

University Heights Park, Recreation,
& Open Space Advisory Group
P. O. Box 3115, San Diego, CA 92163

November 7, 2019

Mr. Andrew Fields
Deputy Director
Parks & Recreation Dept.
City of San Diego

*Re: Reallocation of Council District 3 Funds in FY 2020 Park & Recreation Budget to
Other Unfunded Park Needs in the Community of University Heights.*

Dear Director Fields:

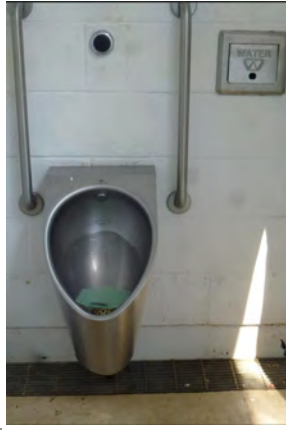
I'd like to introduce myself, Marc Johnson, a University Heights resident since 2012 and the newly elected Chair of the University Heights Recreation Council & Open Space Advisory Group (UHRCOSAG). I, and our entire group of active volunteer residents, look forward to continuing a proactive, productive relationship between UHRCOSAG – the designated voice of University Heights – and the Parks & Recreation Department.

This letter is in response to recent actions regarding the addition of a “Comfort Station” to the Trolley Barn Park. The UHRCOSAG requests the reallocation of CD3 funds set aside in its January 18, 2019 Budget priorities for FY2020 for the construction of a comfort station in the Old Trolley Barn Park in University Heights at an approximate cost of \$500,000 - \$1,000,000.

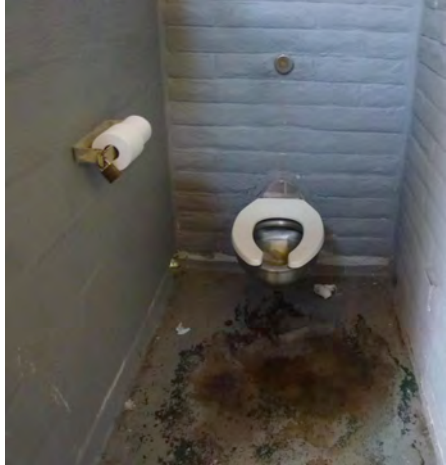
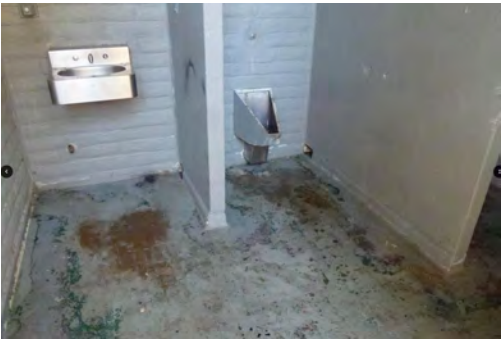
At our last UHRCOSAG meeting on September 5, 2019, a number of residents who live around the Old Trolley Barn Park attended and voiced their objection to a proposed allocation of funds for a comfort station in that park. This is a neighborhood park that services the residents within one-quarter of a mile. Residents surrounding the park, who would be the most impacted, were not notified of the budget allocation by CD3 until a resident brought it to their attention. As a result, petitions were obtained and submitted to UHRCOSAG and CD3.

The residents attending the meeting made clear that any addition of a permanent public restroom in the park would be unacceptable. It was noted during the discussion that prior to our CD3 Councilmember's submitting a funding request in the FY2020 Budget for a comfort station, the UHRCOSAG, as an officially designated Advisory Group, should have been given the first notice and consulted for input. This was an egregious oversight as the comfort station/restroom had been removed from the Unfunded Needs List several times and currently remains off the list. From the creation of the park, the community and police were in agreement that there be no permanent bathrooms in the park if and when it was established.

At a subsequent meeting with Councilmember Ward on September 14, 2019 at the University Heights Library, a number of residents from around the park reiterated their concerns and provided photos of 4 poorly maintained neighborhood park restrooms:



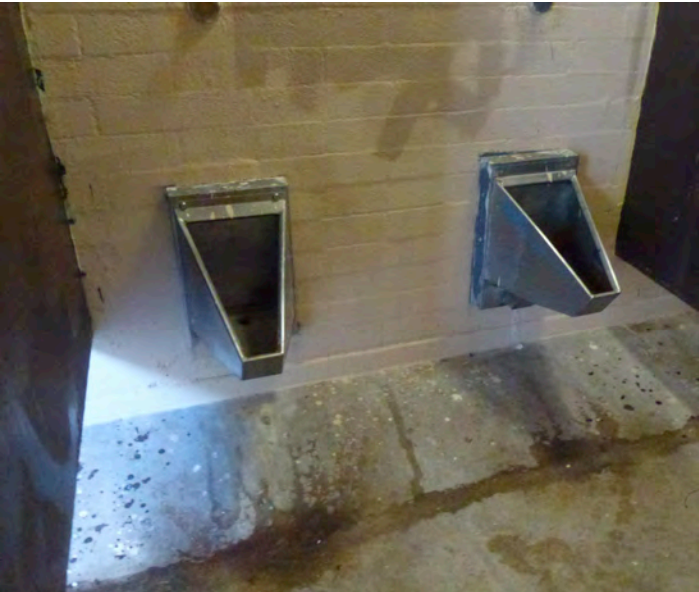
North Park Park



Mission Hills Pioneer Park



Ward Canyon Park



Presidio Park

Comfort stations horrors were further confirmed in a U-T article Gotta Go and another one on the Balboa Park restrooms:

The San Diego Union-Tribune

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Balboa Park bathrooms are gross. Is help on the way?



The public restrooms next to the San Diego Air and Space Museum in the Palisades area of Balboa Park were photographed on Wednesday in San Diego, California. A new report finds that all of Balboa Park's public bathrooms are in severe disrepair. (John Gibbins/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

By JENNIFER VAN GROVE - MAY 8, 2019. 2:40 PM

None of the 23 city-owned and -operated restrooms in Balboa Park are in acceptable condition, according to a newly released study that's being used as a tool by park groups to persuade the mayor and City Council to spend on immediate renovations.

The study, which was authored by volunteer and park advocate René Smith, graded each of the public toilets in the park using available city data. Smith's findings, presented to the city's Balboa Park Committee last week, paint a disturbing portrait of facilities that are more befitting of a third-world country than a major U.S. metropolis.

"They assault the user from many vantage points: health, safety, ADA compliance, cost of operations but most importantly from a human dignity and social justice perspective," Smith, a retired systems analyst, wrote in his 24-page report, titled "Balboa Park Comfort Stations: An Analysis with Implications for San Diego City Policy Changes."

The author analyzed data from a previously conducted facilities condition assessment of 118 Balboa Park buildings and amenities, which looked at everything from a structure's plumbing and electricity to its interior finishes. He applied the city's quality of standard for public-facing buildings and found that, for the average park bathroom, it would cost more than half of its replacement value to return it to a serviceable level.

The report determined that none of the public toilets — not to be confused by bathrooms that are operated by the museums and are often in better condition because of restricted access — meet the city's minimum standard.

The facility in the worst shape is the bathroom at 6th Avenue and Thorn Street, with the cost of maintenance estimated at around 77 percent of its replacement cost. Similarly, required maintenance for the Morley Field and Archery Range public restrooms was estimated at 68 percent and 67 percent of facility replacement costs, respectively.

"Because we used a data-driven process, we're able to reveal this issue as an important factor in the visitor experience," said Tomás Herrera-Mishler, who runs the Balboa Park Conservancy and knows Smith well. "The restrooms are past their use-by date. Even the best cleaning possible doesn't do the job anymore."

The only solution is to get rid of the existing facilities and install something else entirely, the nonprofit leader said, advocating for non-gender-specific restrooms with exterior, shared hand-washing stations. He added that he won't allow his three adult daughters (ages 18, 27 and 30) to use the park's public toilets in the interim because of their conditions. Some of the facilities don't have doors on toilet stalls, by design. Others have been taken over by homeless persons.

The city's parks and recreation department, which manages the restrooms, could not provide an estimate on what it spends each year on Balboa Park bathroom maintenance in time for publication. The city also does not track or measure usage.

"City maintenance crews work diligently to make sure comfort stations are clean and stocked each morning," said Tim Graham, a spokesman for the department. "Unfortunately, comfort stations are often a primary target for vandalism, graffiti and theft, which results in an unpleasant and uninviting experience for those patrons who wish to use the facility. City crews do their best, but are often having to play catch up as it relates to cleaning and restocking a vandalized comfort station."

Relief could be on the way.

Last week, the Balboa Park Committee voted unanimously to press Mayor Kevin Faulconer to put city funds that were allocated to a redevelopment plan into park bathroom and building roof repairs instead. The committee is an official body that advises the mayor on park matters, meaning the action added muscle to the efforts of other park groups, including the conservancy.

The groups have been eyeing the \$9.5 million that was set aside by the city to finance part of the Plaza de Panama project. That effort, which sought to remove cars from parts of the park and construct a paid parking garage, [collapsed](#) earlier this



The inside of the public bathroom in the Palisades area of the park, next to the Air and Space Museum, as seen on May 8. (John Gibbins/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

year because of anticipated [cost overruns](#). A late April report from the city's Independent Budget Analyst identified those funds as available for other capital projects.

Additionally, Councilman Chris Ward, whose district includes Balboa Park, publicly called on Faulconer to redirect those project funds to park improvements in a Monday press conference.



The vintage facilities in the Palisades area of the park have no doors, broken toilets, and homeless people staying in them. (John Gibbins/The San Diego Union-Tribune)



This closet inside the men's restroom has had the door broken open and is being used as a phone charging station by transients. (John Gibbins/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

“Park conditions are embarrassing and must be addressed,” said Ward, who did not support the Plaza de Panama effort. Faulconer, who is currently in the process of revising the [city's fiscal 2020 budget](#) ahead of a June vote, appears to be on the same page.

“The mayor believes these funds should remain in the park, and should be used for some of the improvements the community is calling for,” said Christina Di Leva Chadwick, a spokeswoman for Faulconer's office. “Funding from the Plaza de Panama project ... will be formally moved into the pot of money that pays for Balboa Park improvements (the Regional Parks Improvements Fund) in an upcoming budget action that will be released next week.”

City Council will have to vote to make it official, she said.

“It's a great down payment,” Herrera-Mishler said of the city's potential investment, estimating that he might be able to get nine new facilities for \$9.5 million.

Separately, the city has already committed to replacing two of Balboa Park's most offensive public restrooms — the aforementioned facility at 6th and Thorn, and another at 6th and Nutmeg — at a cost of \$2 million, said Graham, the parks and recreation spokesman.

The expenditure can't come soon enough.

“It's getting to the point now where our visitors, from our region and from all over the world, are noticing that our park looks shabby,” Herrera-Mishler said.

Councilmember Ward's aide for the area, Tyler Renner, in a 7/26/2019 email, stated: *“if there is strong opposition from the gate at these public meetings, the City will not move forward and funding will be reallocated.”* Therefore, based upon past history and current opposition to the establishment of a permanent public restroom in the Old Trolley Barn Neighborhood Park, the UHRCOSAG is requesting the reallocation of the funds to other long-sought (and previously identified) Unfunded Needs, i.e.:

- (1) Temporary Dog Park, as stipulated in CD3's budget -- Approximate Cost TBD;**
- (2) Planning & Design of a Permanent Performance Stage in Old Trolley Barn Park – Approximate Cost TBD;**
- (3) Electronic Marquee in the Birney Joint Use Playing Field – Approximate Cost TBD.**

Thank you for your consideration and acknowledgement of our above request.

Sincerely,

Marc Johnson, Chair UHRCOSAG

Cc: Mayor Kevin Faulkner; Councilmember Ward; Andrea Tevlin, Independent Budget Analyst; Tyler Renner, Director of Community Outreach CD3