



July 18, 2017

Honorable Mayor and City Council
333 W Ocean Blvd,
Long Beach, CA 90802

RE: Support for Agenda Item R-29: Park Equity

Dear Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council:

It is with great enthusiasm that we at **Willmore City Heritage Association (WCHA** www.willmorecity.org) fully support, Item 29 on the July 18th Council Agenda titled "Park Equity", authored by Councilwoman Gonzalez.

The City of Long Beach is one of the most diverse cities in the entire nation. One can witness this diversity first hand when visiting the 162 different parks within the City. While these parks are held dear to our hearts for the over 3,000 acres of open space they provide, certain parks have not had an equitable level of attention and programming as others. The Open Space and Recreation Element of the General Plan, which was adopted in 2002, observed that "populations in the north, central and western areas of the City are underserved." Although certain objectives and policies were set in place to address this inequity, the problem, as this item points out, still remains 15 years later.

Many community organizations, like ourselves, have attempted to fill the gap in programming by providing residents in these underserved neighborhoods with the classes, activities and programs they deserve, such as **Winter in Willmore at Drake Park (our 7th annual this year), and Willmore Season of Live Arts and Music (S.L.A.M., now our 2nd annual) at Cesar Chavez Park.** You can learn more about them here:

<https://www.facebook.com/willmoreslam/>

<https://www.facebook.com/WinterinWillmore/>

In addition, WCHA has, through grants, donations, and volunteer hours, contributed to the infrastructure of Cesar Chavez Park in order to make it a better place for our residents. Over the last 5 years, WCHA, without **ANY** funding from Parks, Recreation and Marine, has built The Children's Gateway Garden, the City of Long Beach's first completely ADA accessible community fruit and vegetable garden, and, in order to actually HAVE programming, reconstructed the Amphitheater, expanding a too small stage, adding electrical outlets, a 40' sail shade, and 8 commercial benches. This summer, 5 shade trees and low water use ground cover were also added. You can see photos of the process and learn more about these projects here:

<https://www.facebook.com/Cesar-Chavez-Park-Childrens-Gateway-Garden-538162266266165/>

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Amphitheater-at-Cesar-Chavez-Park-1410419245937090/>

Over the last 5 years, WCHA has spent a quarter of a million dollars on these events and infrastructure improvements. In addition there have been literally, thousands of volunteer hours (which are currently valued at \$24.14 per hour) invested in building, maintaining, and staffing events. WCHA has an all volunteer Board, and various funds acquired are not used for project management, but go towards projects and events. Despite our record of successes, we continue to face a multitude of challenges when attempting to program these parks. The strenuous permitting processes, the various permit fees, and at times, the outright denial of our efforts places our families and residents at a disadvantage, also making it needlessly difficult for our performers and vendors to contribute. As an example, Shakespeare by the Sea has a pre-built set that they use, that is taller than our sail shade. Despite the fact that we are willing to pay to have the original installer remove and re-install the shade, over the weekend, we managed to do it last year, but have been forbidden to do so, ever again. Shakespeare by the Sea must somehow figure out how to re-configure their stage set (which they use for all 10 weeks, at all their other venues) just for us. We are lucky that they are willing to come. We are concerned that they will not continue, and our neighborhood, and City, will be the poorer for it.

No words can describe the love we have for Long Beach and its residents. We wish to see everyone have the opportunity to experience the amenities our wonderful city has to offer in ***their*** neighborhood, regardless of where they live. With your assistance and affirmative vote for Item 29, we can make that wish a reality and work together to create a fair and equitable system.

In Service,

Kathleen Irvine, President

Willmore City Heritage Association