

# San Diego, California

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“America’s Finest City”



Downtown San Diego viewed from across San Diego Bay from Coronado island.

source: [www.sandiego.gov/](http://www.sandiego.gov/)

**San Diego’s** distinctiveness is defined by its location and great climate. Millions flock to its beaches and bays, canyons and mountains, and unique neighborhoods for year round activities with only nine inches of rainfall a year. The development of the most recent city general plan, City of Villages, has revitalized many parks and open spaces associated with communities on a large scale.

Since the turn of the century, San Diego has had many great planners, architects, and landscape architects, but there is also a strong history of incomplete plans due to politics. The Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915-16 in Balboa Park was very pivotal in how open space and landscape were perceived by people moving into the fast growing region. In 1909, John Charles Olmsted worked with local horticulturalist Kate Sessions on developing a plant palette of native and adapted plants for the Expo that would reflect the climate. The layout was to have the buildings to the edges of the park in true Olmsted style and put emphasis on the canyon landscape. But architect Bertram Goodhue, who designed the Spanish style buildings, politically had the buildings moved to the center of the park. Olmsted left the job stating he couldn’t be part of the destruction of the park. Goodhue also used a plant palette opposite of Olmsted’s and included many broad lawns. People saw the lush landscapes and realized that with enough water anything can grow. The impact of this exposition still resonates today in how landscapes are perceived in San Diego. Politics have continued to shape the growth of San Diego which has resulted in the unsustainable sprawl of the suburbs and the abuse of regional resources.

By the 1970’s San Diego’s image was becoming tarnished due to explosive growth. Kevin Lynch did an assessment of San Diego stating that they were on their way to becoming another Los Angeles and losing the very characteristics that makes San Diego unique if changes were not made. By the 1980’s change began, starting with the Downtown core that had become run down with the outward sprawl to the suburbs. By the 1990’s San Diego was running out of room to keep sprawling, traffic was reaching an all time high and people were tired of the condition of their communities. It has taken boldness to plan big, but San Diego has planned too often in increments with incomplete results, now with a strong general plan, City of Villages, many communities and open spaces have become vital spaces again.



Feeding a giraffe at the San Diego Zoo

source: [www.sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/](http://www.sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/)

## City Statistics:

City Population: 1,223,400

City Area: 218,000

Density Level: 5.6

Park Acreage: 62,310

Park acreage per 1000 residents: 50.9

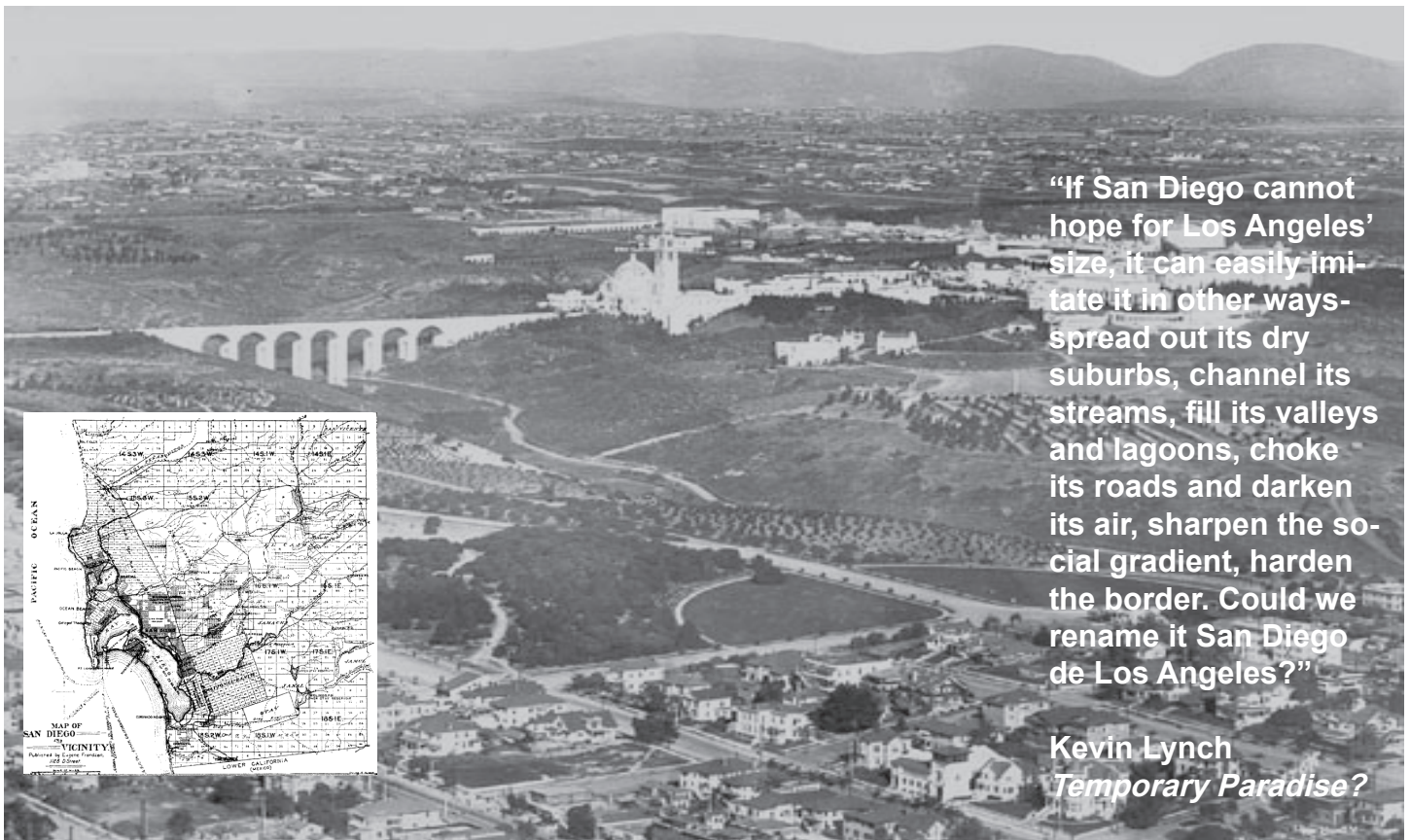
Governing bodies:  
City of San Diego



source: [Urban Land](#) March  
2000: 76-79

**Historical Context:** San Diego has had many great planners, architects, and landscape architects through the last 100 years, each with good intentions for the city, but through politics, war, or incredible growth, the city has endured unbelievable sprawl. By looking at the history, we can see where they have come from and what the solutions need to be if this city is going to survive another 100 years.

- 1893: Irving Gill arrives. This marked the beginning of the modern era of architecture for San Diego; he took cues from the region not distant sources.
- 1908: John Nolan's Plan for the Improvement of San Diego is a classic City Beautiful plan, but not much of the plan is implemented.
- 1909-1911: John Charles Olmsted creates a master plan for Balboa Park's upcoming Panama-Pacific Exposition. He works with Irving Gill and horticulturalist Kate Sessions to create landscapes which fit San Diego's climate. Bertram Goodhue is the lead architect and persuades planners to forgo Olmsted's designs. Olmsted leaves the project.
- 1915: the Panama-Pacific Exposition opens. Thousands see the lush landscapes and changes, for the worse, how future residents and planners treat these arid lands.
- 1926: Nolan is hired again to make a city, harbor and parks plan. His ideas become the cornerstone for all master planning for the next 42 years.
- 1946: Federally funded dredging of False Bay begins, now known as Mission Bay, and is completed in 1961.
- 1970's: Canyons are being bulldozed and filled for new development at an alarming rate.
- 1974: Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard's report *Temporary Paradise? A Look at the Special Landscape of the San Diego Region* draws attention to the urban sprawl problem.
- 2002: City of Villages Plan implemented.



**“If San Diego cannot hope for Los Angeles’ size, it can easily imitate it in other ways—spread out its dry suburbs, channel its streams, fill its valleys and lagoons, choke its roads and darken its air, sharpen the social gradient, harden the border. Could we rename it San Diego de Los Angeles?”**

**Kevin Lynch**  
*Temporary Paradise?*

source for both photos: <http://sandiegohistory.org/journal/journal.htm>

## Major Components

### a. Connective corridors:

- The Strand~5 mile boardwalk fronting Pacific Beach to Mission Beach.
- San Diego River Park~Trails for biking and walking starting from Ocean Beach to Mission Valley to Mission Trails Park and out to the mountains.
- Martin Luther King Promenade~connecting the downtown waterfront.
- La Jolla beaches~waterfront trails along the bluffs.

### b. Anchors:

- Balboa Park~1000 acres containing 15 museums, gardens, arts, and broad open space, thus making it a place that offers something historical, horticultural, educational, and recreational.
- Mission Bay Park~the largest man-made aquatic park at 4,235 acres, 46% land and 54% water.
- Old Town~230 acre Spanish/Mexican historical town with parks and open space.
- Open Space Parks~offering natural settings with trails and scenic views.
  - Mission Trails Regional Park~5,984 acres
  - Los Penasquitos Regional Park~4,000 acres
  - Black Mountain Open Space Park~2,352 acres
  - Teolote Canyon Natural Park~6.5 miles of trails

### c. Entertainment Parks:

- San Diego Zoo~it started out as a place for animals left over from the first exposition to become a world class zoo.
- Sea World~an entertaining form of marine “zoo” that also works to protect our marine environment.
- Lego Land~this a purely entertainment-type park
- Wild Animal Park~located in San Diego’s north county, it is a place to see animals in the “wild”.



Above:

top: Windansea Beach

source: [www.sandieg.gov/park-and-recreation/](http://www.sandieg.gov/park-and-recreation/)

bottom: Balboa Park formal gardens

source: <http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/parks/index.html>

source: <http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/parks/index.html>

San Diego needs audacity. Too few of us devote personal energy to our communities and make individual sacrifices for the good of the community. If we're going to stay, we must wake up and get serious."

Neil Morgan, San Diego Union-Tribune, senior editor.

## “City of Villages” Strategy

In 2002 the City of Villages Strategy was formalized in order to increase residential and employment concentrations to support regional planning goals and an expanded transit vision for the next 20-50 years. A set of core values is applied to each unique neighborhood “village” .

**Open Space** – We value the City’s extraordinary setting, defined by its open spaces, natural habitat and unique topography.

**Diversity** – We value the physical, social and cultural diversity of our City and its neighborhoods.

**Public Facilities** – We recognize that the availability of public facilities, infrastructure (including information infrastructure), and services are essential to neighborhood quality and necessary companions to density increases.

**Housing** – We value the promotion and encouragement of affordable housing and an overall diversity of housing types and costs.

**Culture** – We value the City’s multiplicity of arts, cultural and historic assets.

**Walkability** – We value walkable, tree-lined communities.

**Schools** – We value schools as an integral part of our neighborhoods and encourage equitable access to quality schools and other educational institutions.

**Recreation** – We value parks, accessible by foot, transit, bicycle and car, as areas to support neighborhood, community and regional facilities and programs.

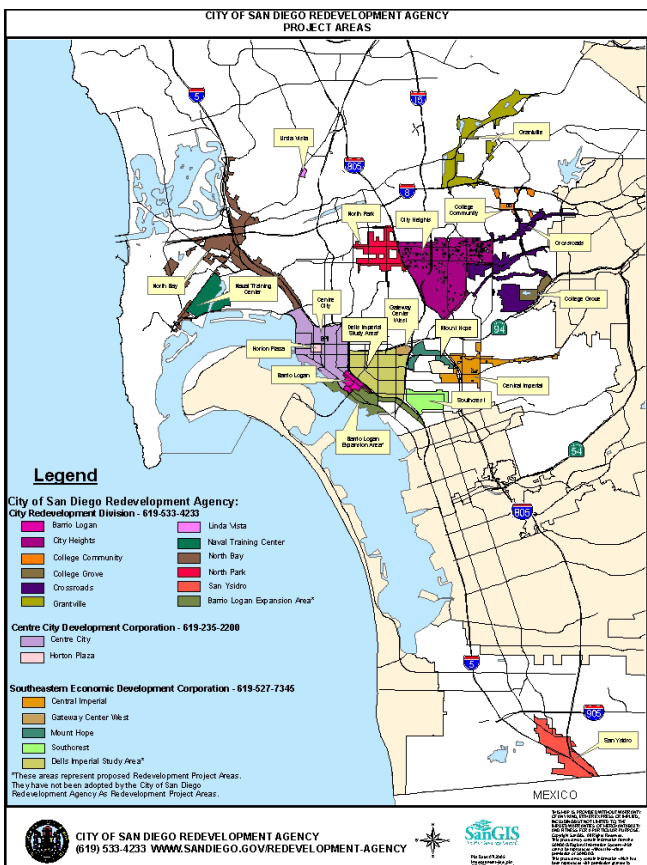
**Economy** – We value maintaining and encouraging a diverse economy to achieve a rising standard of living for all San Diegans.

**Regionalism** – We value regional cooperation and coordination to resolve regional growth issues and support regional collaboration with other organizations and agencies in order to meet economic prosperity.

**Mobility** – We value a convenient, efficient, aesthetically-pleasing and multi-modal transportation system.

**Multi Nationalism** – As a prominent border city, we value our mutually-beneficial cultural and economic ties with our neighbors in Mexico.

**Efficiency** – We value a compact, efficient and environmentally-sensitive pattern of development.



source: <http://www.sandiego.gov>

“America’s Finest City”

## Lessons Learned

- San Diego has a history of incomplete city and open space plans, now planners are implementing sweeping changes to tired neighborhoods through the City of Villages Strategy.
- Density through mixed use development, combine residential and business with open space amenities and pedestrian friendly corridors.
- Mass transit such as bus, trolley or rail needs to continue expansion between urban hubs and major components of the city, including transit to parks and open spaces.
- Architecture is to fit the context of each village.
- Establish a council policy or other mechanism to outline parameters for locating and purchasing properties for future open space and parks.



source: <http://www.dtsd.org/>



source: [http://www.downtown-sandiego.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/about.abt\\_pp](http://www.downtown-sandiego.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/about.abt_pp)



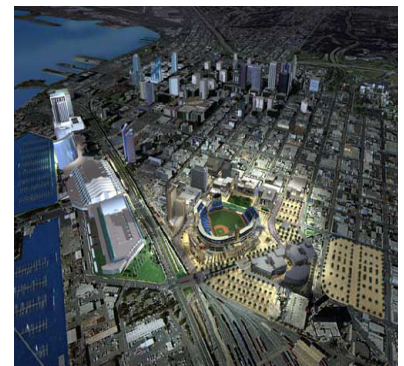
source: <http://www.dtsd.org/>

## Story in a Box - “Paradise in Progress” Program

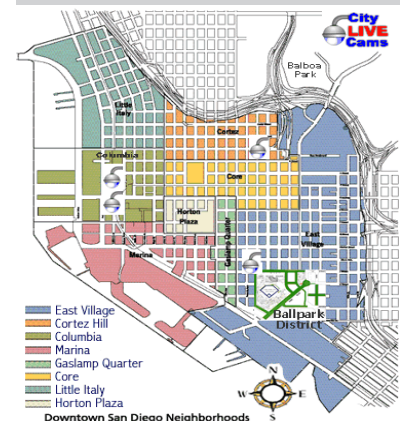
This program dealt specifically with the revitalization of San Diego’s urban core. The opening of Horton Plaza in 1985 and the restoration of seventy historic buildings in the Gaslamp Quarter was just the start. Now, with more than 100 redevelopment projects completed, underway or in the pipeline, Paradise in Progress was inaugurated to provide project information, changes in traffic patterns, best travel routes, most convenient parking, and other information to help visitors, businesses, residents and workers enjoy Downtown during this period of construction and progress.

Paradise in Progress is a public/private partnership, led by a steering committee comprised of the Downtown San Diego Partnership, City of San Diego, Centre City Development Corporation, San Diego Convention Center Corporation, San Diego Convention and Visitors Bureau, San Diego Padres, Port of San Diego, Metropolitan Transit Development Board, East Village Association, Gaslamp Quarter Association, Little Italy Association and Associated General Contractors. Construction/Special Event workshops and regular communications with community organizations are held monthly to monitor the progress of projects and to keep the lines of communication open.

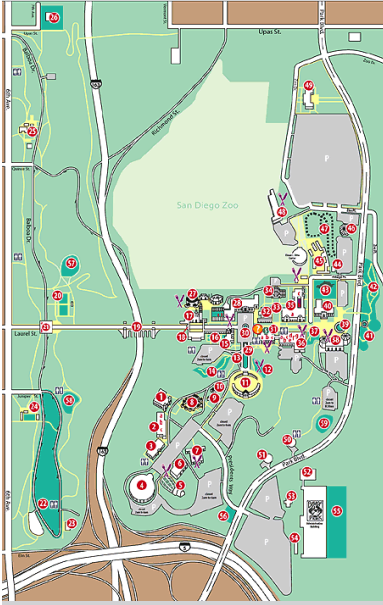
source: Downtown San Diego Partnership  
[http://www.downtownsandiego.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/about.abt\\_pp](http://www.downtownsandiego.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/about.abt_pp)



source: <http://www.dtsd.org/>



source: <http://www.dtsd.org/>



Balboa Park Map  
source: <http://sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/>



Del Mar coast line

source: [www.co.san-diego.ca.us/parks/index.html](http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/parks/index.html)



Los Penasquitos Regional Park  
source: <http://co.san-diego.ca.us/parks/index.html>

## Resources

Grogan, Bradley C. "Betting on Change." Urban Land March 2000: 76-79

Downtown San Diego Partnership: [http://www.downtownsandiego.org/index.cfm/fuse-action/about.abt\\_pp](http://www.downtownsandiego.org/index.cfm/fuse-action/about.abt_pp)

City of San Diego: <http://www.sandiego.gov/>

Community and Economic Development: <http://www.sandiego.gov/ced/index.shtml>

The Journal of San Diego History: <http://sandieghistory.org/journal/journal.htm>

Downtown San Diego Partnership: <http://www.dtsd.org/>

The American Institute of Architects, *Opening Remarks*: [http://www.aia.org/cod\\_lajolla\\_042404\\_sandiego\\_opening](http://www.aia.org/cod_lajolla_042404_sandiego_opening).

City of San Diego--Parks and Recreation: <http://www.sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/>

County of San Diego: <http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/parks/index.html>