



PARKS & RECREATION



# FY2023 ANNUAL REPORT

MARCH 2024

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LEVERAGE

# A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

The City of Santa Cruz Parks & Recreation Department is an organization made up of approximately 83 full-time staff and over 100 part-time and seasonal staff members with a common mission to provide quality public spaces and experiences that build a healthy community, foster equity, and better the environment.

Santa Cruz is home to truly world-class assets and amenities like the Santa Cruz Wharf – the longest wooden wharf in the Western Hemisphere; a top-10 world ranked disc golf course at DeLaveaga Park; the most dog parks per capita in the United States; the home of the longest-running public skatepark in the nation at Sgt. Derby Park; and iconic, historic community venues like the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium and London Nelson Community Center.

We are proud of what we achieved and the challenges we overcame in FY2023. Of course, we are privileged and fortunate to live and work next to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and some of the best waves in the world.



**TONY ELLIOT**  
DIRECTOR





*There are no communities that pride themselves on their quality of life, promote themselves as a desirable location for businesses to relocate, or maintain that they are environmental stewards of their natural resources, without such communities having a robust, active system of parks and recreation programs for public use and enjoyment.*

*-National Recreation and Park Association*

## MISSION

To provide quality public spaces and experiences that build a healthy community, foster equity, and better the environment.

## VISION

We envision a thriving Parks & Recreation system that creates recreational and cultural opportunities, improves quality of life, and strengthens the health of the local environment and economy for all.

## VALUES

The parks and recreation department is essential to the community. To that end, we commit to:

- transparent and honest communication as the foundation of great relationships.
- a spirit of equity, openness and innovation, welcoming differences and diversity.
- service to the community in a manner that is sustainable, safe, responsive and accessible to all.
- collaboration to achieve results that reflect our department vision, leveraging the strengths of the community.



# 2M

annual visitors to the Santa Cruz Wharf and Beaches

# 9,742

Street trees within the City's urban forest

# 99,952

Participants in recreation programs, classes and events



## GARFIELD PARK REOPENS

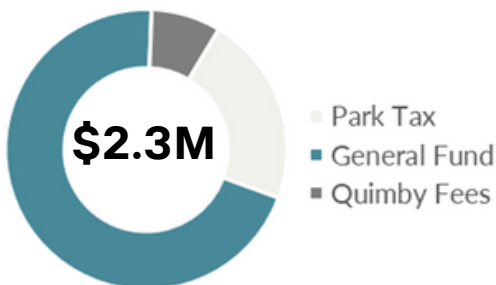
Councilmember (now Vice Mayor) Golder and Director Elliot assist Olivia Elliot with the official ribbon cutting to open the new, improved Garfield Park and playground.

# CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The department capital improvement program is severely under-resourced. In FY 2023, however the department funded several new capital projects, including the Downtown Infrastructure Beautification and Safety Improvements and DeLaveaga Golf Course Water Conservation Improvements.

In total, the department activated close to \$2.3M for critical projects across a number of key facilities with a focus on investments that would enhance staff and public safety, improve revenue-generating assets and drive natural resource conservation.

FY2023 also saw the completion of several projects that brought key amenities back to life for the enjoyment of many. The Garfield Park and Playground Renovation project scope was honed thanks to input from surrounding neighbors. The new amenities include: playgrounds for younger and older children with innovative climbing features; benches, picnic tables, and other site furnishings; a new outdoor game area; refurbished pathway; and water-efficient plantings. Nearly half of the project budget was provided by a Proposition 68 Per Capita grant.



Thanks to another Prop 68 grant from the Habitat Conservation Fund, staff was able to replace over 400 linear feet of floating boardwalk at Neary Lagoon, a project made challenging by its location within a sensitive wetland habitat. Finally, the department completed the resurfacing of sports courts at both University Terrace and Grant Park.



## SENIORS A TRAVELIN'

Senior Programs Recreation Assistant, Ka Bezerra, welcomes an adventurous group of seniors to the Angel Island Day Trip.

# RECREATION HIGHLIGHTS

**Super Saturday Delivers.** The first day of summer registration was super successful, busting all records! Over 2,000 participants registered online for summer programs totaling \$608,014, ten percent above previous years. This included over \$45,000 in scholarships from Friends of Parks and Recreation, the Junior Guard Booster Club, and the JR Scott Memorial Fund.

**Beloved Events & Trips Return.** Celebrating Santa Cruz' unique connection to Hawaiian culture and history, the thirtieth Annual Aloha Outrigger Races were held on the Santa Cruz Wharf. Registration capped out with 32 teams, and a robust waitlist. The races occurred alongside the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's thirtieth Anniversary celebrations. Kona Brewing contributed a VW Hawaiian theme van as a photo booth, and the hula dancers once again graced the Wharf's Stage during Sanctuary anniversary speeches and Outrigger trophy presentations.

Senior Program staff led the first senior trip in over two years. 50 seniors traveled to Angel Island State Park, the largest natural island in the San Francisco Bay. Senior trips provide transportation to each destination, helping keep seniors active, engaged and connected to their communities while alleviating loneliness and isolation.

**Juneteenth Festivities Expand.** The 2023 Santa Cruz Juneteenth event drew hundreds of community members to an expanded celebration that included a music-filled parade starting from the Black Lives Matter mural in front of City Hall to the London Nelson Community Center.

The celebration continued with dance, poetry, and musical performances, along with soul food offerings, arts and crafts, a basketball skills contest, and a sack race, in Laurel Park. The London Nelson Community Center has been honored to host this annual free event in Laurel Park since 1991.



## **NOTHING 'MODEST' ABOUT THE CIVIC AUDITORIUM**

Attracting top bands and performing acts, the Civic Auditorium played host to Modest Mouse and a packed house.

### **Records Set for Clam Chowder Cook-Off.**

Despite a snowstorm closing Highway 17 the day before the event, the sun emerged Saturday as a huge reward to those able to make it to the 42nd Annual Chowder Cook-Off. The event staff shined despite the spotty weather with 30 more chowder teams registering to take part than in 2022. Thanks to the pre-sale of chowder kits and merchandise, the total revenue generated was a record-breaking \$85,253.

**Civic Auditorium Shines as Community Gathering Place.** Despite challenges, a lean team of Civic staff and volunteers ensured the shows went on as was the case when storms knocked out building power the morning of the March Bonnie Raitt show, staff made gutsy decisions that resulted in a successful, sold-out show.

From the Cabrillo Festival of Music in July to big shows like Oliver Tree, Modest Mouse, and Bonnie Raitt to the Symphony's season performances to city school graduations, this diverse community found in the Civic a place to celebrate, dance and connect.

**Youth Leaders Provide Critical Assistance to Programs.** This year, teen and youth volunteers gave thousands of hours to the Captain's Corps, Junior Leader, and City Youth Liaison programs, providing help to the Parks & Recreation and Public Works departments, as well as Councilmembers.

Twenty-six Captain's Corp youth volunteered more than 1800 hours to help the program run smoothly. The Captains helped support lifeguard competitions through added support in the water, while also competing in their own events.

Additionally, 14 Junior Leaders gained leadership skills as Summer Camp volunteers. Youth ages 12 - 17 are eligible to take part in the Junior Leader program. 2022 was the first summer of volunteering for Junior Leaders since 2019, the last year the program was operated before the pandemic. Junior Leaders volunteered almost 2000 hours this summer, helping to create an even better experience for both campers and staff.





## PROTECTING ENDANGERED SPECIES

Volunteers conduct experimental outplanting of the endangered Santa Cruz Tarplant at Arana Gulch

## PARK HIGHLIGHTS

**Endangered Tarplant Rebounds.** Nearly every year since 2007, fewer than 50 Santa Cruz tarplants have been observed at Arana Gulch, one of the last places in the world the plant is known to occur. From 2015-2020, management focused on the use of cattle grazing to create suitable habitat conditions for the plant. By 2019, the seedbank was too depleted to continue grazing alone as a strategy to meet species recovery goals. Recently, management actions were re-focused on species recovery. After several years of outplanting experimentation and seed reintroduction (and with the help of a wet winter), 1,899 Santa Cruz tarplants were found at Arana Gulch in 2023.

**Invasive Iceplant Kept at Bay.** To allow for unimpeded access to the coastline for numerous events, ADA access, bicyclists, joggers, tourism and more, staff removed 38,440lbs of ice plant from the West Cliff pathways and curb lines.

**Restoration of the Cowell Beach Bioswale.** Staff replanted the bioswale with native plants to restore the feature's landscape and its original depth. These actions renewed the original stormwater function and added a splash of color to the parking area, further improving the aesthetic appeal of the Wharf entrance. The bioswale is important for the environment and community, and this stormwater feature helps to protect the Monterey Bay Sanctuary from pollution.

**Water Conservation at DeLaveaga Golf Course.** Staff completed several upgrades to the Delaveaga Golf Course irrigation pump station. Originally installed in 1992, some of the station components were on the brink of failure. Replacing them with modern technology improved energy and water efficiency yielding benefits to the environment and the department's bottom-line.



## A PARK'S JOURNEY BACK

Community members attend a meeting hosted by the department and Bionic Landscape Inc. to discuss the redesign of San Lorenzo Park

### **Benchlands Closure in San Lorenzo Park.**

From September through mid-November, a cross-functional team of city staff remained focused on vacating, closing and cleaning the lower section of San Lorenzo Park known as the Benchlands. The homeless encampment presence in the park at its height stretched the length of the lower park from Water Street Bridge to the Branciforte pedestrian bridge.

City and County outreach teams connected with the estimated 240 people who were living in the Benchlands to develop alternative sheltering plans and provide access to services. The City offered an alternative shelter option to everyone who was interested. 39 percent of people living in the Benchlands accepted the City's offer of safer shelter at the City Overlook at the Armory. This project connected over 170 people with a higher standard of shelter and onto a path towards stable housing

**Toward Restoration and Redesign.** With the closure, staff focus turned to restoring San Lorenzo Park to a public, open-space for the community. In early 2023, the department

hired a design and landscape firm to spearhead the San Lorenzo Park re-design process. From January to July, the Redesign team held 19 outreach events and public meetings, engaging a total of over 1,600 participants. This community engagement will continue into 2024, and will culminate in a final preferred plan and report with rough cost estimates.

**Reopening Upper San Lorenzo Park.** After months of closure, the Upper Park was opened to the public and as a first order of business, the park played host to a successful Earth Day event. With a major effort from staff to restore and prep the area for public access and use, Mayor Fred Keely was able to welcome the Earth Day crowd back to San Lorenzo Park.

As with every department effort, success would not have been possible without the help of incredible partners - Hotel Paradox, San Lorenzo Park Neighbors, Coastal Watershed Council, Santa Cruz Lawn Bowling Club, Jane Mio and the Benchlands Environmental Stewardship Team (BEST), and many others who contributed to upkeep and restoration of the park.

# FY2024 GOALS

<p><b>DESIGN EXCELLENCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a system-wide assessment of aging facilities and deferred maintenance</li> <li>• Complete San Lorenzo Park conceptual redesign process</li> <li>• Research replacement of Civic Auditorium ceiling tiles</li> <li>• Upgrade, modernize outdoor stage in Laurel Park</li> </ul>
<p><b>PLAY, COMMUNITY HEALTH &amp; INTERACTION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to activate Wharf with new events, activities</li> <li>• Increase programming and events for diverse and multi-cultural communities</li> <li>• Launch Winter and Spring Break JG program</li> <li>• Implement more accessible and user-friendly scholarship application process</li> <li>• Continue to develop intergenerational programs to combat isolation and loneliness</li> <li>• Promote County Master Plan on Ageing survey</li> <li>• Reopen Harvey West Pool to the community</li> </ul>
<p><b>STEWARDSHIP &amp; SUSTAINABILITY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update approved street tree list to promote a diverse and resilient tree canopy</li> <li>• Collaborate with Public Works to install new solar panels and ballfield lighting at Harvey West Park and solar panels on the roof of the Civic Auditorium</li> <li>• Continue installation of LED lighting at Civic Auditorium</li> <li>• Finish installation of new interpretive signs along the Neary Lagoon floating walkway</li> </ul>
<p><b>SAFETY FIRST</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete replacement of perimeter net and fence at Golf Course Driving Range</li> <li>• Install physical security measures at Parks, facilities, offices</li> <li>• With City partners, implement the Downtown Site Furnishing Standards</li> <li>• Improve tracking of staff training and develop annual training calendar</li> <li>• Continue de-escalation and general staff safety training</li> </ul>
<p><b>CONNECTION &amp; ACCESSIBILITY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement safety improvements at Civic Auditorium</li> <li>• Complete Market Street Center ADA improvements</li> </ul>
<p><b>PARTNERSHIPS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize new MOUs with three key operating partners</li> <li>• Complete a department Sponsorship program</li> <li>• Engage MAH on London Nelson historical memorial updates</li> <li>• Increase engagement with the Youth Action Network</li> </ul>
<p><b>GOOD GOVERNANCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAPRA (Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies) accreditation roadmap developed and demonstrated progress being made</li> <li>• Secure 2-3 grants for open space stewardship, water conservation &amp; facility safety</li> <li>• Golf Course Operation Plan is updated</li> <li>• Civic Business Plan and venue are achieving FY24 cost recovery target</li> <li>• RecTrac system improvements yield better data for decision making</li> </ul>

# FY2023 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

## Expenditures

In FY2023, the Parks and Recreation adopted budget was \$16.9M. This included over \$625K in structural budget reductions. However the department was able to add a full-time (1.0 FTE) Special Event Coordinator to the administrative team.

## Revenues

The Parks and Recreation department is funded primarily through General Fund revenue sources, such as property taxes, sales and use tax, transient occupancy tax (TOT). In a typical year, the department generates enough revenue via program fees, permits, and other charges to offset about one-third of its expenditure budget. In FY2023, department was budgeted to bring in nearly \$5.5 million (5,463,184) in revenues. The actual revenue generated exceeded this target by 11 percent, bringing in just over \$6.0 million.

## Cost Recovery

A key department metric is the revenue-to-operating expenditure ratio. In FY2023, the budgeted ratio was 32 percent, up from 25 percent the previous year. In the end, cost recovery was 4 points higher than budgeted. The resulting net impact of the department on the General Fund was \$10.9 million (10,866,331).

## Capital Improvement Program

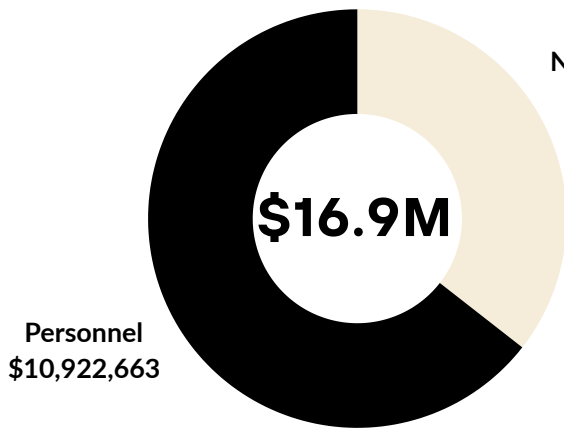
Though FY2023 represented a significant increase in department CIP investment with \$2.3M being invested, historical department CIP investment has been fairly anemic. Looking at the last ten years prior to pandemic shutdowns, which began in FY2021, CIP investment represented only six percent of the 10-Year Total of all CIP and Operational spend.

As such, the department conservatively estimates \$100M in deferred maintenance across the Parks & Recreation system. Staff is working on a Facility Condition Assessment to inform more accurate estimates. This information will then drive discussions on how to fund top priorities.

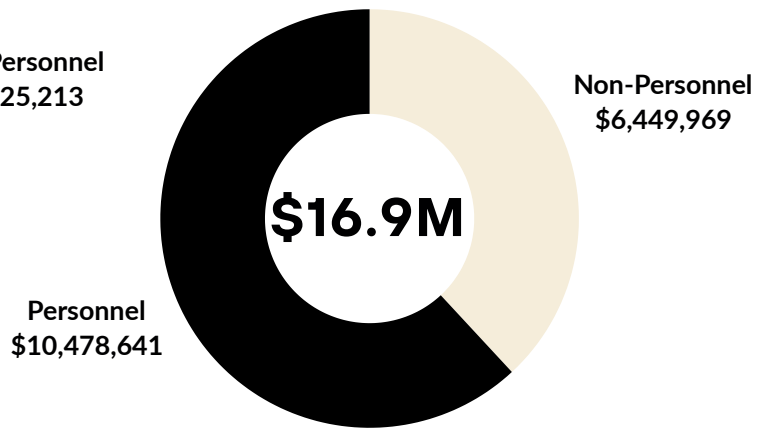
CIP TOTAL (2011-2020)	
10-Year Total	8,893,700
10-Year Average	889,370

OPERATING TOTAL (2011-2020)	
10-Year Total	141,595,850
10-Year Average	14,159,585

10-Year Total (2011-2020)	
CIP %	6%
Operating %	94%
TOTAL	150,489,550
AVERAGE	15,048,955



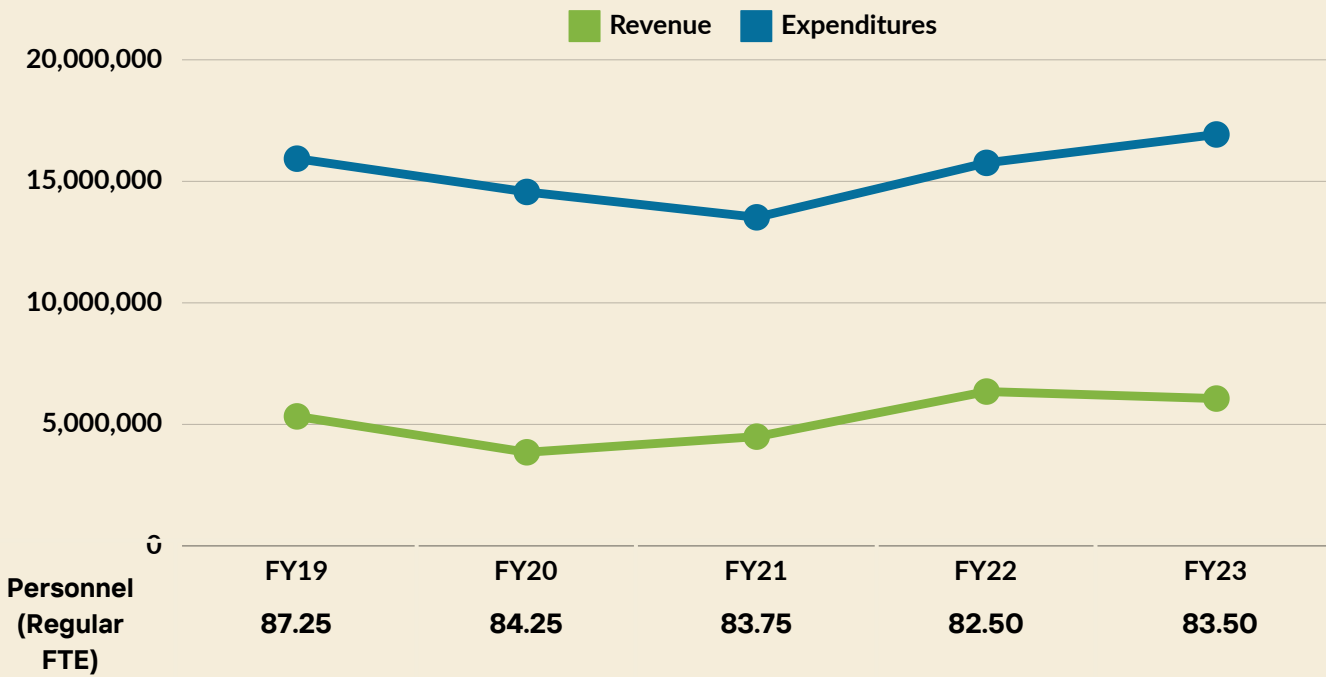
**FY2023 Adopted Budget**



**FY2023 Actual Expenditures**

The department leveraged added funds from FY2023 budget adjustments to end the fiscal year within budget. The margin of actuals versus adopted budget clearly demonstrates the department operates on the margin. Another strong year of revenue generation delivered a lower net impact to the General Fund than was projected in the adopted budget.

**5-Year Actual Budget Performance**



While revenues are stabilizing at a higher level than pre-pandemic years, cost containment remains a challenge given increases to personnel, supplies and utilities outside the department’s direct control. Consequently, revenue optimization and diversification will continue to be a major department priority.



# 700K

Grant funding secured by department staff

# 6.1M

Revenue generated by Parks & Recreation programs, rentals, permits and fees

# +84%

Amount FOPAR Youth Scholarship awards increased from FY22, with 35% of awards going to Medi-Cal qualified youth

# 3,808

Pounds of trash removed from the banks of the San Lorenzo River in two hours by 143 volunteers; the January event was sponsored by the department and several local non-profit partners

# FY2024 CHALLENGES