THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE ISSUED: May 28, 1999 REPORT NO. P99-084

ATTENTION: Planning Commission, Agenda of June 3, 1999.

SUBJECT: **INITIATION OF AN AMENDMENT TO THE BALBOA PARK MASTER PLAN AND TO THE BALBOA PARK - CENTRAL MESA PRECISE PLAN FOR THE PROPOSED ZOO EXPANSION. (PROCESS 5).**

OWNER: City of San Diego

APPLICANT: Doug Myers, Executive Director, The Zoological Society

SUMMARY:

Issues - Should the Planning Commission initiate amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan (Master Plan) and the Balboa Park - Central Mesa Precise Plan (Precise Plan) to modify the policy documents as they relate to the San Diego Zoo's proposed leasehold expansion.

Manager's Recommendation - INITIATE the study of the proposed amendments to the Master Plan and Precise Plan, and the policy issues relating to the conversion of public parkland to a private leasehold, and other issues identified in the Discussion section of this report.

Environmental Impact - The amendments to the Master Plan and Precise Plan would be evaluated by the Planning and Development Review for compliance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) during the processing of the proposed plan amendments.

Fiscal Impact - The applicant would prepare all studies associated with the Master Plan and Precise Plan amendments. An initial deposit has been collected to cover the processing costs. Due to the scope of the project, additional funding and staff will be needed to facilitate the review process within the Zoological Society's expected time line.

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BACKGROUND:

The San Diego Zoo, which is owned by the City of San Diego and operated by the nonprofit Zoological Society of San Diego (Society), is located within the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan planning areas (Attachments 1 and 2). The Society's current leasehold boundary encompasses approximately 124.03 acres, consisting of animal exhibits, concession stands, restaurants, breeding facilities, an animal hospital, administration offices and a public parking lot for approximately 3,016 cars. In 1969, the City renewed the leasehold for 50 years and approved an additional lease for 1,800 acres of land in San Pasqual Valley for the Wild Animal Park. In 1991, an additional 341 acres was added to the lease in San Pasqual Valley for the growing of food for the animals.

The Society would like to expand their leasehold within Balboa Park to implement the "New Century Zoo" Plan. This Plan has four primary goals: 1) Expand the preservation and conservation of endangered animal species through a captive breeding program, 2) Provide the addition of new exhibit spaces, 3) Expand the parking capacity of the existing Zoo parking lot, and 4) Create a prominent entrance on Park Boulevard. City staff has determined that the proposed leasehold expansion is not consistent with either the Master Plan or Precise Plan and therefore requires amendments to both Plans. Additionally, the Society's lease agreement with the City would also need to be amended to consolidate the expanded area into one leasehold.

The proposed Plan Amendments would affect a total of approximately 24.5 acres of public parkland in the following areas: the War Memorial Parcel, the Old Globe Way and Parking Area, the Archery Range, the Balboa Park Miniature Railroad, the Carousel, the Richmond Street Off-Ramp Parcel and the Zoo Parking Lot (Attachments 3 and 4). The following is a brief description of the Society's proposal (indented) followed by a summary of the current Precise Plan recommendations:

> **War Memorial Parcel (6.1 acres):** The Society proposes to demolish the existing War Memorial Building and relocate all of the current functions and activities that take place in the building to an acceptable new location either within, or outside, Balboa Park. A new, five-level parking structure would be built on the south end of the parcel. The northern half of the parcel would remain as a landscaped area with enhancements to identify this as the "Gateway" to Balboa Park and the Zoo. The five level parking structure would be for both zoo and park users and accommodate approximately 4,500 cars. The structure would be a 'pay-to-park' facility and require new driveway entrances from Park Boulevard.

The Precise Plan's specific recommendations call for the 1948 War Memorial Building to remain and the Zoo's parking lot, which serves Zoo and Park users, to be brought into compliance with the City's Landscape Ordinance. Currently, the War Memorial Building is the office of the Citywide Disabled Services Program and it is used by Senior Citizens, Veterans Groups, Spreckels Organ Society, Elder Help, Square Dance Festival, etc. The building is also used by the City and the Park and Recreation Department for training and meetings that host approximately 4000 people yearly.

Old Globe Way and Parking Area (1.0 acres and 29 parking spaces): The Society proposes to eliminate the existing public parking behind the Botanical Building and to fence in this area to accommodate new exhibits.

The Precise Plan's specific recommendation calls for: 1) a new vehicular cul-de-sac to be provided in this area with adjacent service and disabled parking provided behind the Botanical Building, 2) the existing Ficus and Sycamore trees to be preserved in the center of the cul-de-sac, 3) and the remaining area to be provided as landscape area.

Archery Range (12.2 acres): The Society proposes to eliminate the Archery Range and will work with the City to find a suitable site for relocation. This area will then be used by the Zoo for growing food for the animals and to allow for some public access trails.

The Precise Plan's specific recommendation calls for the Archery Range to be relocated to a comparable alternate location and to return the area to a naturalized preserve with unrestricted public use. A pedestrian trail system that incorporates historic viewpoints and interpretive signs are to be developed with a link to Palm Canyon and the Alcazar Garden.

Balboa Park Miniature Railroad (3.7 acres): The Society proposes to demolish the Railroad and relocate the Carousel to this location, along with new Zoo exhibits and a new entrance to Spanish Village.

The Railroad is a designated City of San Diego historic site and its lease was recently acquired by the Society. The Precise Plan's specific recommendations call for the Railroad to remain with the addition of a new public picnic and children's playground area to be created in the center of the Railroad leasehold. A 'North Village Promenade' is to be created on the west side of the Railroad, linking the Zoo to the Prado with new paving, benches, landscaping and lighting. The Plan also shows a new 'Spanish Village Entry' adjacent to the Railroad featuring a pedestrian plaza, fountain, seat walls and two new studio buildings.

The Carousel (0.5 acres and 99 parking spaces): The Society proposes to acquire the Carousel lease and to relocate the Carousel farther back onto the Miniature Railroad leasehold. The existing public parking lot adjacent to the Carousel would be eliminated. New landscaping and parking would be provided in this location.

The 1922 Carousel is a designated City of San Diego historic site. The Precise Plan's specific recommendation calls for the Carousel and public parking lot to remain, with a restroom and maintenance building to be provided. Currently, the leaseholder of the Carousel has not accepted the Society's proposal to purchase the lease.

Richmond Street Off-Ramp Parcel (1.0 acres): The Society proposes to fence in this area as part of the Sheep and Goat Canyon renovation and to add a Zoo service road. However, the Zoo disclosed at the Balboa Park Committee

meeting that they would propose to locate a 700-space employee parking structure in this location with potential access from Richmond Street.

The Master Plan shows this area to remain as open public parkland. Richmond Street and the adjacent property are not a dedicated street or right-of-way. This parcel is part of Balboa Park and designated as part of the State Scenic Highway.

Zoo Parking Lot (3,016) parking spaces): The Society proposes to eliminate all of the free public parking and a portion of Zoo Drive, which is not a dedicated street, and to build a new entry, exhibits, and a portion of the five-level 'pay-to - park' parking structure within this location.

The Precise Plan's specific recommendations show the parking lot to remain as a free public parking lot for Zoo patrons and Park users, with the requirement to add landscaping to meet the City's Landscape Ordinance. The Zoo parking lot is the largest parking lot in Balboa Park and according to the lease agreement the parking lot is to be used by Zoo patrons and Park users, including the users of the War Memorial Building. A parking structure is identified in the Precise Plan, but not in the location that the Society is proposing, and not as a 'pay-to-park' structure.

National Historic Landmark Zone

Several of the proposed leasehold expansion areas are within the National Historic Landmark Zone as identified in the Precise Plan (Attachment 5). These areas include the Old Globe Way and Parking Area, the Archery Range, Spanish Village, the Miniature Railroad and the Carousel. A National Historic Landmark Zone is a federal designation from the National Park Service (NPS). Proposed alterations within the Landmark Zone are required to comply with the "Secretary of Interior's Standards" and "Criteria for the Treatment of Historic Properties." The Precise Plan states that the NPS will be asked to review any proposed alterations and make a determination regarding the significance of the alterations and whether the proposed changes are consistent with the Standards.

DISCUSSION:

The Society's proposed expansion was not contemplated at the time of the preparation of the Balboa Park Master Plan and Central Mesa Precise Plan. The Society's proposal is a deviation from the goals and recommendations of the Plans and there are considerable land use and park policy issues that need to be addressed . However, the Precise Plan provides that a substantial deviation from the goals, objectives and recommendations or the design guidelines can be considered through the amendment process. The Plan Amendment review will involve all of the same boards and commission that approved the Precise Plan: 1) Historical Site Board, 2) Commission for Arts and Culture, 3) Central Balboa Park Association, 4) Balboa Park Committee, 5) Design Review Committee, 6) Park and Recreation Board, 7) Planning Commission, 8) Natural Resources and Culture Committee of City Council and 9) City Council. Public input forums will also be conducted with the surrounding Community Planning Committees (Greater Golden Hill, Greater North Park, and Uptown).

Although the required Supplemental Criteria for Initiation can be met, there are numerous and significant policy issues that would need to be addressed during analysis of the Society's proposal. Some of these issues have been raised, or are expected to arise, through public input forums as the proposed Plan Amendments move forward. This list should not be considered all inclusive.

1. Land Use Policy - Staff would evaluate whether the leasehold expansion is the best use of Balboa Park parkland for the citizens of San Diego, now and in the future. According to the most current SANDAG forecast, the population for the San Diego region will increase by approximately one million people in the next 20 years. Public parklands and urban trails will be needed in the future to accommodate inner city recreational needs as infill development occurs. The amount of open public parkland in Balboa Park is a finite resource that cannot be replaced or recreated elsewhere.

2. Plan Detail - The City Manager recommends that the Society prepare a separate and detailed Precise Plan, or Element of the Precise Plan, for the Society's leasehold and its proposed expansion to evaluate the full impacts of the proposed Plan Amendments. In addition, a general development plan for the entire leasehold would be required as a condition of an amended lease.

3. Ultimate Limits of Expansion and the Study of Alternative Sites for Expansion - Staff would evaluate the ultimate limits for the Society's proposed expansion in Balboa Park and what type of Zoo uses would be appropriate. Alternative sites for expansion, such as the Wild Animal Park, would be reviewed along with other sites in Balboa Park.

4. Circulation Study - Staff would require the Society to update the 'Circulation Element' of the Precise Plan. The update would address the following issues: 1) vehicular circulation and parking, pedestrian circulation, service access routes, and alternative modes of transportation; 2) the best parking plan for the Park now and in the future; and 3) the impacts of how a "pay to park" structure would affect the remaining public parking lots within the Park and the adjacent neighborhood on-street parking. Alternative parking structure sites within the Park that would benefit the entire park and Zoo users would be considered, including the Plan's recommendation of locating a structure south of the Organ Pavilion. The update would also look at the opportunity for a shared parking facility at Inspiration Point to serve the downtown ballpark, Park and Zoo users.

5. Historical Resources - Staff would evaluate whether the City should allow the removal of historical resources from the Park. A Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO) Permit would be required as a part of the Plan amendments if the proposal includes either relocation or the removal of the Miniature Railroad or the Carousel. In addition, projects or improvements related to Spanish Village may require an RPO permit and would require adherence to the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. A policy issue to be resolved during the evaluation would be whether the historically designated Miniature Train and Carousel operation and maintenance should be made a condition of the Society's lease.

6. War Memorial Building - Staff would evaluate whether the City should allow the demolition of the War Memorial Building and what the compensation for that building should be if demolition occurs. The study would identify the requirements of a new building, who would be responsible for the costs of design and construction, and where the building would be located.

7. Consideration to City - The City currently provides subsidies to the Society including free rent. Staff would evaluate whether the provision of additional subsidies for additional acreage should be considered.

Criteria for Initiation:

Before a Land Use Plan Amendment can be initiated, Section 111.0703 of the Municipal Code requires that any one of three initial criteria listed below must be met:

(1) The amendment is appropriate due to a mapping or textual error or omission made when the original 'Land Use Plan' was adopted or during subsequent amendments; or

(2) Denial of initiation would jeopardize the public health, safety, or general welfare; or

(3) The amendment is appropriate due to material change in circumstances since the adoption of a 'Land Use Plan' whereby denial of initiation would result in a hardship to the 'Applicant' by denying any reasonable use of the subject real property.

The proposed Master Plan and Precise Plan Amendments do not meet any of the above criteria. However, Section 111.0703 also states that a Land Use Plan Amendment may be initiated if all four of the following supplemental criteria are met.

NOTE: THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA JUSTIFICATION IS A SUMMARY OF THE STATEMENTS PROVIDED BY BRG CONSULTING INC., THE SOCIETY'S CONSULTANT:

Supplemental Criteria:

(1) The proposed 'Land Use Plan' Amendment is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Progress Guide and General Plan; and

The project's consistency with the General Plan depends on whether it is consistent with the Balboa Park Master Plan and Central Mesa Precise Plan, which are discussed below.

Balboa Park has an extensive planning history, which dates from the 1915 and 1935 World Expositions. The Balboa Park Master Plan was adopted by the City in 1989. The overall vision of the Plan was to "nurture and enhance the cultural, recreational and passive resources of the Park to meet the needs of the region

and surrounding community, while respecting its physical, cultural and historical environment." One of the most important of the six major goals of the Master Plan is to 'preserve, enhance, and increase free and open parkland' throughout the Park.

The Master Plan calls for Precise Plans to be developed for subareas of the Park to help guide future development. In 1992, the Central Mesa Precise Plan was approved by City Council. The Precise Plan's goals are categorized by land use, circulation, architecture, landscape, management and maintenance. The Society's proposed project would implement the following goals and recommendations of the Central Mesa Precise Plan:

1. The proposal would maintain the northern portion of the War Memorial Parcel as a landscaped open space area.

2. The proposal would relocate the Archery Range as recommended in the Central Mesa Precise Plan.

3. The proposal would replace several scattered parking lots with one parking structure.

4. The design of the new parking structure would meet the requirements of the City's Landscape Ordinance.

(2) The proposed 'Land Use Plan' Amendment appears to offer a public benefit to the community or City; and

The proposed Plan amendments offer several benefits to the local community and the City of San Diego. These include benefits in education, recreation, socioeconomic values and community identity. These are described as follows:

1. The Center for Reproduction of Endangered Species (CRES) is the world's foremost multi disciplinary scientific rescue effort for endangered animals and plants. The proposal would facilitate the further advancement of CRES, which would maintain San Diego's role as one of the leader's in endangered and threatened species conservation.

2. The Society provides educational programs and opportunities that benefit children and adults, at the Zoo and in the classroom. The proposal would allow the Society to expand educational programs and facilities for the benefit of children and the public.

3. The Society has contributed to international conservation efforts through its captive breeding programs. The proposal would give the Society needed space to continue advancements in the preservation and conservation of these and other endangered and threatened animals. This would strengthen San Diego's role as one of the leaders in the field and ensure the Zoo's viability and continued

success into the next century which would contribute to the health of the economy and a sense of civic pride.

4. The Zoo is one of the world's leading attractions, attracting approximately 3.5 million visitors annually, which directly benefits San Diego's tourism industry. The proposal would ensure the Zoo's viability and success into the next century, which would contribute to the health of the local and regional economy.

5. The long-term viability of the Zoo is important to the local and regional economy of San Diego. The Zoo is one of San Diego's major employers, providing jobs for many residents and generating business in other sectors of the economy. The Zoo also helps attract business and industry to San Diego because it is a cultural, educational and a recreational asset.

(3) Public services appear to be available to serve the proposed increase in density or intensity of use; and

The proposal would expand the Society's leasehold by approximately 24.5 acres, which would result in a 20 percent increase in the land area occupied by its existing leasehold. The amended leasehold would result in an intensification of land use over that which is identified in the adopted Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan. However, the areas of proposed expansion are located in areas of Balboa Park where utilities are in place, or can be accommodated by an expansion of existing services that currently service the Zoo.

(4) City staff is available to process the proposed 'Land Use Plan' Amendment without any work being deferred on General Fund-supported programs or ongoing Updates.

Every effort will be made to study the proposal, process the Plan Amendments and meet the project deadlines. Due to the scope of the project, it is anticipated that additional staff will be needed when the actual amendments are submitted to avoid delays to other scheduled projects.

CONCLUSION:

The City Manager recommends that the Planning Commission initiate the Plan Amendment process, and that the policy issues listed above be included within staff's analysis of the proposed project. It should be noted, however, that neither the City staff nor the Planning Commission are committed to recommend in favor or denial of the proposed Plan Amendments, or any project proposal, as part of the action to initiate the Plan Amendment process.

Respectfully submitted,

[SIGNED]

Approved by:
MARCIA C. MCLATCHY
Park and Recreation Director

[SIGNED]

Submitted by:
LEISA A. LUKES
Development Project Manager

SHIFFLET:RLS:(619)525-8231

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Project Location Map
2. Balboa Park Master Plan Boundary
3. Proposed Lease Boundary Adjustments
4. Conceptual Site Plan
5. National Historic Landmark Zone Overlay
6. Ownership Disclosure Statement

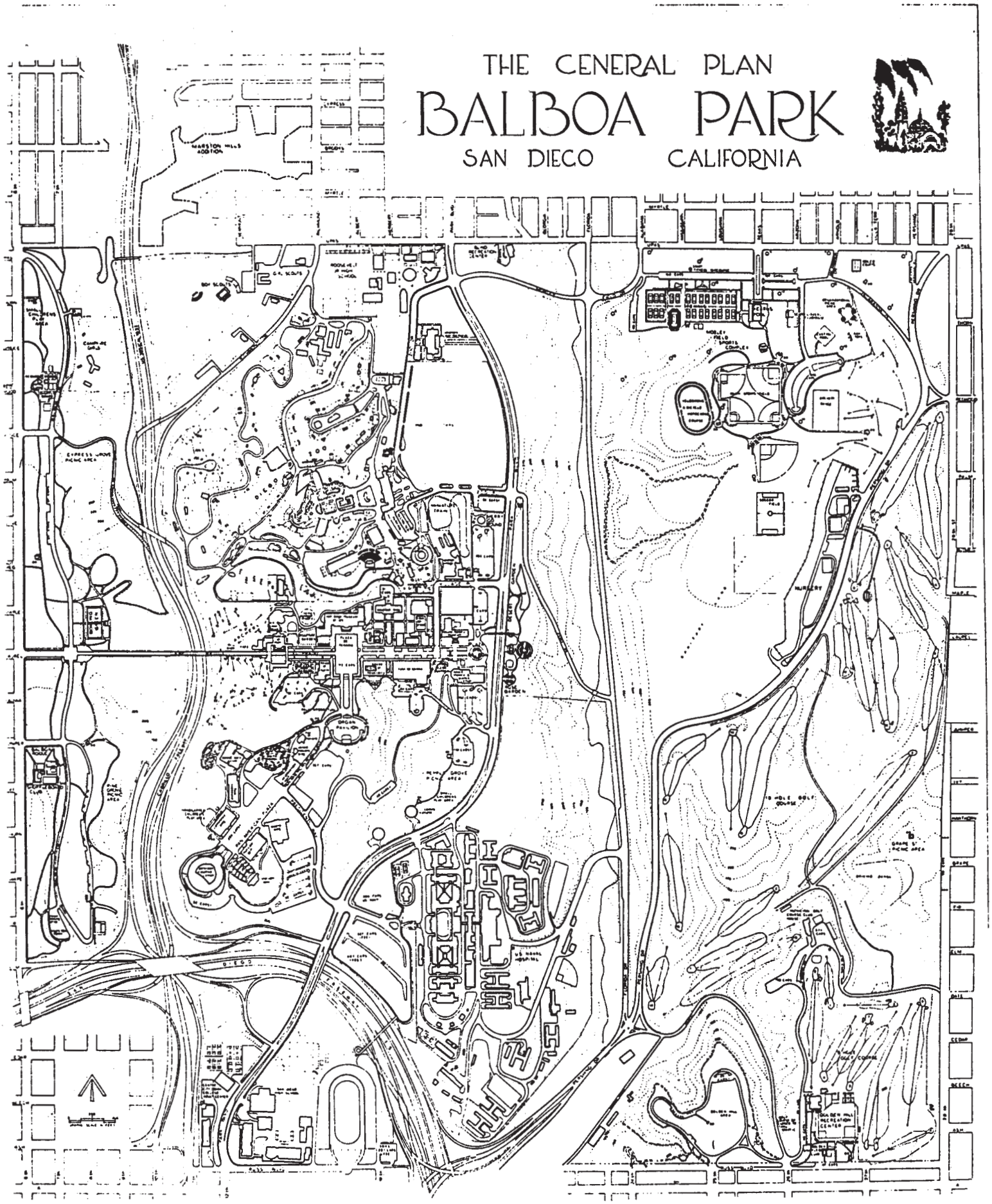
SOURCE: BRG Consulting, Inc., 1999.
BASE MAP: Point Loma 7.5' USGS Quad Map

BRG CONSULTING, INC.

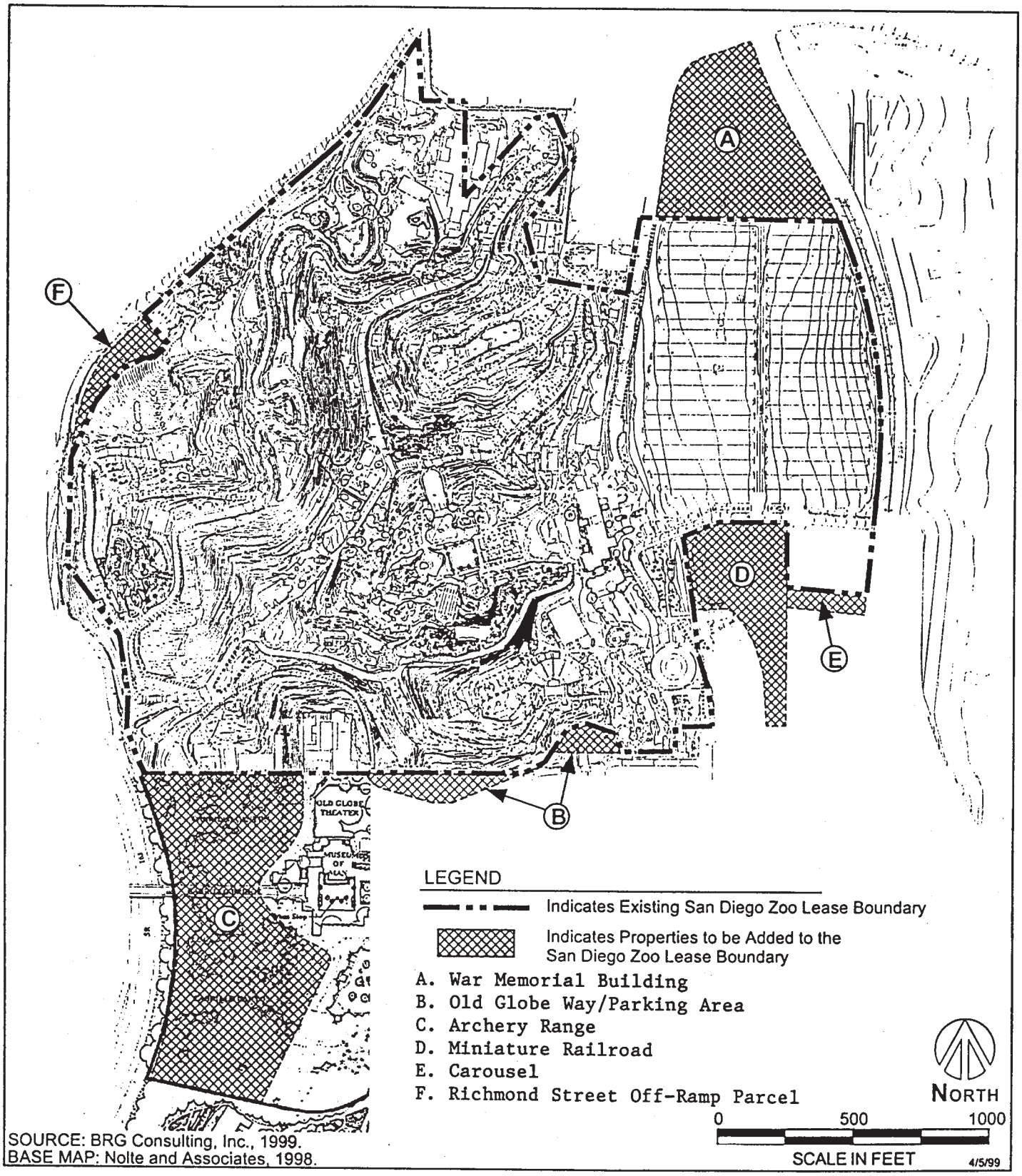
New Century Zoo - San Diego Zoo

Project Location Map

ATTACHMENT 1



ATTACHMENT 2



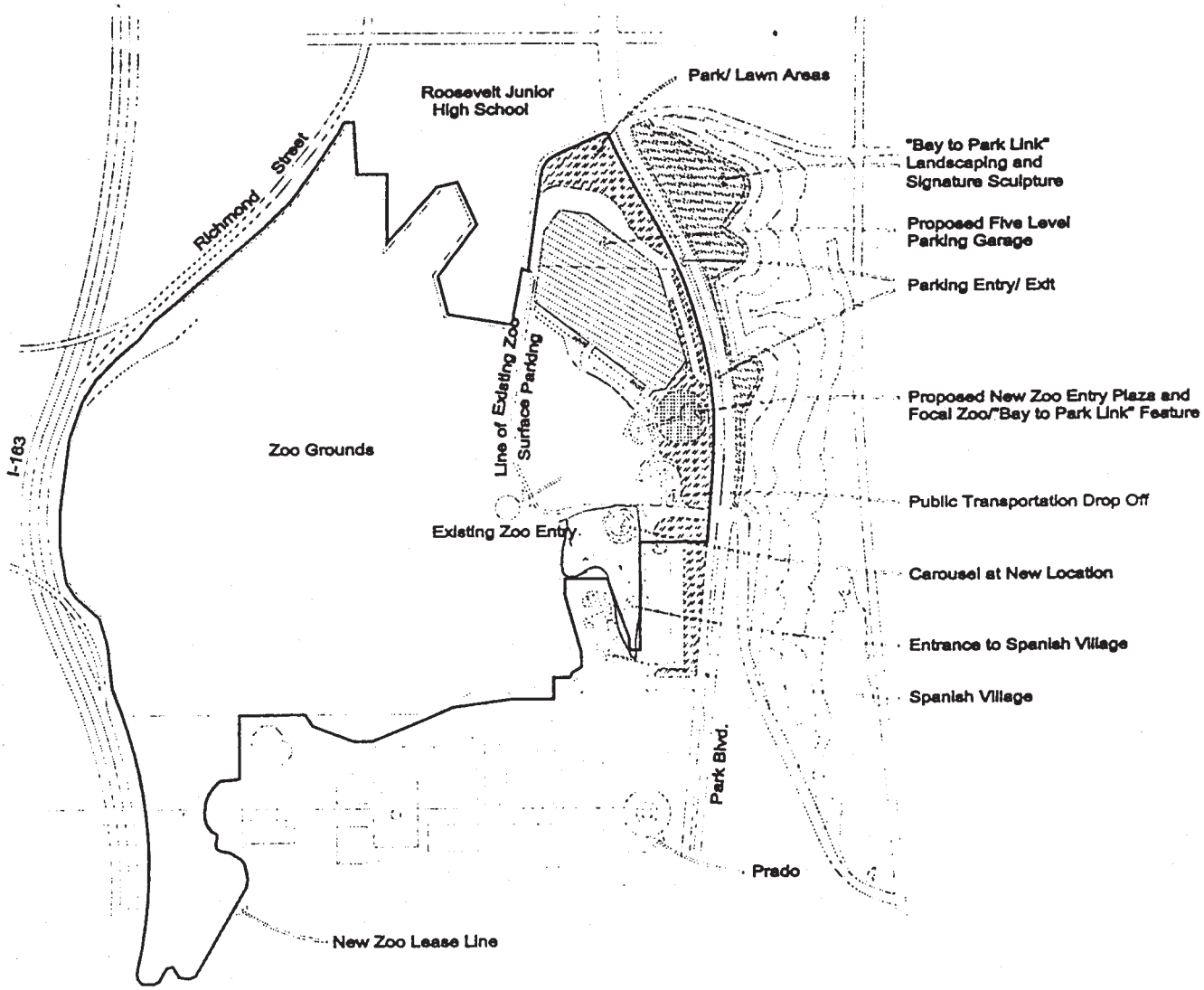
SOURCE: BRG Consulting, Inc., 1999.
BASE MAP: Nolte and Associates, 1998.

BRG CONSULTING, INC.

New Century Zoo - San Diego Zoo

Proposed Lease Boundary Adjustments

ATTACHMENT 3



North

0 800 1600

Scale in Feet

4/5/99

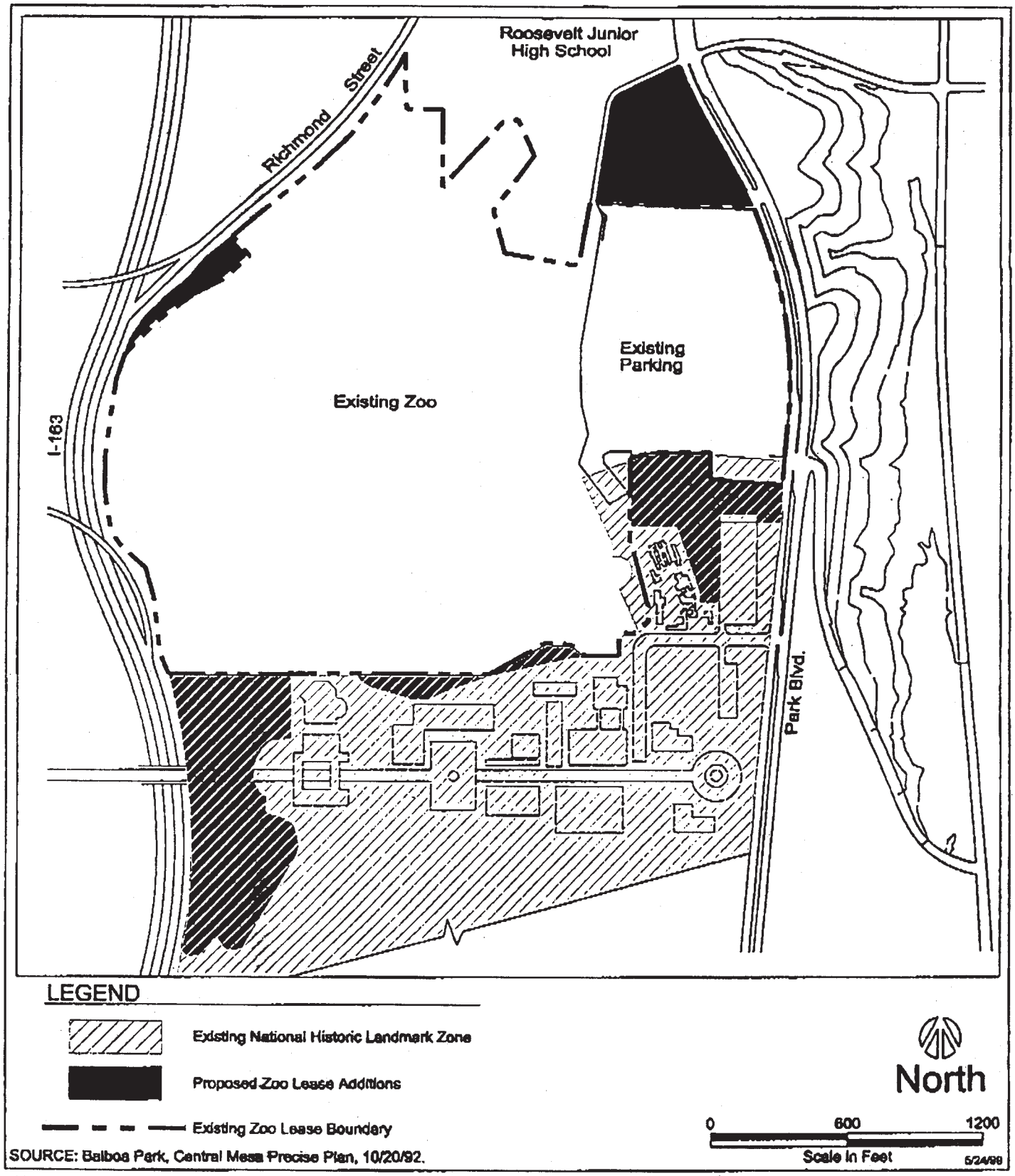
SOURCE: Tucker Sadler & Associates, October 1998.

BRG CONSULTING, INC.

New Century Zoo - San Diego Zoo

Conceptual Site Plan

ATTACHMENT 4



SOURCE: Balboa Park, Central Mesa Precise Plan, 10/20/92.

BRG CONSULTING, INC.

New Century Zoo - San Diego Zoo

National Historic Landmark Zone

ATTACHMENT 5

CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Development Services Department

Ownership Disclosure Statement

Project Name: New Century Zoo

Project Address: 2920 Zoo Drive, Balboa Park

Legal Status (check one) ☐ Corporation ☐ Limited ☐ General
☐ Individual What State _____

Please list below the owner(s) of the above referenced property. Include individual partnerships and corporations.

1. City of San Diego
Name (type or print) | Signature | Date

1222 First Avenue, San Diego CA 92101 | (619) 236-6460
Address | Phone No. | Fax No.

2. Zoological Society of San Diego [SIGNED] 1-6-95
Name (type or print) | Signature | Date

PO Box 551 San Diego CA 92112-0551 | (619) 231-1515
Address | Phone No. | Fax No.

3. _____
Name (type or print) | Signature | Date

_____
Address | Phone No. | Fax No.

4. _____
Name (type or print) | Signature | Date

_____
Address | Phone No. | Fax No.

Attention: The applicant is responsible for notifying the Project Manager of any changes in ownership during the time the application is being processed or considered. Changes in ownership are to be given to the Project Manager at least thirty days prior to any public hearing on the subject property on the Change of Responsible Party Form.

For City use only: Property Type _____

Case No _____ Date Filed _____

ATTACHMENT 6