



Memorandum

TO: PARKS AND RECREATION
COMMISSION

FROM: JON CICIRELLI

SUBJECT: ActivateSJ Strategic Plan
Status Report

DATE: 10/21/2024

Approved

Date:

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the status report on the ActivateSJ 2020-2040 Strategic Plan.

BACKGROUND

This report will inform the Parks and Recreation Commission of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services' performance, accomplishments, and results in achieving the goals set forth in the *ActivateSJ* 20-year strategic plan, established in 2020.

Since 1942 the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS/Department) has grown and evolved with San José communities. The Greenprint, the Capital budget strategic plan, created in 2000 and updated in 2009, helped guide much of the development of the parks and recreation system that exists today.

ActivateSJ is a service-driven 20-year plan that focuses on people. The five guiding principles of **Stewardship, Nature, Equity and Access, Identity** and **Public Life** speak directly to what San Joséans have indicated they value and expect. The strategic priorities set within the guiding principles are facilitating identification of opportunities and directing important decisions. Each guiding principle acts as a building block, beginning with the foundation of Stewardship and culminating in Public Life.

ANALYSIS

2020-2040 ActivateSJ Plan

The 2020-2040 ActivateSJ Strategic Plan envisions a San José full of *“healthy communities that inspire belonging”*. The mission is to connect people through parks, recreation, and neighborhood services for an active San José. The following principles guide staff in their work:

- **Stewardship** – we take care of what we have and invest for the future;
- **Nature** – we protect, preserve, and promote natural areas for all people;
- **Equity & Access** – we embrace people of all ages, cultures, and abilities;
- **Identity** – we aim to be a premier parks, recreation, and neighborhood services system; and
- **Public Life** – we promote community spaces for a safe, fun, and healthy San José.

ActivateSJ envisions the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services as adaptable to meet future challenges while continuing to focus on the current communities of San José. As such, this evaluation of progress helps to define the future steps to continue accomplishing these set goals and aspirations.

The full report can be viewed here: ¹[ActivateSJ Strategic Plan](#).

In the early spring of 2020, and continuing through early 2022, the Department was consumed and ultimately transformed into a facilitation team that helped lead the city of San José through the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery. Nearly all PRNS staff became full-time stewards of public health and safety.

As the public life principle went from a focus on fun to preserving health, PRNS staff, parks, and facilities became the reliable sources of assistance and refuge. Department staff organized, facilitated, and carried out county-wide food and necessities distribution, provided socially distanced recreation and learning-pods, and provided necessities for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Staff also facilitated emergency care and shelter for individuals affected by floods, fires, and extreme weather conditions.

During 2021, the Department assisted the City and coached the public through carefully developed stages of returning to “normal” operations. Services were systematically and carefully restored or expanded through the end of 2021 and into 2022. Most of 2022 served as a year to adjust to the new normal, and to assess and implement resilience and recovery strategies. PRNS has made progress in various areas of the ActivateSJ Strategic Plan, despite many large and unexpected challenges.

¹ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/43503/637178743945470000>

Progress and Accomplishments in Stewardship

San José residents have made it clear that they value safe and clean parks, trails, and community centers. PRNS staff have strived for greater effectiveness in protecting San José resources. Major accomplishments over the last four years include:

- Establishment of revised Park Maintenance Standards in April 2021;
- Annual count and survey of San José trail users is conducted each year, and reports are posted online: ²[Annual Count and Survey](#) of San José Trail Users;
- Creation of Trail Maintenance Standards is in process, with a pilot trail condition assessment being conducted this fall, 2024.
- Update of the Park Condition Assessment process to align with revised Park Maintenance Standards and collect results with a GIS-enabled tool;
- Reorganization of service delivery for parks maintenance, including the centralization of mowing and repair work, changing the composition of some routes for greater efficiency, and creating greater focus on maintenance work for maintenance staff by placing operations and programming under separate management;
- Development and maintenance of strong community and non-profit partnerships to boost resiliency and sustainability including:
 - Neighborhood Center Partnership Programs (e.g., Boys & Girls Club, South Valley YMCA, Catholic Charities, Chopsticks Alley Art);
 - San José Parks Foundation;
 - Happy Hollow Foundation;
 - San Jose Conservation Corps;
 - Veggielution;
 - Guadalupe River Park Conservancy; and
 - Police Activities League.
- Addition of the integrated pest management team into the base budget has allowed for the renovation of fields and abating of pests;
- Completion of comprehensive geographic information system mapping and database of all parks and facilities to support maintenance and capital condition assessments, strategic and capital planning efforts, and official inventory reporting;
- Replacement of obsolete vehicles with electric vehicles when available; and field operation small engine purchases will be electric powered;
- Development of policies that support updates to residential development fees;
- Placed 475 youth from the Work2Future Program in summer job opportunities through the SJWorks Program from 2020 – 2023 with 95% of youth securing placements in City Departments;
- Co-created the Resilience Corps Climate Change Pathway program with San José Conservation Corps. This program included over 300 participants, and

² <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/parks-recreation-neighborhood-services/parks-trails/trail-network/trail-count>

dozens of those were hired in PRNS, entered the Park Management Program at West Valley College, or pursued other job-related opportunities; and

- Preparation work began with consultants and Bay Area Consortium of Community Colleges on the development of a Park Ranger Apprenticeship program to create a pipeline for career development in the profession.

In the coming years, the PRNS team will continue to focus efforts on maintenance and improvement of existing parks, recreational facilities, and trails in the system, and employ continuous innovation to improve all aspects of our work. Staff will also welcome and engage all members of the community to partner with us in caring for San José spaces, resources, and programs, while working towards better resiliency and sustainability. To do so, a few examples of renewed and future focus include:

- Seeking sustainable funding mechanisms for the parks and recreation system;
- Maximizing the lifespan of all park infrastructure and buildings;
- Developing effective management and maintenance of a 100-mile paved off-street trail network;
- Promoting a culture of innovation and continuous quality improvement in all operations;
- Advancement of data-driven project selection and prioritization of capital projects with a focus on infrastructure backlog; and
- Engaging the community in stewardship and volunteer efforts and expanding the range of those opportunities.

Progress and Accomplishments in Nature

Access to nature promotes early childhood development, reduces stress, and promotes socialization. Parks, trails, community gardens and centers, and open spaces provide many options to access nature, enhancing the quality of life for San José residents and visitors alike. The protection and preservation of natural areas provides tree canopy, helps sustain waterways, and offsets the effects of climate change. Major accomplishments over the last four years include:

- Refocused outdoor summer camps to provide intentional nature-based programming;
- Meeting regulatory requirements for stormwater management and green infrastructure park designs;
- Partnering with City of San José Environmental Services Department (ESD) for green infrastructure maintenance training for staff;
- Continued and strengthened partnership with Public Works and ESD to address regional stormwater management needs;

- Incorporation of landscape standards into the Park Design Guidelines and Community Center Design Guidelines for native (and appropriate non-native) plantings;
- Increased the acreage of California-friendly planting and habitat in San José neighborhood parks and civic grounds;
- Installation of pollinator gardens in six of ten council districts, with others to follow;
- Creation of a pollinator working group to advise where and how to promote pollinator gardens in San José;
- Inventoried trees within San José parks to evaluate their health and biodiversity, with the inventory expected to be completed by the end of 2024; and
- Developed and implemented a dedicated Urban Forestry Program including the first-ever dedicated forestry positions in PRNS.

Looking forward, the PRNS team will focus on increasing participation in nature-based programs through partnerships with non-profit partners. Teams will work to combine efforts with partners to create and implement interpretive educational programs and services. Staff will continue to expand and integrate elements in support of reducing the effects of climate change and bolstering the beauty and resiliency of our outdoor spaces.

Progress and Accomplishments in Equity and Access

San José is home to a diverse and vibrant population that is facing challenges with affordability and growing income disparity. The City is challenged to undo historic and systematic inequality. Diversity is a strength, and the department delivers services that provide access to better, safer, and healthier opportunities. PRNS staff are representative of the community and committed to providing services to all. Notable accomplishments over the past four years include:

- Development of a racial equity action plan for each division in the department;
- Happy Hollow Park & Zoo Access for All Program served ~13,000 guests last year providing \$180,000 in discounts, and on pace to double in service this year.
- Development and administration of a quarterly Community Activity Guide, along with increased community awareness of public recreation opportunities through social media posts, videos, flyers, and announcements;
- Making progress in the use of health disparities among specific population groups (e.g. high longevity areas or [Blue Zones](https://www.bluezones.com/about/history/)³) at the citywide, zip code and neighborhood levels through analysis and mapping, in order to guide future investments of time and programming;
- Implementation of and leadership for the citywide age-friendly initiative, including continued evaluation of strategies and making recommendations as approved by

³ <https://www.bluezones.com/about/history/>

City Council. Current programs and new programs and services are developed and maintained in support of an age-friendly city;

- Leading the citywide coordination of the BeautifySJ initiative, including development of a blight removal service delivery model for public spaces, and ongoing leadership of blight reduction in all areas;
- Launch of a new Encampment Response Coordination System database with Information Technology Department for improved customer service and timely data reporting;
- Encouraging healthy lifestyles for all by supporting increase in childcare opportunities, childcare spaces, scholarships and priority registration; and
- Prioritization of park maintenance projects using the results of park condition assessment scores and ⁴[Healthy Places Index percentiles to focus on parks that need the most work in the communities that most need parks; and](#)
- Securing the City's participation in the National Recreation and Park Association's ⁵[10-Minute Walk Program](#), aligning city programs with the ⁶[Envision 2040 General Plan](#) and ⁷[United Nation's Urban Environmental Accords](#);

Going forward, the PRNS team is committed to providing exceptional experiences for all, contributing to improving the health of the community, and providing opportunities for meaningful community engagement. A 10-minute walk to a quality park for residents is also an important future goal. As this work on removing barriers to participation and access continues, the focus will be on promoting parks and affordable recreational experiences for marginalized groups.

Progress and Accomplishments in Identity

San José residents want to preserve and protect the unique character of individual neighborhoods, and welcome visitors to a place with recognizable sights and cultural events. As an essential player in helping to forge a stronger identity for the City, PRNS offers important opportunities to reach that goal. Key accomplishments over the last few years have included:

- Development and implementation of Park Design and Community Center Design Guidelines;
- Incorporation of identity features/branding into designs wherever possible;
- Successful coordination with County partners to include San José parks in the Parks Rx⁸ Initiative and the Healthy Parks, Healthy People Program⁹; and

⁴ [Healthy Places Index \(HPI\)](https://www.healthypacesindex.org/) | <https://www.healthypacesindex.org/>

⁵ <https://10minutewalk.org/about-us/>

⁶ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/22359/637928744399330000>

⁷ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter/goal-11>

⁸ <https://www.parkrx.org>

⁹ [healthy parks healthy people - Health & Safety \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/healthy-parks-healthy-people)

- Installation of bike racks at each of our facilities as capital improvements are completed.

PRNS is a leader in the citywide Age-Friendly Initiative. Two of the biggest social transformations of the 21st century are urbanization and an aging population. We will continue the work of advancing San José's reputation as one of the nation's healthiest cities and strive to maintain the World Health Organization's designation of San José as an age-friendly city. Major focus going forward includes program evaluations for age-friendly designation factors and supporting our non-profit partners in their endeavors with age-friendly programs. Plans also include identification of six to ten parks and recreation facilities to be studied and prioritized for creation of memorable and iconic destinations, reflecting the culture and history of the neighborhoods in which they are located. Weaving together Blue Zones, Age-Friendly and the Children and Youth Master Plans initiatives are key to achieving our goals.

Progress and Accomplishments in Public Life

The Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services teams have a steadfast focus on strengthening community life and encouraging neighborhood vitality by connecting people through safe, fun events and daily activities. Notable accomplishments over the past four years have been:

- Evaluation and modification of policies and procedures to enhance and diversify our service delivery models for placemaking (e.g., Al Fresco program during the COVID-19 pandemic); continued review with the goal of making commercial opportunities easier to achieve;
- Promotion of arts and culture in parks and community centers through classes, programs (e.g. Chopsticks Alley), and activities for all ages;
- Collaboration with Guadalupe River Park Conservancy to bring artist engagement to the river trail;
- Advocating for public art, including placement at department facilities (e.g., Mayfair Community Center, Plata Arroyo Park, etc.);
- Securing the budget for the Placemaking Team ensuring the department can continue programs like Viva CalleSJ and Viva Parks – programs that encourage physical activity and community building;
- Expanding neighborhood empowerment programs like Project Hope and BeautifySJ supporting a clean, safe, and vibrant public life for all;
- Marked progress on development of a Neighborhood Association Engagement Model, securing staff to support efforts, and educating new and renewed commitment from Neighborhood Associations and volunteers;
- Constantly working to ensure the hiring of staff that represents the diversity of the communities being served, and provides information about and access to programs in several languages;

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION

October 21, 2024

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- Participation in the City Manager's Office Customer Service Pilot focused on ensuring that people feel welcomed into our parks and facilities;
- Development of guidelines to improve park design and maintenance, and emphasize everyday activities that encourage active public spaces.

Looking to the future, staff is excited for the prospect of updating and upgrading venues like Plaza de César Chávez and St. James Park to support the public spaces and programs that enhance everyday life and connect and strengthen our diverse neighborhoods. PRNS strives to continuously identify opportunities for installation of smaller play features throughout our civic spaces to encourage play for all residents. The department will focus in the next few years on our Community Center hub sites, their working models and programming their spaces to ensure gaps in service are addressed. The department also looks forward to refining the new Neighborhood Association Engagement model and being more intentional with the connections made between the places and people.

COORDINATION

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Manager's Budget Office and the City Attorney's Office.

/s/

Jon Cicirelli

Director of Parks,

Recreation and Neighborhood Services

The principal author of this memorandum is Kari Davisson, Assistant to the Director, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department. For questions, please contact Andrea Flores Shelton, Assistant Director of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services at andrea.floresshelton@sanjoseca.gov, (408) 535-3572.



Strategic Plan Status Report 2024

November 6, 2024

Parks and Recreation Commission

PRESENTERS

Jon Cicirelli, Director

Andrea Flores Shelton, Assistant Director

Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department

ActivateSJ Background and Principles

- **20-year strategic plan** for 2020 - 2040
- Derived from the Greenprint
- Initial updates delayed due to major events and changes
 - Pandemic
 - New Division
- Five guiding **principles**
 - **Stewardship**
 - **Nature**
 - **Equity**
 - **Access**
 - **Identity**
 - **Public Life**



ActivateSJ Principle: Stewardship

- Park Maintenance Standards
- Park Service Delivery Models
- Partnerships to boost resiliency
- Integrated Pest Management
- Summer jobs for youth | Work2Future
- Resilience Corps Pipeline



ActivateSJ Principle: Nature

- Stormwater management & green infrastructure park designs
- Native plant landscape standards in Park & Community Center Design Guidelines
- Dedicated urban forestry
- California-friendly planting and habitat
- Pollinator promotion



PRC AGENDA - 11/06/2024
ITEM: VII.A



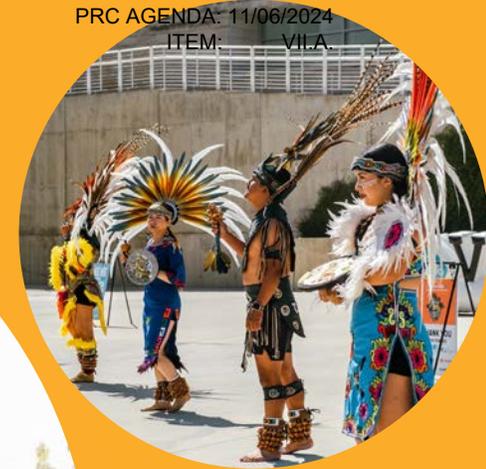
ActivateSJ Principle: Equity & Access

- Community Activity Guide | Social Media
- Use of Healthy Places Index to identify disparities
- Age-friendly initiatives
- BeautifySJ | Blight Reduction
- 10-Minute Walk
- Scholarships and priority registration
- REAP



ActivateSJ Principle: Identity

- Park and Community Center design guidelines
- Identity features and branding work
- Parks Rx & Healthy People Program
- Childcare



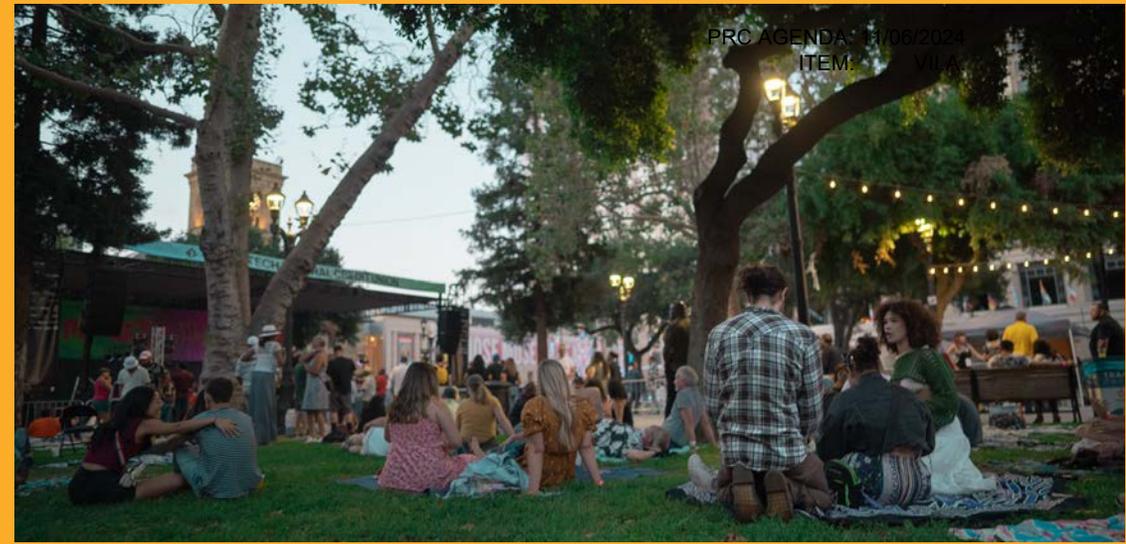
ActivateSJ Principle: Public Life

- Placemaking / Viva CalleSJ
- Project Hope | BeautifySJ
- Arts and culture:
engagement, classes,
collaborations, placement
- Neighborhood
Engagement model
- Hiring for diversity
- CMO customer service pilot



ActivateSJ: What's Next? (2025 – 2030)

- Sustainable Funding
- Greenprint Update
- Data-driven project selection
- Expand volunteer programs
- Nature-based programming
- Children and Youth Master Plan
- Mitigate climate change / bolster resiliency
- Maintain WHO Age-Friendly City status
- Updating key venues and public spaces
- Enhanced neighborhood engagement



PRC AGENDA - 11/16/2025
ITEM: 11.1

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