks master plan, presenting a new opportunity to re-imagine public space and parks in our city. What should be in it? How should it address the changed and changing nature of our community? How do San Diego's canyons play a role?

Panelists: Eric Bowlby, executive director, San Diego Canyonlands; Kate Goodson, principal, Pop/Arch; Nathan Elliott, principal, OJB Landscape Architecture; Shannon Scoggins, park designer, Planning Department and project manager for the city's parks master plan.

Moderator: Nick Ferracone, C-3 Member, board member, American Planning Association, San Diego Section

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Everybody in San Diego County loves their parks -- from the giant aquatic wonderland in Mission Bay to the cultural jewel in the crown of Balboa Park down to neighborhood and pocket parks, plazas and canyons.

"Parks have evolved from royal gardens to escapes from industrial revolution grime to places today where people "re-create" their lives through active and passive activity," remarked moderator Nick Ferracone in introducing the panel. "They're difficult to maintain over time, that's the hardest part."

The city of San Diego has embarked on a three-year redo of its 1956 city parks master plan, which panelist and project manager Shannon Scoggins laid out.

The first phase, the data-collection part and initial public engagement series of workshops, is nearly complete. The next phase through next winter, will focus on needs and priorities; the third phase, from the spring to fall of 2019, will itemize on long-range goals; and the final phase through the winter, will conclude with the adoption of the final plan by the City Council. A key component will address financing of what could run into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The scope of the city's park system mirrors the range of parks regionwide:

- 42,000 acres with 26,912 acres of open space; 5,955 acres of water surface; 3,034 acres of community, neighborhood and mini-parks and joint-use parks with school districts; 6,174 acres of regional parks and shoreline and beach areas
- 13 aquatic complexes
- 3 municipal golf courses
- 7 skate parks
- 17 off-leash dog parks

The fiscal 2018 budget covered a Park and Recreation Department staff of 1,000 and spending of \$142.7 million.

Eric Bowlby, Executive Director of the 10-year-old San Diego Canyonlands nonprofit organization, reminded the dialogue attendees, "Open space, especially in canyons, also can be enjoyed if properly maintained and adopted by neighborhood volunteers." He cited the Monroe Clark Middle School in City Heights where the Cesar Chavez Club helps out every month. The 47th Street canyon has become a "nature classroom," he said, and more can be done if some of the \$4 billion in the voter-approved Proposition 68 state bond in June is spent on underserved neighborhoods built around canyons.

Nathan Elliott, a principal at the OJB landscape architectural firm, reviewed several out-of-state park projects that could provide a model for what San Diego can do. "San Diego is behind the curve," he said. For example, the Klyde Warren Park, built on a lid over a downtown Dallas freeway, involved \$50 million in private contributions, nearly 50 percent of the cost, and resulted in a popular destination for residents as far as 45 minutes away. A private nonprofit manages the park and collects \$400,000 annually from food trucks that service the 5.2-acre park.

Since it opened in 2012, the property values have skyrocketed in the immediate area and a museum has relocated its main entrance to front on the park. Previously, for obvious reasons, it turned its back on the freeway.

OJB is currently designing two-block East Village Green in downtown San Diego that promises to have some of the same attractions as the Dallas park. The trick will be to make it as "bullet-proof" as possible from heavy wear and tear expected from downtown residents, Elliott said.

Kate Goodson urged greater consideration of the varying scale of places and parks to involve thinking about space and time, even in small spots where residents can play and grow up.

"Neighborhoods need places to play and grow," she said. In her downtown San Diego work, she is helping turn a section of Island Avenue between Third and Fourth Avenues into a pocket park. Fourteenth Street south of City College could become a landscaped promenade closed on occasion for special events.

Parklets, such as on parking spaces in front of the Snowflake Baking building on 16th Street in East Village, represent opportunities to set aside places for relaxation.

In Encinitas, Goodson said, 11 measures are being taken to activate streets, add artwork build pocket parks along stretches of Coast Highway 101.

-- Roger Showley

