




Community & Economic Development Department
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Planning Division

CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD MEETING DATE: JANUARY 21, 2026
AGENDA ITEM NO.:5

WORKSHOP ITEM

Case Numbers	Not Applicable	
Request	To provide input on the preparation of the Fairmount Park Master Plan	
Applicant	Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department	
Project Location	2601 Fairmount Boulevard, generally situated south of State Route 60, west of Market Street, north of Houghton Avenue and Locust Street, and east of the Santa Ana River.	
APN	207-060-005; 207-070-003; 207-070-004; 207-070-008; 207-070-005; 207-070-006; 207-070-007; 207-090-011; 207-110-002; 207-110-010	
Ward	1	
Neighborhood	Downtown	
Historic District	Not Applicable	
Historic Designation	City Landmark #69	
Staff Planner	Not Applicable	

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Cultural Heritage Board provide input on the Fairmount Park Master Plan.

BACKGROUND

Fairmount Park History

The history of Fairmount Park is quite extensive. Fairmount Park is approximately 280 acres in size, situated near the Santa Ana River, south of State Route 60, and west of Market Street. Fairmount

Park is the largest park in Riverside. First dedicated in 1898, it is also the second oldest park in the city.

The area that would eventually become Fairmount Park was the original site of a Cahuilla Village, one of three Native American rancherias just outside of the Mile Square that were abandoned by the late 1800s. In 1883, at the suggestion of Charles M. (C.M.) Loring, Samuel Cary (S.C.) Evans Sr. donated land to the city with what would ultimately become the original park acreage. On October 6, 1897, 35 acres of land was dedicated as Fairmount Park and on April 9, 1898, the park officially opened.

Over the course of time additional land was donated to expand the park. While working on the development of the 1915-16 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego (today Balboa Park), the Olmsted Brothers, sons of the nationally recognized landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, were commissioned by Mayor S.C. Evans Jr., the City Council, and the Parks Board to develop a plan for Fairmount Park. The plan was to include but not limited to modification to the existing lake, new roadways, trees, and a swimming pool. The Olmsted plan was submitted to the city on June 1911. The entirety of the Olmsted plan was not completed at that time but was reintroduced in 1923 with the expansion of Lake Evans.

Fairmount Park was designated as City Landmark #69 on December 18, 1985. The information summarized above is only a small excerpt of Fairmount Parks history. The Landmark Resolution specifies that the designation includes all publicly visible elements of the park, including, but not limited to, the configuration of the lakeshores, the Fairmount Park Bandshell (destroyed in fire in 1992), the Fairmount Park Golf Course, the grounds of the Riverside Lawn Bowling Club, the Fairmount Park Rose Garden, the Food Machinery Corporation "Water Buffalo", Union Pacific Engine No. 6051, and the three Mission Revival restroom buildings.

Fairmount Park Master Plan Status

The Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department (PRCSD) issued an RFP for preparation of the Fairmount Park Master Plan in September 2024. Multiple consultants submitted proposals and MIG Inc. was eventually selected as the prime consultant for this assignment. Work began in early 2025. MIG is a planning and design consultant with a specialty in park planning and design.

Work completed to date includes:

- Evaluated the existing conditions including a detailed site topographic survey
- Reviewed current deferred maintenance efforts
- Evaluated the original 1911 Olmsted Brothers Plan
- Evaluated past studies and evaluations of the park
- Conducted an analysis of the changes that have occurred over time
- Conducted three in-person meetings at the Issac Walton Building with the Fairmount Park Master Task Force (May 1, June 5, and September 25, 2025)
- Conducted two in-person Open Houses at the Armory June 26, 2025, and November 3, 2025, that drew over 100 community members
- Facilitated an Intertribal Summit with over 20 members from local Tribes to discuss the Master Plan at the Stewart Boathouse September 30, 2025
- Conducted several meetings with the University Wash design team including in-person on May 1, 2025
- Met with the Scouts of America in-person on May 1, 2025
- Facilitated an in-person meeting with Fairmount Golf Course golfers July 29, 2025

- Conducted numerous internal city meetings with representatives from Finance, Historic Preservation Office, Transportation, and Parks, Recreation, and Community Services
- Field visit to the Glen Oaks Golf Course in Glendora (Sept 22, 2025)
- Field visit to the Moreno Valley Civic Center Amphitheater (Sept 25, 2025)
- Consider current amenities including, but not limited to the lakes, rose garden, band shell, armory, golf course, boat house, Issak Walton building, tennis courts, lawn bowling center, playgrounds, and open spaces
- Evaluated vacant land and underutilized land within the park
- Reviewed potential uses and renovation of auxiliary buildings throughout the park
- Explored synergies with adjacent uses and properties including the church property on the southwest side of the park
- Articulated and recommended improved circulation of the park for motor vehicles (including parking), pedestrians, bicycles, and skateboards
- Based on input from the stakeholders and community, the team has prepared several initial opportunities for the enhancement of the park including order of magnitude cost estimates

Upcoming tasks

- Continue to make updates to the project website
https://riversideca.gov/park_rec/planning-projects/master-plan/fairmount-park-master-plan
- Conduct an additional meeting with the Task Force in January 2026
- Conduct another Intertribal Summit in January 2026
- Prepare a draft master plan (January 2026) and final master plan (1st quarter 2026) of the park based on stakeholder and community input
- Consider the process to get Fairmount Park placed on the National Register of Historic Places

The goal of the project is to chart a path to enhance the park to increase activity while preserving the historic integrity of the park. The final product will be a cultural landscape masterplan and report that will follow historic research standards. The Master plan will include a conceptual plan of the entire 280 acres that features the park historic core.

CEQA, NEPA, and agency permits will not be completed as part of this effort. Once the Fairmount Park Master Plan is completed, the city will be in a stronger position to seek funding including private and corporate donations and grant funding to make future improvements to the park. It is the goal of PRCSD to list this resource on the National Register at a later time.

Fairmount Park Master Plan Draft Recommendations

The preliminary recommendations within the draft Fairmount Park Master Plan are based on input from the community members through in-person and on-line engagement, the Master Plan Task Force, stakeholders, Tribal input, and the PRCSD. These key recommendations include the following:

1. Bandshell – The original bandshell was extensively damaged by a fire in October 1992 and reconstructed in 1993. Although the intent was to reconstruct the bandshell as close as possible, some of the original elements were not reconstructed and the only original material and features includes the rock rooms that flank the bandshell and the concrete podium. Additionally, the bandshell is no longer functional and does meet today's requirements for staging events. These deficiencies include but are not limited to electrical power, lighting, audio/visual, stage size, storage, security, accessibility, talent green rooms

and on-going maintenance. The recommendation is to rebuild the bandshell near the same location albeit with a slightly larger stage, yet in the same architectural design, and including improvements to power, lighting, audio/visual, storage, security, accessibility, and talent green rooms. The river rock that clad the existing wings to the left and right and the barrel tile on the roof of the bandshell could be reused in the rebuilt bandshell. In addition, the rebuilt bandshell should maintain the proportions and aesthetics of the existing bandshell. The existing dedication plaques could be cleaned and remounted on the future dedication of the recreated bandshell.

2. Train and Water Buffalo – The existing train engine and water buffalo are recommended to be protected and remain in their existing locations.
3. Golf Course – There are several options being considered for improvements to the golf course. These options include improvements to the existing driving range, relocating and expanding the driving range to the north side along the SR-60 off-ramp to Market Street, expanding the golf course to the east along Market Street, creating a new pitch and putt course on the north edge of Brown Lake, and a multi-purpose bike and pedestrian promenade on the west and north edges of the golf course that connects to the Santa Ana River Trail. The city will be issuing an RFP to solicit interest from the private sector for a partner, lessee, or concessionaire.
4. White Foot Bridges – There are two small pedestrian bridges that are located on the northeast corner of Fairmount Lake that will be removed during the reconstruction of the historic Lilly Ponds and renovations to the Springbrook Arroyo. Although early construction, the bridges are not original and replaced wood foot at the same location.
5. Cypress Trees – Fairmount Park includes many historic Cypress Trees that a prominent aesthetic feature of the park. The plan is to preserve them as much as possible and to plant additional Cypress Trees.
6. Lake Improvements – Like the Cypress Trees, the three lakes at Fairmount Park are an important historic and aesthetic resource that provide habitat for birds and fish and provides numerous recreational opportunities such as fishing and boating. The Master Plan includes recommendations that will improve water quality, improve the boat ramps, and improve the lake edges for better access.
7. Circulation and Parking Improvements – The Master Plan includes recommendations that will improve circulation and increase the amount of parking without adversely affecting the park. Circulation improvements include realigning Bowling Green Drive and Redwood Drive to better connect Market Street to the golf course and Bubbling Wells neighborhood, a roundabout at the eastern main entry into the park from Market Street, reduce the number of drivers using the park as a cut-through to get to and from the freeways by closing Locust Street and Fairmount Park Boulevard, and replacing two vehicular bridges with new bridges (the Bowling Green Drive bridge over Spring Brook tributary and the Redwood Drive bridge between Fairmount Lake and Lake Evans). Parking improvements include a new parking lot (with a possible parking deck) southeast of the bandshell parking lot. This area is currently occupied by the City Yard, unimproved dirt areas, and roads.
8. Evaluate Property – The Master Plan includes recommendations for the evaluation and disposition of underutilized parcels for higher and better uses that would provide added revenue for park improvements and ongoing maintenance.

9. Armory Improvements – Proposed improvements to the Armory include transforming it into a restaurant and brewery with outdoor seating and pickleball courts north of the Armory parking lot.
10. Scouts of America – The Master Plan team has had numerous meetings with the Scouts of America, and they are very interested in reestablishing their presence in the park. The city is currently in discussion with the Scouts regarding next steps.
11. National Register of Historic Places – The Master Plan recommends that Fairmount Park be registered on the National Register of Historic Places. Generally, to be registered, properties must be at least 50 years old and maintain their integrity in location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The criteria for registering for the park are as follows:
 - a. Event: Association with significant historical events.
 - b. Person: Association with important historical figures.
 - c. Design/Construction: Embodying distinctive design, construction, artistic value, or representing a significant entity.
 - d. Information Potential: Likely to yield important historical information.

EXHIBITS LIST

1. Fairmount Park Designation Staff Report, 12-18-1985
2. Bandshell Designation Minutes, 10-08-1969
3. Cypress Trees Designation Staff Report and Resolution, 07-08-1984
4. Bandshell Reconstruction Staff Report, 11-11-1993
5. Bandshell Reconstruction Minutes, 11-11-1993
6. Letter from Riverside Historic Society dated July 14, 2025, concerning the locomotive
7. Riverside Independent Enterprise Article dated March 14, 1954, concerning the locomotive
8. Letter from the Riverside Historical Society dated October 10, 2025, concerning the bandshell

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Approved by: Brian Norton, Principal Planner/Acting City Planner