COMPETITION SUMMARY

AIA SAN DIEGO
BALBOA PARK
CENTENNIAL GATEWAY
COMPETITION
The Balboa Park Centennial Gateway Competition is an ideas competition held in the fall of 2013. A collaborative endeavor by the San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIASD) and the San Diego Museum of Art (SDMART), it was conceived as an opportunity to complement public discussions on park improvements for the 2015 Balboa Park Centennial. The competition invited a broad cross-section of San Diego’s planning, design, and arts community, both students and design professionals alike, to consider the question:

As part of the legacy of the 2015 Centennial Exposition, how can Park Boulevard be defined as the Park’s front door.

In addressing the question posed by competition organizers, entrants were asked to propose ideas for several locations along Park Boulevard.

The Jury

The competition was juried by a distinguished group of highly respected professionals from San Diego’s art & design community.

- Rob Quigley FAIA. Architect of our new library and many San Diego landmarks.
- David Rice FAIA. Architect for the San Diego Zoological Society
- Laura Burnett FASLA. Leading landscape architect and designer of Balboa Park’s “Bird Park”.
- Mathieu Gregoire. Noted public artist and project manager for the Stuart Collection at UCSD.
- Simon Andrews AIGA. Graphic artist and designer of many of San Diego’s neighborhood gateways.

The jury evaluated the entries on December 7th, 2013 and presented their recommendations at a panel discussion during a public reception held at the Museum on December 11th. Bill Fulton, San Diego City Planning Director, also joined the panel discussion.
AIA San Diego

Balboa Park Centennial Gateway Competition

The Results
The Competition submissions produced a wealth of ideas, many of which are strongly rooted in existing plans for the Park. Some are broad in their aspirations and contribute to the long range vision for the park. Others are simpler in scope and achievable in the near future. In viewing the entries, the Jury recognized several common themes they felt worthy of further consideration by City and Park Planners, and gave recognition to the projects that best represented these themes. The AIA has organized them into several initiatives for the City’s consideration.

- Engage the East Mesa
- Create an Integrated Plan for Park Boulevard
- Restore Florida Canyon
- Address Parking on the Central Mesa
- Connect to Downtown
- Do Something for the 2015 Centennial

Initiative 1: Engage the East Mesa
The Jury chose to share the top award among three different but related entries, all of which propose a pedestrian bridge across Florida Canyon and convert the former East Mesa landfill to cultural or recreational uses.

*Park the Dump, Dump the Cars* proposes a large parking structure integrated into the Florida Canyon hillside and connected to the Prado via an elevated pedestrian bridge. This structure replaces surface parking lots on the Central Mesa.
The other first prize winners, *Gateway of Connectivity* and *Park Boulevard is Not an Edge*, offer variations on the East Mesa bridge concept. The jury admired the *Edge* recommendation to locate the bridge “off - axis” from the Prado to enhance the view to the East Mesa complex. They admired *Gateway’s* concept of a system of elevated and at-grade pedestrian and bike paths connecting the Prado, East Mesa, and neighborhoods east of the Park.

![Park Boulevard Is Not An Edge, N. Looney Architecture](image1)

*Park Boulevard Is Not An Edge, N. Looney Architecture*

![Gateway of Connectivity, DeBartolo + Rimanic Associates](image2)

*Gateway of Connectivity, DeBartolo + Rimanic Associates*

**Initiative 2: Create an Integrated Plan for Park Boulevard**

Many entries offer solutions for the pedestrian and vehicular intersections (or nodes) along Park Boulevard. **Taken collectively, these ideas offer creative opportunities for an exciting, integrated street plan.** The Jury felt many of the ideas are implementable in the near future.
Park Blvd. / Upas Street: The Jury felt the second place winner: *Hillcrest Fruit Farm* offers a simple but compelling idea: recognize the Park’s horticultural legacy and the region’s agricultural roots by planting an orchard at Park and Upas, the Park’s northern boundary.

The Jury was “deeply attracted to the idea of using natural elements to establish a new gateway experience. It was drawn to the subtle character of the vision, the appropriate scale, the influence of Kate Sessions, and the link to Samuel Parsons’ 1902 master plan idea of connecting the Park to the community through food production. This idea is achievable in the near-term and easily translatable to other locations.”

*Hillcrest Fruit Farm, Newschool of Architecture & Design*

Park Blvd. / Zoo Place and Prado: *P.R.A.D.O* received a Juror’s Recognition award and series of architectural elements from Zoo Place to the Prado. The elements relate to the Botanical Building, define major nodes along Park Boulevard, enhance the pedestrian experience along the eastern edge of Park Boulevard, and provide “lookouts” where Park visitors can pause and admire the views to Florida Canyon and beyond.

“The use of architectural monuments and pedestrian walkway provides strong definition to Park Boulevard’s eastern edge. The primary elements establish a strong visual statement, in keeping with the Parks’ ambitions, and create compelling viewpoints to Florida Canyon and East Mesa”.

*P.R.A.D.O, DiDonato Associates*
**Park Blvd. / President’s Way:** Several entries recommend the installation of a roundabout at the intersection of President’s Way. While none of these entries were selected for an award, the jury thought the underlying idea was worthy of further consideration by park planners.

“A roundabout at President’s Way provides an opportunity to calm traffic and announce transition into the heart of the Park.”

**Park Blvd. / I-5 Freeway Overpass:** Balboa Park Experience was representative of several submissions that transformed the Interstate 5 overpass into a pedestrian friendly entryway from downtown.

“Experience provides a distinct transition between the city and park, separates cars and pedestrians, and creates a unique pedestrian experience across the freeway”.

**Historic Streetcars:** While the Jury recognized this as a proposal currently under public review, it supported the idea of reintroducing historic streetcars and recommended that the trolley line be extended to engage the neighborhoods north of the Park as well.

“Reintroducing historic streetcars can “effectively address today’s transportation challenges while also adding an element of whimsy and fun”.

Streetcars, San Diego Historic Streetcars Inc.
John Nolen Parkway: Many entries proposed renaming Park Boulevard to *John Nolen Parkway* to honor the visionary landscape architect and planner. The AIA thinks the idea has merit, particularly for the segment between I-5 and Upas Street which has few residents or businesses affected by an address change.

“It is a simple way to honor an important figure in San Diego’s history and also contribute to the 2015 Centennial legacy”.

### Initiative 3: Restore Florida Canyon
Jurors felt strongly that the restoration of Florida Canyon as a natural landscape with defined, connected pedestrian and bike pathways was a critical element in the long term vision for the Park

“In addition to helping connect and unify the Central and East Mesas, it enhances the pedestrian experience along the eastern edge of Park Boulevard, and optimizes the opportunities offered by the *Engage the East Mesa* and *P.R.A.D.O*”.

### Initiative 4: Address Parking on the Central Mesa
The *Park the Dump* proposal offers a bold idea for removing parking from the Central Mesa and returning existing parking lots to park space. Several jurors felt strongly that parking should be completely removed from the Central Mesa. While ultimately favoring the bold vision of *Park the Dump*, the jury also considered proposals for structured parking on the Mesa, as suggested in the park master plan, to reduce parking footprint and reclaim open park space

*Gateway recommends taking advantage of existing topography (such as the grade depression behind the Starlight Bowl) to provide structured parking adjacent to the Museums that reduces grading impacts and recaptures open park space”.

Nolen Gateway, RJC Architects
Initiative 5: Connect to Downtown

Several entries expand on the idea of connecting to downtown.

**Tramway:** One of the more intriguing entries and recipient of a Juror’s Recognition Award, the Tramway proposal addresses park access and transportation. The jury felt it had the potential to enhance non-vehicle connectivity from key city destinations such as the Convention Center; North Embarcadero, and waterfront park at the County Administration Center.

"With a visible presence that might become a signature downtown feature, the tramway concept might become a genuine tourist attraction in its own right while delivering large, new audiences to Park attractions and events."

**Bridge the Freeway at Cortez Hill:** Proposing new buildings that span across Interstate 5 to provide a continuous connection between downtown and the park, Balboa Park Gateway was one of the boldest of the competition entries. While not selected for an award, the jury applauded the goal of connecting the Park and downtown via Cortez Hill.

"This entry builds upon ideas already found in the downtown plan and offers a bold way to connect the Park and downtown via Cortez Hill."
Initiative 6: Do Something for the 2015 Centennial

Reflections: This entry was the winner of the People’s Choice award, voted on by visitors to the Museum exhibition. While the jury had concerns about how it might be constructed, it recognized the opportunity for a temporary gateway for the 2015 Centennial.

“Reflections proposes a space-frame structure located at the mid-point of the I-5 overpass. The structure supports suspended elements that reflect the surrounding environment.”

Reflections, Jeffery Taitano

Soaring Above: Recipient of Juror’s Recognition Award, this entry proposes a network of towers that “seek to elevate and extend the horizons of visitors to the Park”. One juror noted that the towers echo early 20th century observation towers built in nearby North Park to sell building lots and houses.

“Soaring offers interesting opportunity to orient visitors to important destinations within the park and connect the heart of the park to the urban and natural landscapes beyond. Lit, these structures offer high visibility after dark and have the potential to carry information for Park visitors.”

Soaring Above, Newschool of Architecture & Design

Next Steps

The Balboa Park Centennial Gateway Competition was conceived to complement current public discussion on improvements for the 2015 Balboa Park Centennial Gateway. The AIA and Museum hope that City and Park planners consider the ideas presented here as they consider long range park planning. More importantly, the AIA believes many offer real opportunities for improvements that can be implemented in the near future.

The AIA recognizes that the submissions are “ideas”, conceptual in nature, and require further development by professionals to be fully realized.
Acknowledgements

Sponsors

The AIA and San Diego Museum of Art wish to thank the following sponsors, without whose generous support the Balboa Park Centennial Gateway Competition would not have been realized. They include:

- San Diego Zoo Global
- Ray Waite
- Miletus Group, James Guthrie
- Reprohaus

Competition Organizing Committee

The competition organizing committee was comprised of:

- Dan Stewart AIA, RJC Architects
- Jack Carpenter FAIA, Mosher Drew Architects
- John Martinez
- Bastiaan Bouma, Executive Director, AIA San Diego Chapter
- Buu Huynh, Marketing & Programs Manager, AIA San Diego Chapter
- Sandra Benito, Deputy Director of Programs San Diego Museum of Art
- Alexander Jarman, San Diego Museum of Art

Award Winners

First Award, shared by:

Dump the Park, Park the Dump
Domus Studio, Wayne Holtan AIA Team Leader

Gateway of Connectivity
DeBartolo + Rimanic Design Studio, Pauli DeBartolo AIA Team Leader

Park Boulevard Is Not an Edge
N Looney Architecture, Neil Looney AIA Team Leader

Second Award

Hillcrest Fruit Farm
Newschool of Architecture and Design (NSAD) Student Team:
Michael Garwood, Arnulfo Rodriguez, and Mahyar Mostfavy
Jurors Recognition Awards

**P.R.A.D.O**
Di Donato Associates, Kevin Bussett AIA Team Leader
Chris Sawaya, Christian Carpenter, Ryan Ahmadi, Allen Di Donato

**Streetcars**
San Diego Historic Streetcars Inc., Derek Emery Team Leader
Marilia Maschion, Christian Chaffee

**Tramway**
Place Architecture, Don McLaughlin AIA Team Leader

**Balboa Park Experience**
Newschool of Architecture and Design (NSAD) Student Team:
Mariano Ramirez, David Garcia, David Harrison

**Soaring Above**
Newschool of Architecture and Design (NSAD) Student Team:
Jonathan Chau, Julio Medina, Liza Marie Bajarias

**People’s Choice Award**

**Reflections**
Jeffery Taitano

**Special Acknowledgement:** New School of Architecture and Design (NSAD)

The AIA and San Diego Museum of Art wish to acknowledge the efforts and extend a special note of thanks to Michael Stepner FAIA and the New School of Architecture who, in the spring of 2013, were asked by the City to develop concepts for the Plaza De Panama. Their work preceded and helped create the impetus for this competition.

AIA San Diego

*Founded in 1927, AIA San Diego Chapter is a local component of the American Institute of Architects. The chapter provides a variety of services, resources, and support to the local architecture and design community.*

[www.aiasandiego.org](http://www.aiasandiego.org)