

We need your help to save San Jose parks, programs

By James Reber

There are three things the people of San Jose need to know about their parks system in order to save it.

First of all, let me describe what I mean by our “parks system”. This includes nearly 3,000 acres of parkland, over 54 miles of trails, 55 community centers, and all of the programs and services contained therein. For most of us, though, it is a rather personal and comfortable relationship with one of the 200+ neighborhood parks.

The three things that you need to know:

- 1. The budget cuts over the last few years are severe**, especially for the department of Parks Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS), which has lost 37% of its workforce and 22% of its operating budget.
- 2. The effect of these cuts is not yet fully visible**, but they will become very visible soon. With less people and less money, the loss of some maintenance and programs that draw people, could leave many of our neighborhoods vulnerable.
- 3. You can do something to prevent the loss of these community treasures.** San Jose Parks Foundation is a private nonprofit whose mission is to support these public parks. Our funding comes from people like you, who care about the parks, trails, community centers and the programs and services they provide.

San Jose Parks Foundation has been around for a year, but has already had a significant impact on several programs, despite a small budget. The Almaden Lake Summer Swim Program was saved through the efforts of Councilmember Nancy Pyle working with the foundation to solicit contributions from local businesses and individuals. We helped Councilmember Sam Liccardo save the program at Biebrach Pool.

We have spent this first year meeting with dozens of citizen groups who are working to take care of their neighborhood parks. We are working with the Martin-Fontana Parks Association and PG&E to replace trees that must be cut, and with FOBLCC to open the new Bascom Community Center.

Also of concern are the new parks that are funded, but have been delayed because of maintenance issues. These include Buena Vista Park, where neighbors are willing to take on maintenance, Newhall Park, and the Mabury/Commodore Park, which has been on the planning schedule for decades. We are working to create neighborhood solutions for these parks that may be applied to still others that have yet to be built. Councilmember Kansen Chu is helping to lead this project.

Empty parks that fall into disrepair are everybody’s business. They often become magnets for illicit activity. The plain truth is that parks affect property values in both directions. Nice parks increase property values. Unkempt park brings them down.

San Jose Parks Foundation provides funding support for small neighborhood groups. We act as a fiscal receiver for volunteer-based groups. We provide fundraising and organizational training. We worked with the Friends of Family Camp and PRNS staff to help save Family Camp.

We can do more. It depends on you. We are a membership organization. We urge people to join at Trailblazer level, which is \$125 a year, but a basic membership is available for just \$40. We spend 100% of our time and money on San Jose’s City Parks. We work with community groups of all kinds, as well as with city staff.

We are all in this together. Please join San Jose Parks Foundation. You will be helping to prevent the budget cuts from ruining our beautiful parks and trails. Our website is www.sanjoseparks.org. Learn more about what you can do or make a donation and become a part of the solution.

James Reber is Executive Director of San Jose Parks Foundation. He wrote this for this newspaper.