

PARKING AT SDMG, BALBOA PARK AND THE ZOO

by LuAnn Benton, SDMG President

updated 1/5/2026

Beginning Monday, January 5, 2026, a paid parking system will be enforced in and around Balboa Park. It includes Spanish Village and the SDMG building. The rollout has been rushed and communicated poorly to the public. Messaging on the new rules has been a patchwork of information posted on the government website at the URL below.

<https://www.sandiego.gov/parking/balboapark>

The parking policy appears to be evolving in real time only days ahead of launch. As updated information becomes available, this flyer will be updated as well and posted on the SDMG website at short URL: <https://bit.ly/parkingbb>. However, remember to check the city's official web page (above), which is updated frequently. There appears to be no phone number to call.

Don't run afoul of the City Council's rules. Here are the latest updates:

1. **Parking behind SDMG is by special permit only**, except the two handicapped spaces.
2. **SDMG was given 3 permits** that will be used for instructors and a few others.
3. **Students may no longer park behind SDMG.**
4. There are **5 loading spaces behind SDMG** (yellow marked lines) for a maximum of 20 minutes. You have to get a loading pass from your instructor to use one of the loading spaces.
5. **Parking meters have been installed on roads within and adjacent to the park**, including Balboa Drive, El Prado, Juniper Road, Presidents Way, Quince Drive, Zoo Drive and Village Place. Adjacent roads with meters include Sixth Avenue, from Elm to Upas streets, and Park Boulevard, from Village Place to Presidents Way.
6. **The cost of metered parking** is \$2.50 per hour, with a four-hour maximum. Daily fees in the lots ranged from \$5 to \$16. Meters take credit cards, Apple Pay/ Google Pay or coins. Download the [Park Smarter App](#) to pay using your smartphone.
7. **ADA Accessible Parking:** ADA parking will continue to be free with no time limit at the blue parking spaces AND at the new parking meters for cars.
8. **San Diego residents may qualify for discounted parking rates by registering their vehicles online at: <https://sandiego.thepermitportal.com>.** Be sure to read the restrictions and exclusions!
9. **Trams** operate daily and leave from the Inspiration Point parking lot at Park Boulevard and Presidents Way every 10 to 15 minutes, from 9 am to 6 pm and drop you off at Plaza de Panama, where you will walk from there.
10. **To get back to your vehicle**, either walk back to Plaza de Panama to catch the tram or walk back to your car from Spanish Village.
11. **Consider an annual San Diego Zoo membership**, which would be cheaper than the street parking or the parking lots.

Get news & updates – Join SDMG's mailing list:

<https://bit.ly/sdmg-signup>

Annual Zoo Membership with Parking Pass

<https://zoo.sandiegozoo.org/parking>

All zoo memberships have an emblem labeled **San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance**. According to the Zoo's website, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance members receive complimentary parking at the San Diego Zoo but must [register their vehicle online via the Zoo's portal](#).

Implications of Fee-Based Parking at Balboa Park

As currently conceived and implemented, the fee-based parking system threatens to undermine visitorship and volunteer programs that serve the public. It penalizes volunteers who donate their time to non-profits in and around the park, [including SDMG](#).

San Diego Mineral and Gem Society is a 501(c)(3) organization. We have served the San Diego community since 1934. Currently, SDMG has approximately 700 dues-paying members. The new paid parking system at Balboa Park may curtail all of our non-profit, volunteer and educational programs, effectively shutting down all of our Society's programs, which are available to the community at low or no cost.

What we do and who we serve, thanks to our volunteers –

- Approx. 35 instructors volunteer their time to teach 26 classes per week.
- Approx. 300 students, including seniors, kids, handicapped, and low-income individuals, carry tools and equipment for their classes from their cars.
- Our classes are priced to support seniors, kids, handicapped, and low income individuals. Prices barely cover our overhead to operate classes.
- SDMG hosts at least two educational meetings or presentations per month. They start at 7pm and

In November 2026, San Diego residents may get the opportunity to register their opinion on fee-based parking in Balboa Park.

**However, it must first qualify
as a ballot initiative.**

**If you approve enabling public input
on the fee-based parking system
via the ballot box in November 2026,**

**sign the petition TODAY:
<https://repealthefees.com/#sign-up>**

are open to the public free of charge.

- We operate an educational museum that is open 363 days per year. It is free of charge and attracts thousands of visitors every year, including during our December Nights open house.
- People visit our museum from all over the world. We are a member of SMMP Society of Mineral Museum Professionals.
- SDMG supports two scholarships for San Diego State University students per year from funds raised by special events -- all with volunteers.