



City of Long Beach

Office of Vice Mayor Robert Garcia
Councilmember, First District

Date: November 12, 2013

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Vice Mayor Robert Garcia, District 1 *UR*
Councilmember Suja Lowenthal, District 2 *S*
Councilmember Al Austin, District 8 *Al*

Subject: Restoring the LA River

Background:

The Los Angeles River has long been one of our region's most significant environmental challenges. The LA River flows through Long Beach and empties into our harbor, often collecting waste from upstream cities. Historically, the Long Beach portion of the river has been underutilized. However, recent efforts to increase bike trails, restore wetlands, and activate the riverfront have attracted interest from residents, preservationists, and business leaders.

The LA River still carries snowmelt from the Santa Monica Mountains, just as it did 200 years ago, but it has been neglected throughout the region. Residents wishing to engage in recreational activities along its banks or in its currents will find many obstacles, including trash and other pollution, overgrowth, potentially unsafe individuals loitering or living along the river, and a variety of bureaucratic and legal barriers.

Fortunately, all that has begun to change. Throughout the LA River basin area, and especially in the City of Los Angeles, a movement to reclaim the river has taken hold, as residents, environmental advocates, and elected officials have begun to show interest in restoring the river's natural habitat, as much as is possible; such as, maintaining a water level more appropriate for recreation, cleaning the trash and pollution in the river, adding additional public safety resources to the river's publicly accessible areas, maintaining the landscape more consistently, and allowing recreational use on a regular basis.

In Long Beach, Mayor Foster has led efforts to install catch basins and other technology to capture trash and prevent it from reaching our beaches. Long Beach also has a 10-year-old River Link plan that serves as a guide to future restoration and development along the river. The plan is in need of an update to include new restoration efforts, wetlands projects, changes to the 710 project, and the adaptive reuse of the Shoemaker Bridge.

The City of Los Angeles, in collaboration with Friends of the Los Angeles River and other community groups has begun reclaiming the northern stretches of the LA River and its banks and surrounding lands for use by recreationists including kayakers, hikers, bird-watchers, educational groups, cyclists, and others. Due to its restorative, promotional and educational efforts, Los Angeles has already begun to see more public use of this unique and precious resource, and Long Beach would benefit from undertaking a similar initiative.

While our challenges at restoration are more complex including a cement bottom along our portion of the river, we should actively engage Los Angeles and update our own River Link plan.

Fiscal Impact:

No significant fiscal impact.

Recommendation:

Request the City Manager work with the City of Los Angeles to explore ways the two cities can collaborate in restoring the LA River. Request the City Manager to engage the community and prepare an update to the city's River Link plan. Request the City Manager to report to the City Council on these efforts in the next 90 days.