

September 12, 2023

San José City Council
City of San José
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San José, CA 95113

Re: Item 3.4 File 23-1185 – City of San José Parks and Placemaking Funding

Dear Mayor Mahan, Vice Mayor Kamei and Councilmembers:

Protect Our Parks. We represent a broad base of interested stakeholders and organizations who are writing to express our firm belief that funding for parks and placemaking should be protected in the city's budget. Our parks are not just patches of green amidst urban landscapes; they are the lifeblood of our community, the heart of our neighborhoods, and the catalyst for stronger, more connected lives. Our communities love Viva Calle and Viva Parks, and these programs must be protected.

In these times of San José's evolving urbanization, preserving our parks and placemaking efforts is an investment in the future. The City's Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department (PRNS) and its workers manage over 206 parks, 50 community centers, as well as over 61 miles of trails. The funding for this department directly delivers critical community and neighborhood services that contribute to the health and well-being of the nearly one million people who call San José home. Additionally, open green spaces are a testament to our commitment to sustainability, providing essential habitats for wildlife and native plants, purifying the air we breathe, and mitigating the effects of climate change.

The City has faced a continuing challenge of funding parks and placemaking efforts, as borne out by studies and real-world examples. The pandemic demonstrated the indispensable offerings that parks and public spaces bring to the community – parks and public spaces are “essential services” not simply “nice to haves.”

San José has faced budget cuts in the past, most notably after the Great Recession. By 2011, the city had cut almost 200 staff positions within PRNS, lost 18 park rangers, and about 37% of its budget.¹ Our parks system and programming has suffered from these decisions and has been on a long road to recovery. Still, deferred maintenance and deterioration of the quality of our public green spaces will require sustaining the levels of staffing and service that the city depends on.

¹ Rosen, Carl. “San Jose struggles to keep its many popular parks safe and clean after staff, budget cuts.” Mercury News. 21 Jul 2011.
<https://www.mercurynews.com/2011/07/21/san-jose-struggles-to-keep-its-many-popular-parks-safe-and-clean-after-staff-budget-cuts/>

We urge you to recognize the profound significance of parks and placemaking in shaping the identity and resilience of our city. By protecting parks and placemaking funding, you champion the well-being of residents, foster a sense of unity, promote physical and mental health, boost the local economy, and secure a sustainable and climate resilient future. Let us work together to ensure that our parks and streets continue to flourish as spaces of joy, connection, and vitality. Parks are an integral and basic part of our city's resources for community and neighborhood well-being. Protecting these resources facilitates the safety and vitality of our city as a whole.

Now is the time to protect our essential parks and public services like Viva Calle and Viva Parks. By ensuring parks are well-maintained and their staffing adequately funded, we create an inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging and unity in San José.

Sincerely,

Erika Pinto

SPUR

Sandhya Laddha

Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition

Jason Su

Guadalupe River Park Conservancy

Richard Konda

Asian Law Alliance

David Lewis

Save The Bay

Poncho Guevara

Sacred Heart Community Service

Juan Estrada

Green Foothills

Darcie Green

Latinas Contra Cancer

James Reber

San Jose Parks Foundation

Edward Saum

Shasta Hanchett Park Neighborhood Association

Jordan Grimes

Greenbelt Alliance

Dorsey Moore

San Jose Conservation Corps

Victoria Partida

Tropicana-Lanai Neighborhood Association

Pat Waite

Citizens for Fiscal Responsibility

Emily Schwing

Veggielution