



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

TODD GLORIA
MAYOR

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: January 7, 2026

TO: Council President Pro Tem Kent Lee
Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera

FROM: Mayor Todd Gloria *Todd Gloria*

SUBJECT: Response to Request to Suspend Paid Parking Fees at Balboa Park for San Diego Residents

I am in receipt of your memorandum regarding the rollout of paid parking at Balboa Park and your request to suspend parking fees for San Diego residents.

First, it is important to be clear about how we arrived here. The paid parking program at Balboa Park was not developed or imposed unilaterally by my administration. It was shaped, amended, and approved by the City Council through a series of noticed public hearings and subsequent votes in 2025. Those votes included accelerating the timeline for implementation to meet the City Council's increased revenue assumptions, directing the creation of resident and non-resident rates, requiring creation of parking passes, and then delaying implementation back to January 2026 as originally proposed by my administration to accommodate development of a resident portal. The projected parking revenues were reflected in the Council-adopted Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) budget and this program is now a key piece in mitigating the City's structural budget deficit.

City Council Actions Related to Paid Parking at Balboa Park

June 10, 2025

The City Council voted 7-2 to adopt the FY26 Budget with amendments to my Proposed Budget, assuming higher parking revenue from Balboa Park and the San Diego Zoo by accelerating the timeline for implementation from January 2026 to September/October 2025.

January 7, 2026

June 23, 2025

The City Council voted 6-3 to partially override the Mayor's veto of the FY26 Budget. I did not veto the Council's increased Balboa Park revenue assumptions, but publicly cautioned that those assumptions were uncertain and subject to change.

July 28, 2025

The Parks and Recreation Department presented an informational item to the City Council, outlining potential paid parking models, including simple resident and non-resident rates, Council provided direction on rate levels, enforcement hours, and free parking periods.

September 15, 2025

The City Council voted 6-2 to adopt an alternative paid parking program, including resident and non-resident rates by lot, full- and half-day rates, expanded free parking at Inspiration Point, creation of quarterly and annual passes, free parking for San Diego high school students, and a delayed start date of January 2026 to allow for resident portal development.

November 18, 2025

The City Council voted 6-3 to adopt resident and non-resident parking pass rates following additional public input and revisions to further reduce costs for residents.

Throughout this six-month long process, my administration, in conjunction with your Independent Budget Analyst, consistently cautioned against aggressive revenue assumptions and a compressed rollout schedule, citing concerns about rushed implementation. Nonetheless, the City Council voted in September 2025 and November 2025 to proceed with program implementation as early as January 2026, giving the administration just a few months to stand up a brand new program with a complex rate structure.

Now that the program has been successfully implemented, your proposal to suspend paid parking for residents two days into the new program would have immediate and serious fiscal consequences. This reversal could introduce confusion among park users and would disregard investments already made to establish the system, potentially compromising the program's effectiveness.

The FY26 budget assumes revenue from Balboa Park parking to support park operations, maintenance, and repairs in a park with hundreds of millions of dollars in deferred maintenance needs. As noted in the FY26 First Quarter Budget Monitoring Report, the actions taken at the September 15, 2025 City Council meeting, already reduced anticipated parking revenue to \$3.7 million, representing a loss of \$8.8 million compared to the budget adopted on June 23, 2025. Halting fees would worsen that

budget gap and force cuts or backfills that would ultimately harm Balboa Park itself while creating confusion for park users. That is not a responsible or sustainable outcome.

It is also important to ground this discussion in facts. While there will always be an adjustment period in the implementation of a brand new system of this scale, early data shows that the program is functioning and being used:

- A total of **1,176 applications** within the portal have been received and approved, **1,096** of those are residents.
- More than **600 resident permits** were submitted via the portal within the first three days it went live.
- In the first two days of implementation alone, the City collected over **\$23,000 in parking revenue** from Balboa Park lot meters. This revenue is restricted only to Balboa Park.
- Approximately **\$106,000 in daily, monthly, quarterly, and annual passes** have already been purchased online, **91%** of these purchased permits are resident permits. This revenue is restricted only to Balboa Park.
- **Nearly 40 percent of users** are accessing the payment system via mobile payments through the QR codes at kiosks, indicating that on-site information and digital access are being actively used.
- Most **residents are opting for longer-term passes**, not daily rates, which reflects successful uptake of the resident discount structure.
- Over 600 vehicles parked in the Inspiration Point lot (3 hours free) during the first two days demonstrating that the **"fee-free" option is accessible and being utilized**.

These are not the metrics of a system that is failing to function. They are the metrics of a system that is new, actively being adopted, and continuing to improve as public familiarity increases.

That said, my administration is utilizing feedback to make improvements. We are continuing to expand public education, complete remaining wayfinding signage, refine kiosk messaging, develop the technology to display the daily resident rate on the kiosk, and improve the resident portal. Enforcement remains focused on education, not punishment, during this early phase, to ensure park users are aware of the new parking fees adopted by Council.

January 7, 2026

If your offices receive any constituent inquiries about paid parking in Balboa Park, please direct them to my staff, who are prepared to provide subject-matter support, ensure consistent messaging, and assist your teams in effectively navigating related casework.

What we will not do is reverse course days into implementation in a way that undermines fiscal stability, creates uncertainty, and sends the message that addressing a decades-old structural budget deficit that has plagued our city is optional because it is politically uncomfortable. That kind of erratic decision-making is not good governance, and San Diegans deserve better.

Balboa Park is one of our most treasured public spaces. Caring for it requires follow-through, discipline, and steady leadership, not sudden reversals that jeopardize its future. My administration will continue to implement the program the Council approved, improve it where necessary, and ensure it delivers the resources Balboa Park needs to remain clean, safe, and accessible for generations to come.

cc: Honorable Council President and Members of the City Council
Honorable City Attorney Heather Ferbert
Paola Avila, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor
Charles Modica, Independent Budget Analyst
Rolando Charvel, Chief Financial Officer
Rania Amen, Chief Community Services Officer & City Engineer
Bethany Bezak, Chief Performance & Logistics Officer
Matt Yagyagan, Director of Policy, Office of the Mayor
Andy Field, Director, Parks and Recreation Department
Elizabeth Correia, City Treasurer