

BALBOA ROUND 2



Jacobs/Sanders Plan Would Render Balboa Park Unrecognizable

By Bruce Coons Executive Director, Save Our Heritage Organisation, SOHO

The proposed remodel and redesign of Balboa Park is a 1960s solution for what should instead be a vision for the future. Probably the biggest myth that the Plaza de Panama team (Jacobs/Sanders plan) are hoping people will believe is that their plan removes cars and traffic from the park. That is 100 percent untrue. In reality it just moves cars from one area to another with the goal being to bring in more traffic, making the park a literal thoroughfare and less accessible to people, especially lower income families and the disabled. This is why the name of their project is the Plaza de Panama Circulation and Parking Project. I repeat, their plan does not remove cars from Balboa Park.

The Jacobs/Sanders plan is simple, it is to bring paid parking into the park, and to do this they will construct a massive two-lane highway and bridge attached to the historic 100-year-old Cabrillo Bridge, cut into, through, and around the park's iconic entrance; add a paid parking structure, concrete retaining walls and railings, and massive landfills in Palm and Cabrillo canyons. The new roadway will cut in half the central mesa, creating a massive ditch and will destroy the tranquility of Alcazar Garden forever. If this project were to be successful the Balboa Park we all know and love would be unrecognizable.

The plan is the epitome of reverse urban planning; it is inflexible, permanent, and has

no innovative transportation solutions, restoration of historic features or spaces, or plan for maintenance or future park needs. Instead, a brutal and destructive approach was taken for what began as a simple goal to remove 54 parking spaces from the Plaza de Panama.

Who would have thought when the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the 1915 Exposition was announced, that this National Historic Landmark with its spectacular Spanish Colonial architecture and graceful landscape would be transformed into what can only be described as an unmemorable suburban office park appearance with a freeway-like road running through it. No thought has been given to what would allow the park to move graciously, naturally, and elegantly toward the future. Instead it is being rushed to completion for 2015, in part because of that hard timeline it is an immature design with no feeling for the qualities that make Balboa Park special and beautiful.

The public has been told that because this plan is designed and partially funded by a major San Diego philanthropist, that we, the people who live, work, and raise our families here and who use Balboa Park on a regular basis, should not have a say in how the park's revitalization, transit issues, and future restoration is handled. One individual should not be allowed to redesign, destructively alter and scar permanently the "People's Park" just because they have the means with which to do so, and powerful political allies in the mayor's office.

When you destroy your history you destroy the ability to tell the story of a place. A site such as Balboa Park, a National Historic Landmark, should be held in the highest regard, as it is a monument of a productive past and should be used as a stage for an exciting future, instead of being obliterated along with one hundred years of progress.

Part of the Plaza de Panama teams marketing ploy is to say they are restoring the park. In fact there is no restoration whatsoever in this plan except for possibly some lampposts. And further fact is that this project will prevent future restoration of the park, changing forever the current landforms and paving over so much of the park as to make many of the long anticipated future reconstructions of historic buildings, gardens, and garden structures impossible.

SOHO is most often known for finding solutions that make all parties happy, with even the most difficult of projects this has been accomplished. Practical, cost efficient and elegant solutions to the final goal of the removal of cars from the Plaza de Panama can be found on our Website at sohosandiego.org.

The needs and desires of the many must outweigh the shortsightedness of the one. I ask that the people of San Diego and its environs join with SOHO and over 20 other organizations and help us save Balboa Park for generations to come, for your children and their children.