

— SAN JOSE —
**PARKS, RECREATION &
NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES**



Greenprint Update

**Steering Committee #3 Briefing Memo:
Community Engagement Themes**

Community Engagement Themes

This progress review paper discusses community engagement themes that have emerged to date, providing overarching guidance for all topics (listed at right) that will be addressed in the “What We Need” document, planned for release in summer 2017.

The paper is organized into the following sections:

- Community Engagement Process
- Themes
- Challenges
- Potential Partnerships
- Appendix: Engagement Findings Charts

Community Engagement Process

As part of the effort to identify community needs in the early phases of the project, the Greenprint Team conducted a robust engagement process involving a variety of events and activities:

- Focus groups/stakeholder interviews with 12 different constituency groups
- 23 community “intercept” events held across the city
- A project website and social media presence (ongoing)
- An online interactive mapping survey (1,344 respondents and 8,395 map points identified to date)
- A Greenprint Steering Committee to provide diverse perspectives from representatives of commissions, businesses, community organizations, foundations, and agencies across San José

The approach encouraged broad citywide engagement, Council District-based engagement, and participation by diverse groups. Community members provided valuable insight as to how the system is working, where improvements may be needed, and how the City can build a better system.

The findings and themes on the following pages reflect feedback received from the community “intercept” events, as well as focus groups and stakeholder interviews. Charts summarizing responses to specific survey questions are included in an appendix at the end of this document. The online interactive mapping survey is still active and responses will be incorporated once the survey is closed.

“What We Need” Topics:

- Recreation facility needs
- Need for reinvestment
- Community engagement themes
- Access to nature
- Equitable park access
- Conservation and green infrastructure
- Active, healthy, and fun programs and services needs
- Interconnected parks system needs
- Support San José’s public life
- Grand parks needs

Themes

Parks and recreation are central to public life in San José. Ninety-eight percent of participants rated parks, recreation, and neighborhood facilities as being important on some level to the quality of life in San José. As one respondent described, “parks are the lifeblood of the community.”

Several common themes emerged through the community engagement process. These themes relate to qualities that people appreciate in the park system, the types of facilities and activities participants would like to see more of, and big ideas that resonate with community members. The themes below (bold font) are phrased as outcomes for which to strive through future planning and investment.

Lively parks and streets—From organized activities at local parks to community-wide events, participants widely noted activation of San José’s public spaces as strengths to further build upon. Some popular events and ideas for expanded activities include the following.

- San José’s citywide, family-friendly events such as Christmas in the Park, Viva Calle, Luna Park Chalk Festival, the Jazz Festival, summer camps, and wide-ranging events and activities including those offered through the summer in historic St. James Park.
- Activities spanning different times of day such as fitness programs, geocaching, scavenger hunts, guided hikes, nature-oriented experiences, dancing, cinema, teen-focused activities, senior activities, robots and virtual reality trailer, drone flying, a games van, Pokémon challenges, catapults and bungees, chess, reading, senior activity tables, impromptu classes, music/concerts, and weekly markets, among others.

Dynamic parks-commerce integration—Community members highlighted opportunities to integrate businesses or commerce into park-like settings. This synergy can enliven public places, generate revenue, and meet multiple needs of busy families. Following are several participants’ parks-commerce interface ideas.

- Cafés or beer gardens located within parks.
- Permanent buildings that open out onto park spaces, for example a library or café that opens onto a public park or plaza.
- Portable vendors such as food trucks and coffee carts.

Places that unite people—Many responses echoed a sense of pride in San José’s diversity. From people watching, casual conversation, or side-by-side play, public spaces can provide common ground for transcending differences, whether related to age, social class, physical ability, ethnicity, or other. Following are some suggestions for supporting diversity and accessibility.

- Support fun, safe playground experiences for those with physical challenges.
- Celebrate ethnic and cultural diversity with multicultural events and activities.

- Continue to provide a range of affordable or free activities, programs, and sports leagues.
- Develop more programs/activities for teens and seniors.
- Ensure that families can enjoy nearby picnic areas for spontaneous gatherings without a complicated reservation system.
- Provide convenient access to parks from all neighborhoods within a 10-minute walk.
- Improve access for bikes, e-bikes, and other modes of transportation.

Multi-faceted parks and facilities—Community members appreciate the variety of San José’s offerings, from unique parks, like Happy Hollow and the Zen Rock Garden, to traditional parks with picnic areas and sports fields. When asked about types of park settings they might like to see more of, the top three responses were almost evenly distributed across a rich variety of settings: traditional grassy parks with play and picnic areas; corridors with trails or streams; and natural places. The top five reasons participants cited for visiting parks facilities or accessing neighborhood services include playing, exercising, gathering/meeting friends or family, experiencing nature, and relaxing.

Following is a sampling of the types of parks and facilities participants would like to see more of in the future.

- Gardens—community gardens, zen gardens, art gardens
- Sports facilities including cricket fields, lawn bowling, handball and tennis courts, skate parks, expanded aquatics, soccer fields, and a City sportsplex center
- Zip lines and ropes courses
- Dog parks
- Stocked lakes for fishing
- A water park
- Signature projects
- Small “parklets” or mini plazas creatively designed out of “leftover” or oddly shaped parcels

Connections to nature—Experiencing nature was one of the top reasons participants cited for visiting San José’ parks. Community members would like to have more natural places that support wildlife habitat and low-impact recreation uses. Further, participants identified habitat restoration and native plant activities as the most likely means of encouraging their stewardship with San José’s parks and recreation system. Following are participants’ more specific recommendations related to connecting with nature.

- Integrate more natural elements (less paving) into parks: trees, plants, native species, ponds, creeks, open land.
- Include open spaces with interpretive elements to learn about nature.
- Provide improved access to corridors with trails and streams.
- Design parks to protect and link wildlife habitat.

- Feature water-wise and environmentally-friendly practices in park and green street design; create attractive, educational demonstration sites.

Vast network of trails—Trail connections stood out as a distinguishing part of San José’s park system. Stakeholders value the extensive hiking and biking trails and would like to grow these assets. Responses highlighted the importance of a connected bicycle system not only for recreation but also for commuting. Participants suggested a range of strategies related to trails including the sampling below.

- Expand connections to trails such as Los Gatos Creek Trail, Guadalupe River Trail, Coyote Creek Trail, and Penitencia Creek Trail.
- Improve connections/create new connections between commercial centers and neighborhoods.
- Maximize waterways as spines for active transportation connections.
- Make neighborhood paths more accessible.
- Develop more hiking trails.

Challenges

Participants most frequently raised issues related to **operations and maintenance** as barriers to sustaining the type of vibrant, high-quality park system envisioned in the previously described themes. Community feedback indicates that people see funding for adequate operations and maintenance as likely the greatest challenge the City faces. Respondents described that many facilities, infrastructure, trails, parks, and play equipment are showing signs of deferred maintenance, and that City-owned sports fields in particular are over-subscribed and under-maintained. These findings signal a need for a clear process and inventory of existing park and facility conditions to determine where/how to most strategically prioritize reinvestment.

With regard to new parks, residents noted that even when funding is available for park development (for example through a park bond or in-lieu fees) the City often does not have a **dedicated maintenance fee** to support necessary operations and maintenance over the long term. Further, developers have experienced barriers to developing small parks when the Park Impact and Parkland Dedication Ordinance does not allow for **the development of small or oddly-shaped parcels**.

In addition to park development and maintenance challenges, participants also identified a number of **social issues** that warrant attention including safety, vandalism, and homelessness.

Potential Partnerships

Interviewees and survey participants offered promising suggestions for potential partners in advancing aspirations for San José’s parks and recreation system:

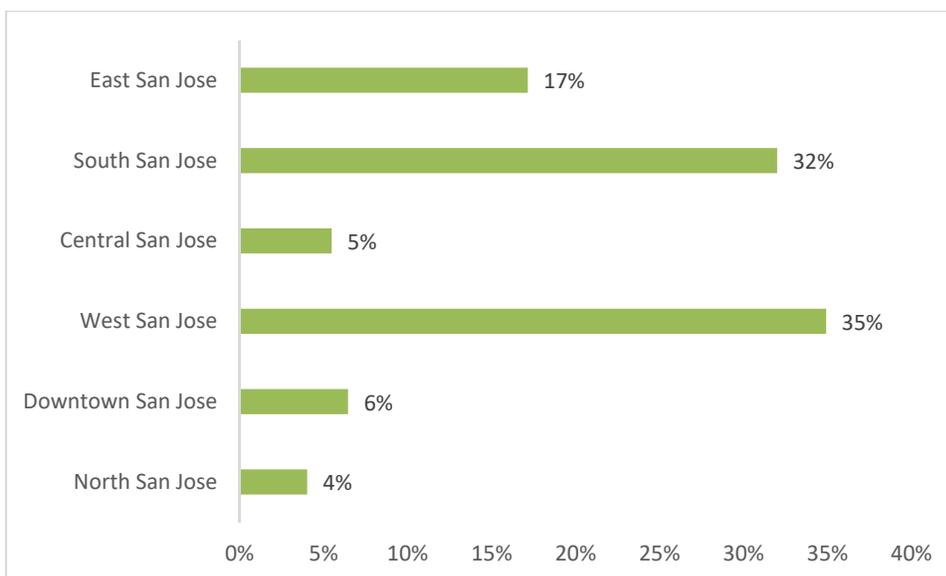
- High tech companies
- Silicon Valley Creates
- Tech Museum of Innovation
- Local businesses
- Bill Wilson Center
- Don Edward National Wildlife Preserve
- PGE
- Environmental services, regional water quality and storm water management companies
- Schools
- Faith community/churches

Engagement Findings Charts

The following charts are summaries of input from the intercept activities. Each participant was provided with a set of dots and asked to indicate which answers were relevant to them. All exercises, with the exception of “Home” and “Importance,” allowed participants to select up to two choices. The percentages are based on the total number of dots counted.

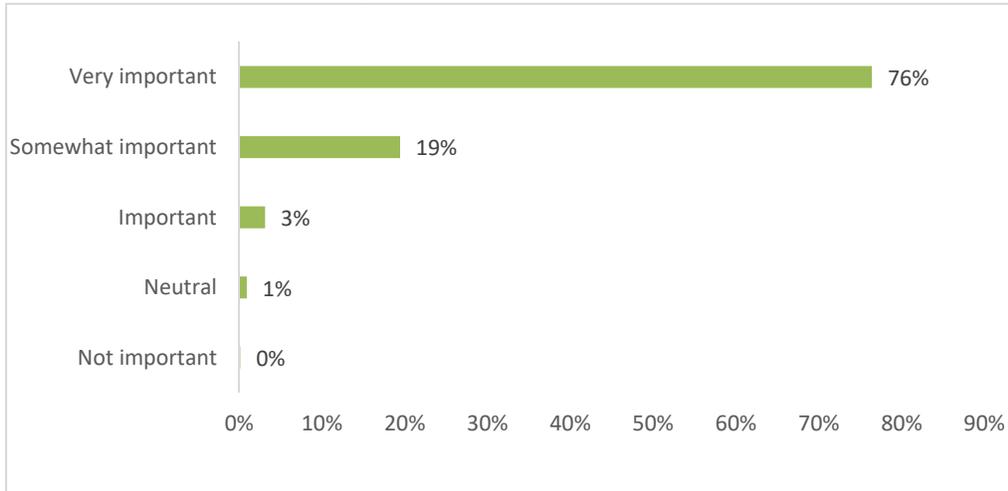
Home

About a third of people that indicated their home at the intercepts were from west San José, another third were from south San José.



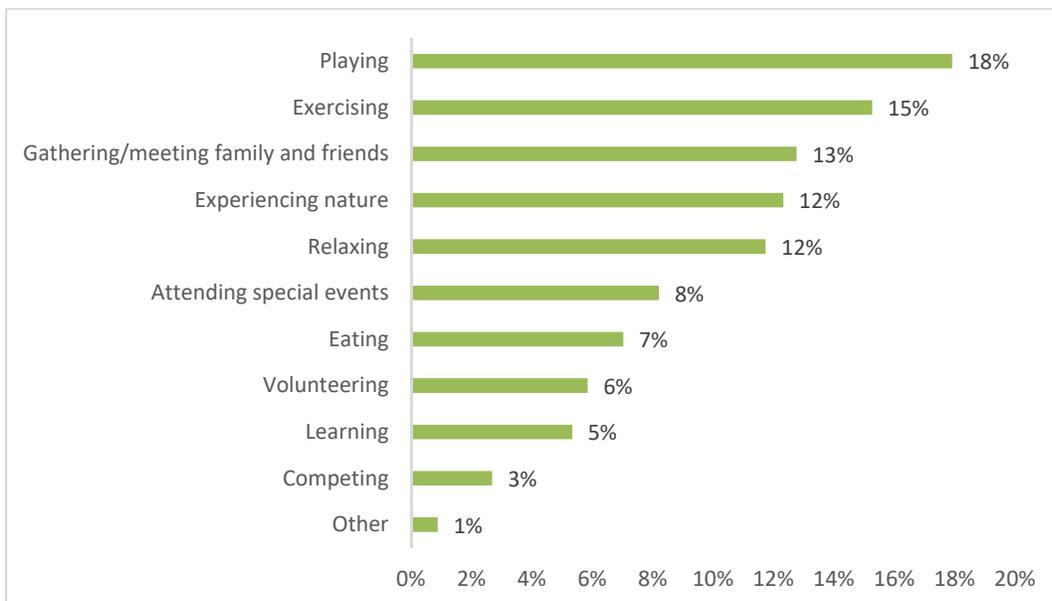
Importance

Parks, recreation facilities, and neighborhood services are important to community members' quality of life. Seventy-six percent of respondents thought that the system was very important to their quality of life. Collectively, ninety-eight percent of respondents rated the system as important to quality of life on some level, from somewhat important to very important.



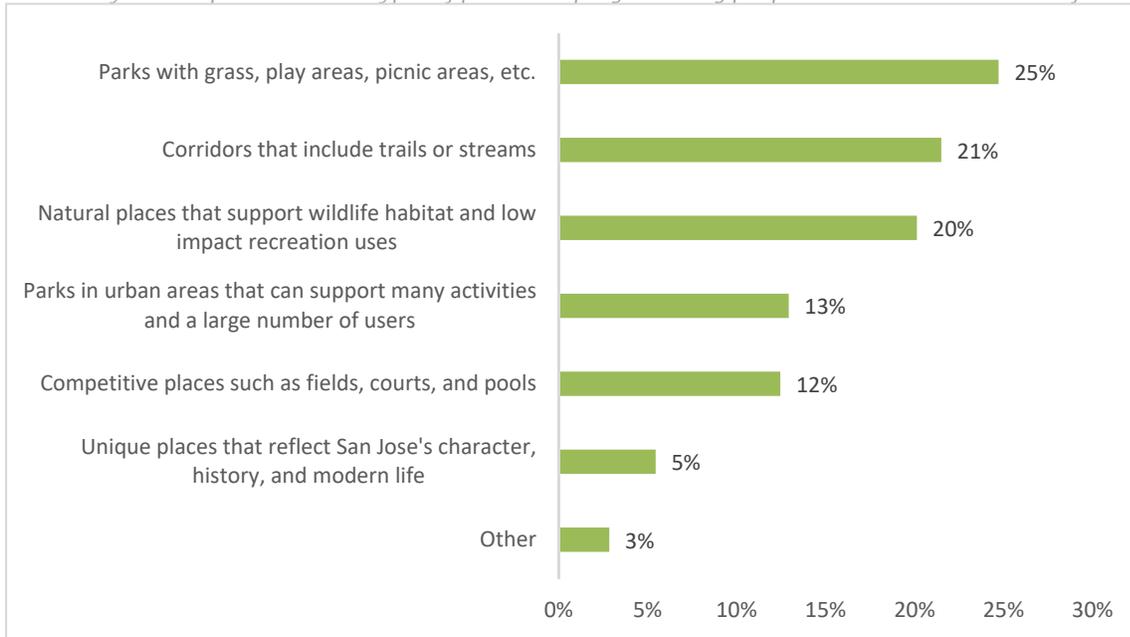
Visiting

The survey captured information on why people visit San José 's park facilities and access neighborhood services.



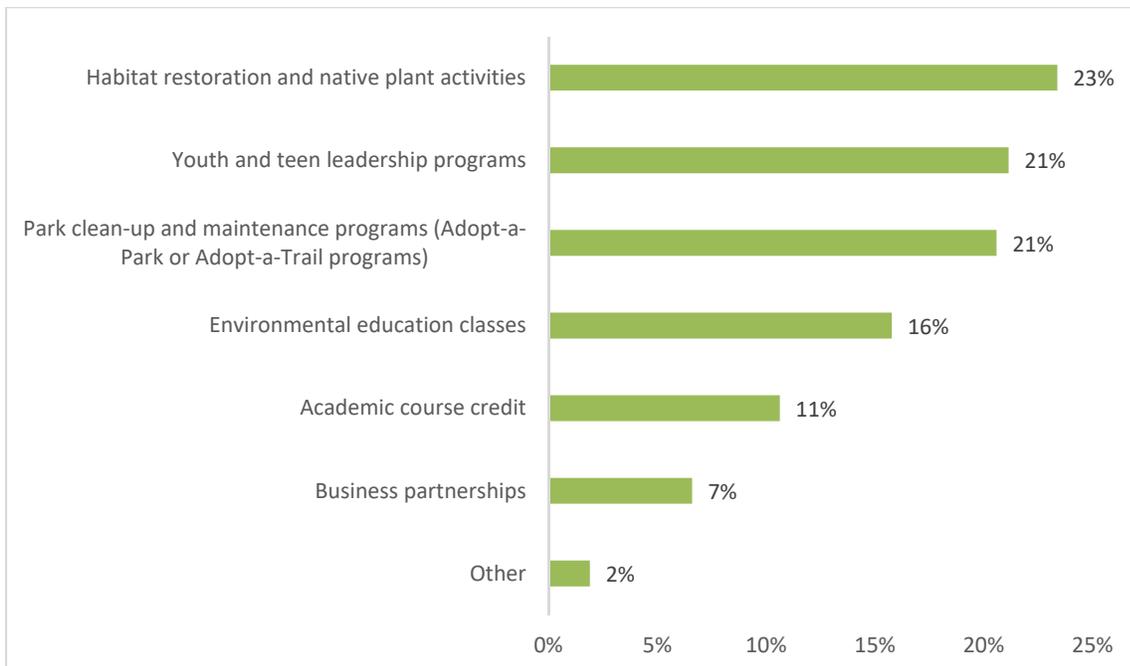
Park Settings

The survey asked opinions on the types of parks and programming people would like to see more of.



Stewardship/Volunteerism

What would encourage you to help out, get involved and become stewards with San José's parks and recreation system?



Community Engagement Themes

Programs, Classes, and Services

For programming, participants were asked to express what programs, classes, and services they were most interested in.

