



**SPUR**

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

November 9th, 2015

Mayor Sam Liccardo  
City Council Members  
City of San Jose  
200 E. Santa Clara St.  
San Jose, CA 95113

**Re: Letter in Support of St James Park Revitalization Strategy**

Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers:

This letter is to express SPUR's support for item 5.2, actions recommended by staff in support of the St James Park Revitalization Strategy. SPUR is a member-supported nonprofit organization. We support good planning and good government through research, education, and advocacy. We recently published *A Roadmap for St. James Park: a strategy for bringing St. James Park to life through innovative governance and stewardship*. As laid out in two earlier policy reports, *The Future of Downtown San Jose* (2014) and *Getting to Great Places* (2013) SPUR views excellent public spaces as fundamental to the livability, walkability, sustainability, and economic prospects of great cities.

The approach recommended in SPUR's paper emerged from a close partnership with PRNS and the Office of Economic Development, a series of meetings with civic, business, and community stakeholders, and original research into best practices that have successfully transformed similarly challenged urban parks nationwide. SPUR appreciates the receptiveness of city staff and community stakeholders to our recommendations, and we support the policy changes before you as important steps in a broader strategy to restore St James Park to the great urban space San Jose deserves.

In your consideration of proposed changes, we encourage you to consider the following:

**Downtown parks present unique challenges.** Downtown parks require much more intensive management to be successful. The density of both use and abuse make downtown park operations a highly specialized and local undertaking. Nationwide, nonprofit conservancies and similar organizations, working in partnership with local public agencies, have proven to be highly effective in transforming and stewarding these kinds of spaces.

**Downtown parks also present unique opportunities.** They serve the city as a whole, both geographically and in their important civic and symbolic functions. Numerous studies have found that thriving urban parks serve as economic drivers, providing a visible nucleus for surrounding development and memorable experiences that distinguish a place in the minds of residents, visitors and investors. St James Park is not serving that role today, but its scale, character and location – and the accelerating pace private investment nearby -- make ideally suited to do so in future.

**The total development fees paid remain unchanged.** In contrast the successful recent Downtown High-Rise Development Incentive Program, the proposed changes do not reduce development fees. A portion of

PDO fees is simply retained for a different set of park-supporting activities, namely operations and maintenance, which are notoriously difficult to fund and deliver. Directing these fees locally reinforces investors' natural interest in thriving public spaces, and can set the stage for future support through assessments or other means.

**This action is part of a broader strategy.** This is not an accounting shell-game, but a deliberate shift in focus and resources toward stewardship. It is built on two years of successful programming, activation, maintenance, policing, and social service outreach by city agencies and their community partners. SPUR's recommendations, broadly reflected in staff's St James Park Revitalization Strategy, call for an incremental transition to a new governance structure – one rooted in an inclusive multi-sector coalition with the capacity to deliver a dramatic transformation of St James Park. The proposed management district is a means to direct both dollars and civic interest toward St James Park. The proposed retention of PDO fees is an investment in this strategy.

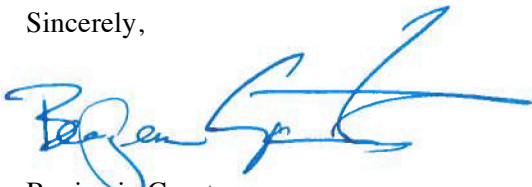
A successful conservancy or similar entity, seeded by the fees retained here, can secure new sources of revenue (from philanthropies, sponsorships and concessions, or voluntary assessments) with the goal over time of reducing the need for public resources, which can be applied to the broader parks system, especially in underserved or less prominent settings that cannot capture revenue from intensive investment nearby. This proposal is modeled on successful examples from around the country, in cities and spaces that have faced similar challenges.

**This process should proceed expeditiously, but methodically.** The next phase of this process will create a formalized advisory role for stakeholders, working in partnership with PRNS to deliver enhanced maintenance services and laying the foundation of a broad-based management partner with formal responsibilities. We recommend a phased process not only to allow for legislative and legal processes, but also to build trust, confidence and capacity among all those making the transition from stakeholders to stewards.

Although it might be possible to pursue such a model without the fee change, it would begin on a shoestring with less chance of success. These resources will give the process a major push and allow it to capture current momentum, including the commitment of the private sector to the Park's success. We urge you to support the proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in and please to not hesitate to be in touch with questions or further discussion.

Sincerely,



Benjamin Grant  
Urban Design Policy Director  
SPUR