



San José Parks Foundation

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Strategic Plan 2024-2027



## **Introduction**

Quality parks, trails, open spaces, and access to community recreation facilities and their programs are all recognized measures of the health and resiliency of a community. They serve to bring people together, provide outlets for cultural expression, preserve our natural environment and engage people in physical activity. Residents of the City of San José consider access to safe and clean parks a priority and we at the San José Parks Foundation (SJPF) are proud to be a steward of the resources that ensure access to high quality parks for all residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a watershed moment for open space providers and advocates as communities became hyper-conscious to the benefits of parks and concurrently it highlighted the disparities that exist around park access. By their very design, parks and open spaces are equitable and accessible to all. Through this alone, parks bring people together from across the breadth and depth of a community. As we reflect on what has happened in our community since March of 2020, we view the pandemic as a turning point in our understanding of what is needed from the park system as a catalyst for closing the access gap that exists in underserved areas of the City as well as ensuring unfettered access to high quality parks, within a 10 minute walk from their home, for all of the City's residents.

For many, developing and maintaining parks may seem indulgent in the face of so many other issues facing the San José community such as our unhoused residents or public safety concerns. We contend that it is not an “either/or” proposition. Thriving, well utilized parks go hand in hand with supporting success in other areas of the community. The development and preservation of parks and ensuring access to community recreation ensures places for community bridge building, art and music and access to nature.

When the SJPF was founded in 2010, The City of San Jose was seeking to celebrate and amplify the benefits of parks, trails, open spaces and community recreation facilities as well as access more revenue to support this vision. At the time of founding, the world was struggling with a major economic downturn. Many financial institutions had collapsed and additionally the City of San José had cut its PRNS budget by 40%. Unwilling to surrender its commitment to the park system, an initial round of funding provided by the City of San José to launch the foundation in order to realize a premier park system. The City Council at that time and the Department of Parks, Neighborhood and Recreation Services (PRNS), knew that without an entity like SJPF, parks, trails, open spaces and community centers could be lost, additionally impacting the health, wellness and equitable access to parks being requested by the community, Specifically the organization was established with the following goals in mind:

- To raise substantial funding and resources in support of the mission of the San José Parks Foundation and the work of the City of San Jose's Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS).
- To collaborate with PRNS and other providers in the development of a world class parks system focusing on the development and preservation of parks, open spaces, trails and community recreation centers.
- To promote awareness, increased community involvement, and leadership in support of San José parks.
- To ensure maximum access for City of San José residents to all San José parks, open spaces and community centers.
- To inspire passion and community involvement in parks, trails and recreational programs.

*We define the parks system as the following: parks, open spaces, trails, community and recreation facilities. We will be using the term “park system” to reference all of these throughout this document.*

We define equity and access within the context of the park system as the ability for all City of San José residents, regardless of where they reside, to have access to a high-quality park within a 10-minute walk of their home and to be able to have a voice in the development of their local parks. This is central to our work and we are committed to work in partnership with PRNS, other open space and environmental providers and residents, to ensure that the goals of equity and access are realized.

With our call to action clear and the need to support the park system greater than ever, we are engaged by the following mission: *Our mission is to advocate unapologetically for a thriving parks, trails, open space and recreation system by securing financial resources, fostering stewardship and promoting equitable access for all City of San José residents.*

This strategic plan is designed to chart our new dynamic vision that will support our overall mission to be a part of creating a vibrant park system for our entire community to share.

## **Retrospective**

The San José Parks Foundation was founded with the intent of supporting the development of parks, trails and community centers in the City of San José. We are committed to an equitable and accessible park system for all with a special focus on developing parks and recreation offerings in underserved communities. We view the SJPF as a catalyst for engaging residents, volunteers, open space providers, political leaders and City staff to work collaboratively to develop, resource and preserve a premier park system. Our vision is bold, achievable and helps to guide our work. By 2034 the SJPF will be:

- A well-resourced organization that is catalytic in transforming the parks system, ensuring that the City of San José is recognized around the world for its innovation in the development of a premier urban park system.
- Leading the way in convening other like-minded organizations around park and open space investment, providing an umbrella organization that leverages the power of other park and open space providers.
- Robustly advocating for the development and maintenance of parks in under-resourced communities to ensure that all City of San José residents have access to high quality, vibrant parks.

We are proud of our ability to pivot to meet community needs and to support communities that are looking to revitalize their local parks. This comes through our fiscal sponsorship program which allows for PRNS and community groups, that could not otherwise receive funding for their park projects due to their lack of a 501(c)3 status, to access philanthropic resources. Specific successes include:

- Sponsorship dollars for large city-wide events, led by PRNS, are funneled through the foundation. We are able to accept those donations and ensure that the resources are used to support these activations. Examples include: Viva Calle San José; The 2106 Super Bowl and Stanley Cup Events; Concerts in St James Park; Northside Neighborhood Night Market.
- Philanthropic donations to build or maintain specific parks also flow through the foundation. Examples include the Roosevelt Roller Hockey Rink and new playgrounds at Pueblo Play and Sherman Oaks.
- Partial restoration of the Japanese Friendship Garden following the devastating flood of 2017. This work resulted in the formation of a “friends of group” established to raise dollars and awareness to support the full recovery of the garden.
- During COVID-19, public gathering was totally interrupted with many of our normal park activities and volunteer events halted. We stepped up and became the fiscal sponsor for two critical efforts: Feeding the Frontline and the Farmworker Caravan. Both were focused on getting resources and support to those serving on the frontlines and ensured some financial stability and visibility for the foundation.
- Our COVID-19 pivot led to other fiscal sponsorship opportunities to support storytelling about the Mexican American Cannery Workers and the history of the LGBTQIA+ communities in the City of San Jose.

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed much of our planned priority work around restoration projects, corporate partner development and establishment of our equity fund. We have always been a flexible and nimble organization with an eye focused on the needs of our community. As we move away from the COVID-19 pandemic, focus more deeply on the park system, embrace the next stage of the organization's development, and leverage our past accomplishments, we will re-engage with these priorities through our strategic plan priorities.

## **Landscape**

Parks and open spaces are equitable, communal spaces that are lacking in our society. They provide spaces of belonging that strengthen our community and the pride residents have in their neighborhood. The City of San José boasts 3620 acres of park land and Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services oversees parks, community centers, recreational facilities and trails. These sites range from vast open spaces to urban pocket parks. Since the PRNS Greenprint plan that was released in 2000 there has been an increase in park system offerings. Currently the system consists of 212 parks (30% increase), 46 community centers (107% growth) and over 65 (142% growth) miles of trails. This increase has been wonderful for the San José community and it has added exponentially to the resources needed to support this increased infrastructure and programming. This includes a much needed program to remove financial barriers to accessing park programming.

In addition to parks, PRNS offers an array of neighborhood services that keep the community safe, focus on senior health, engage youth, and provide for open space activation events. This system is designed to serve the residents of the City of San José, a population of 1.8 million. The City's Envision 2040 general plan includes a goal of 3.5 acres of neighborhood parkland per 1,000 people. Currently, neighborhood parkland provides 2.9 acres per 1,000 residents. And while three-quarters of residents have good access to a park within 10 minutes of their homes, that is not true across all areas of the City.

Certain areas of the city have fewer high-quality parks, primarily due to the City of San José assessing residential development fees, along with construction and conveyance taxes, for new housing developments. These dollars are separate from the City's general fund and are used to support the acquisition, development and rehabilitation of our parks, recreational facilities, trails, and open spaces. The neighborhoods particularly in east and west San José have not had as much housing development and hence, they have missed out on this key revenue source. Additionally, these areas have much less green space and a higher percentage of built out and paved over areas.

As identified in the PRNS Activate San Jose Strategic Plan (2020-2040), a key element of equity is ensuring that residents have a high-quality park to call their own, within their neighborhood. We recognize that moving forward a critical part of our role must be to champion the needs of under-resourced communities and to ensure that we create community accountability in terms of the sourcing and distribution of resources to develop and preserve parks and amenities. We have intentionally considered equity and access in all areas of the strategic plan in order to ensure that we are using this lens in all aspects of our work moving forward.

## **Strategic Priorities**

Parks, trails, open spaces and community facilities create vibrancy and build bridges between people and the outdoor environment. We are clear in our intent and purpose of advocating for a more robust park system, developing our partnerships and ensuring equity and access to high quality parks for all residents. We are called to this next stage of the work and passionate about the work ahead.

Looking ahead four priorities will drive our strategy:

1. Tell the story of how parks create a vibrant community.
2. Drive impact through the development of flexible and sustainable revenue.
3. Build the leadership and infrastructure needed to meet the organization's growth trajectory.
4. Advocate for parks, trails, recreational facilities and open spaces.

**Strategic Priority #1: Tell the story of how parks create a vibrant community.**

The story of parks in San José is a reflection of the people who reside in this community. Of the 1.8 million residents in the City of San José, of this population, 26% are European American; 36% are Latinx; 3% are African American; 35% are Asian and less than 1% identified as Native/Indigenous. 58% of residents speak a language other than English at home. We are a highly diverse community and telling our story must include the history and diversity of the communities that enjoy the parks for play, celebrations and cultural events. It is also a story of communities that are disconnected from the larger park system. For many residents in the City of San José there is low visibility in regards to the depth and breadth of the parks, trails and community centers, and what they have to offer, with many residents only aware of the park in their neighborhood. In order to curate a larger amount of sustained, unrestricted revenue, we need to tell the story of parks in the City of San José and how those parks and trails create a vibrant and healthy community through dynamic recreation opportunities and high-quality facilities. In this work we will be guided a primary area of focus:

1. Design a marketing and communication plan that tells the story of the park system in the City of San José

**1. Design a marketing and communications plan that tells the story of the parks system in the City of San José.**

An organized strategy around the story of parks and their value to our overall community remains an ongoing opportunity to celebrate our City. Moving forward we intend to connect the story of what creates a vibrant, engaged and equitable community through the vehicle of the park system. Many City of San José residents access only their local neighborhood parks or they are aware of the marquee parks in our community like César Chavez, Alum Rock, Happy Hollow Park and Zoo, Municipal Rose Garden and Guadalupe River Park and Gardens. Additionally, there are renowned community facilities such as the Vietnamese-American Cultural Center, Mayfair Community Center, and 11 regional centers such as Bascom, Seven Trees and Almaden. For many, developing and maintaining parks may seem like a lower priority in the face of so many other issues facing the San José community. Telling the story of how the park system provides overall health, well-being, equity and community building does not take away from these critical issues. We believe deeply that a flourishing park system in fact assists in solving these issues. Activated parks and community spaces promote community safety and connection, build bridges and provide spaces to assist those in need. Being strategic with our communications and marketing is tied to the overall revenue development plan for the foundation and supports our lean staffing model. We value our partners and donors and intend to keep them abreast of our overall strategies and financial needs. Our communications moving forward will ensure that we educate our community, engage our donors and solicit new investors. To that end, we will be guided by the following goals:

- Build the communication and marketing strategies that will educate the larger community, inform supporters and expand the reach of the foundation.
- Create a communication plan and calendar, in alignment with resource development goals and advocacy actions.

- Align the marketing strategies to the overall work of PRNS, the role of the SJPF and the shared realized impact.
- Rebrand the organization via its name, look and feel and overall messaging.

**Strategic Priority #2: Drive impact through the development of flexible and sustainable revenue.**

Stewardship of our park system requires revenue to develop and preserve this complex system of open space and community centers. PRNS has identified that 76% of its parks are in acceptable or better condition, with a goal of that being true for 100% of its over 200 parks. The purpose of the SJPF is to assist the department of Parks, Neighborhood and Recreation Services to meet this goal through the development of revenue. These dollars can then be allocated to under-resourced areas of the city as well as to needed scholarship programs that will remove access barriers for community members who wish to enjoy fee for service programming and activities. There are many competing needs on the City’s general fund, with continued, expected contraction in their general fund dollars. A culture of philanthropy is an environment in which everyone in the organization has a role to play in raising funds to support a shared mission. This comes through the development of a comprehensive, proactive plan for sustained and flexible revenue that supports the giving of both individuals and institutions. In this work we will be guided by two focus areas:

1. Champion and build a culture of philanthropy
2. Steward and manage resources

**1.Champion and build a culture of philanthropy**

With a small organization, leveraging the knowledge and talent of all the staff, board and volunteers in the service of resource development is a critical best practice we intend to manifest as a part of our culture. Being able to more accurately predict revenue flows ensures our long-term success and supports the yearly budget gaps impacting the PRNS budget. As we raise needed dollars, we also have the opportunity to live into our values of equity and access as we institute various fundraising vehicles. Revenue currently flows to parks for development and preservation activities. Not all areas of the City of San José receive equal dollars based on capital developments designed to resource park development. Additionally, the City’s general fund continues to experience redactions and parks must compete with other critical areas for funding. We believe that the story of parks is compelling and one that will resonate across our City’s neighborhoods, with the hope that individuals and institutions will be compelled to invest in the overall park system, not just the park in their neighborhood or the open space adjacent to their place of business. We are committed to implementing our fundraising plan grounded in our values of equity and access. To that end, we will be guided by the following goals:

- Build out a resource development plan that is tied to strategic priorities and infrastructure needs, ensuring there are reasonable targets for individual and institutional donors.
- Prioritize under-resourced parks and scholarship fund dollars by leveraging data from the City of San José PRNS Activate San Jose Strategic Plan, and creating a designated capital campaign fund.
- Recruit and develop board members who will support a culture of giving and advance our values.

**2. Steward and manage resources**

Inclusive and equity-based budgeting is a high priority for SJPF as we look to ensure that we close both the PRNS budget gaps and allocate dollars to high need parks in the City. Building sound financial strategy will ensure that we can meet our goals as an organization and allow us flexibility to respond to emergent community needs. To that end, we will be guided by the following goals:

- Ensure fiscal transparency by revamping and socializing the process for fiscal sponsorships with all current and future partners.
- Create yearly budgets with PRNS that are tethered to the identified gaps in the PRNS budget.
- Clarify the yearly planned financial commitment from PRNS to SJPF for its operations. (pending City of San José Council approval).

**Strategic Priority #3: Build the leadership and infrastructure needed to meet the organization’s growth trajectory.**

Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services does not just manage and maintain parks and trails, it also operates recreation programming to support health and wellness, neighborhood programs that partner with communities and is a central provider in times of disaster. The vision for establishing San José Park Foundation is to ensure the on-going support of these community offerings. Since its inception, SJPF has worked lean, with only one part-time staff member serving as the Executive Director and as well as part-time bookkeeping support. That has allowed us to be nimble and responsive and ensure that a majority of the dollars raised go back out to the community. We realize that with the bold vision and priorities we have identified alongside, the continued impact to PRNS funding and competing priorities for the City of San José General Fund dollars, a more robust infrastructure is needed to tell the story, raise funds, track success and advocate for the park system.

We have seen growth in our impact and influence since our inception in 2010 and recognize that in order to meet the organization’s needs at this next season of our development, and to function as the park system requires, the organization needs to build its leadership capacities and infrastructure. Looking ahead, the following focus areas and goals will guide our efforts:

1. Prioritize leadership development at the executive and board levels of the organization.
2. Build an infrastructure development plan that maps out the staffing and technology needs of the organization.

**1. Prioritize leadership development at the executive and board levels of the organization.**

We are aware that at this next iteration of the organization, success comes from the leadership that is cultivated at our executive, board and community levels. Our current Executive Director and Board have deep historical knowledge of the park system and the community. They have been able to leverage that successfully on behalf of the park system. Additionally, we have been fortunate to have access to dedicated community members and volunteers that have supported the organization for many years through their time and financial support. Leadership, formal and informal, is the lifeblood of an organization and SJPF is no exception. As we look forward to the next stage of our work, honoring the current leadership and accessing the next wave of leaders is crucial to our overall success. To that end, we will be guided by the following goals:

- Develop an Executive Director succession plan that will hone the priorities and characteristics of the next leader.
- Build a plan for robust Board member recruitment that mirrors the community we serve as well as the needs of the organization financially and programmatically.
- Create an Advocacy Leadership Council to engage park users and advocates more effectively as advisors to the board and Executive Director.

## 2. Build an infrastructure development plan that maps out the staffing and technology needs of the organization.

We have been able to accomplish much and be in service to the original vision for the formation of a parks foundation. The current staffing model does not provide for the needed fundraising, marketing, advocacy and policy development support that is needed to achieve our vision. In order to develop that infrastructure, we need to intentionally build out the staffing model that is required. Infrastructure needs to also include a technology update that will allow us to effectively track our work internally and communicate our successes externally. We intend to be smart and deliberate about the development of this administrative backbone so that it ties back to our other strategic priorities, vision and our values of equity and access. To that end, we will be guided by the following goals:

- Evaluate staffing needs and build a three-year organizational chart that maps out the staff development designed to support the organization's growth trajectory.
- Assess the technology needs of the organization to track revenue, manage fiscal sponsorship dollars, and curate a donor database.

### **Strategic Priority #4: Advocate for parks, trails, recreational facilities and open spaces.**

An organized voice, in service of the park system, is something we are positioned to offer, especially for under-resourced communities that may have less access to a high-quality park. PRNS has identified in its strategic plan a goal that all residents will have a 10-minute walk or less to a high-quality and well-maintained park. Additionally, they have committed to developing a scholarship fund that will ensure that low-income residents will be able to access PRNS programming. This programming includes summer camps, sport parks, Viva Parks activations at underutilized parks, community beautification projects, specified programming for mentally and/or physically disabled residents, and community childcare sites to name a few. SJPF will leverage our institutional power and voice in support of the park system, in partnership with other park and open space providers, to develop advocacy positions and policy directions. Looking ahead, the following focus areas and goals will guide our efforts:

1. Create an advocacy and policy agenda centered around the development of various funding mechanisms.
2. Advocate for parks, trails and community centers to be built, maintained and preserved in under-resourced communities.

### **1. Create an advocacy and policy agenda centered around the development of various funding mechanisms.**

We recognize that collaborative voices, lifted up in an organized way, centered in a common message, will carry more impact than our voice alone. In the past our charge has been more focused on raising awareness and resources. In this next season of our work we intend to be strategic in our advocacy and policy work through the curation of partner relationships, with the intent of ensuring more resources for the park system and the development of policies to institutionalize those dollars. To that end, we will be guided by the following goals:

- Build and maintain collaborative partnerships with other park and open space providers in order to build joint advocacy messages, create a policy development agenda and support joint funding requests.
- With organizational partners, coordinate an approach to the yearly PRNS budget in order to support PRNS funding requirements.



## 2. Advocate for parks, trails and community centers to be built, maintained and preserved in under-resourced communities.

As we build our collective voice in service of the park system, that voice must include the communities that are most impacted by the lack of high-quality parks. We cannot build an advocacy plan or develop relevant policy without understanding what those community members need and envision for themselves and their families. As outlined in Strategic Priority #3, we intend to create an Advocacy Leadership Council to inform the development of our funding priorities. Additionally, this group will cross over into this focus area as we work to capture the voices of our users in the development of our advocacy messages. The development of a collective voice, grounded in high need communities, is how we plan to use our institutional power to amplify the need for equity and access for all City of San José residents. To that end, we will be guided by the following goals:

- Leverage current PRNS data regarding identified under-resourced parks in San José and collaborate with identified communities to clearly define their needs.
- Create the funding and advocacy plan for identified parks that is linked to the SJPF resource development plan.

## **Conclusion**

Vibrant, high quality, accessible parks, trails and recreation facilities are within reach for all residents of the City of San José. We are building needed infrastructure and partnerships to ensure that all City residents can enjoy both their neighborhood parks and community centers as well as our larger marquee spaces. As we embark on implementing our new strategic plan, we envision a dynamic park system that is financially sustained through the foundation as well as the support of the community. We are proud of our work thus far and filled with anticipation for the future.