



AL COUNCILMAN
8TH DISTRICT
AUSTIN

R-40

Date: October 4, 2022

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Al Austin II, Eighth District
Councilmember Stacy Mungo, Fifth District

Subject: Acquisition Efforts and Visioning Plan for Park Space Along LA River

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Recommendation to request the City Manager to provide an update on the City's effort to acquire park space along the Los Angeles (LA) River from LA County; and

Request the City Manager to direct the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Marine to develop a park vision plan for the 11-acre parcel APN 7140014940 in collaboration with the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, community members, and all other appropriate stakeholders; and

Request the City Manager investigate the feasibility of establishing a butterfly preserve along the LA River on a portion of parcel APN 7140014939.

BACKGROUND:

Over the last several years, the City of Long Beach and its Councilmembers have shown a commitment to improving existing parks and exploring opportunities to develop new outdoor leisure spaces for residents citywide. However, with much of the City's 52 square miles already developed, identifying space for park development often requires creative and collaborative solutions. This has resulted in a concerted push from Councilmembers and residents alike to convert land along the LA River into park space for nearly 20 years. Notable successes include the DeForest Wetlands and Molina Park. In support of this ongoing effort, City Council adopted a resolution in April of 2022 to support the formation of the Lower Los Angeles River Recreation and Park District, which would create an interjurisdictional committee to promote development of open space for the benefit of communities along the Lower LA River and increase coordination of resources. Additionally, in February of 2021, Councilmembers Austin, Zendejas, and Uranga introduced an item requesting the City Manager to study the feasibility of acquiring open space for public park development along the lower LA River. The resulting Park Acquisition Feasibility Report (Report) was presented to City Council on April 5, 2021.

The Report provides thorough analysis of the 6,943 parcels within a quarter-mile walk east and west of the LA River in Long Beach, ultimately identifying 9 parcels that could serve as opportunity sites for future parks. The criteria used to determine the final 9 sites include (1) if the site was institutional or utility property; (2) if the land was undeveloped, unused, or otherwise

unencumbered; and 3) if the site was for sale or lease at the time. The final 9 sites include property owned by the City of Long Beach, Los Angeles County, and Southern California Edison. The site identified by the report as the best opportunity for new park space is an 11-acre County-owned property located north of the 405 freeway, APN 7140014940. There is currently interest from both the County and City in seeing this parcel developed; the report indicates that the City began discussions with the County in early 2021 about acquiring the property. Given the amount of time that has passed since the report was presented, it is appropriate that the Council receives an update on the City's efforts to acquire this parcel (APN 7140014940).

Included in the Report are possible funding sources to supplement the City's acquisition of this property. However, since the report was published, new funds have been made available to support this initiative. In the 2021-2022 California State Budget, Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell secured \$3.3 million to support development of open space along the LA River in Long Beach. These funds can only be administered by the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), one of ten conservancies within the California Resources Agency that aims to preserve open space and habitat from eastern Los Angeles County to western Orange County. RMC has expressed an interest in assisting with the ongoing acquisition efforts and collaborating to create a vision for this new space. Funds have already been earmarked and a partner has been identified; it would behoove the City of Long Beach to capitalize upon these circumstances. The City Manager should direct the Parks, Recreation, and Marine Department to develop a park vision plan for this 11-acre parcel in collaboration with RMC, community members, and all other appropriate stakeholders. The park vision plan should consider incorporating equestrian connectivity and recognition for the people and cultures indigenous to the land.

Another parcel presented as an opportunity site in the Report is a 20-acre plot (APN 7140014939) adjacent to the aforementioned site. This parcel includes land controlled by LA County on both the east and west sides of the LA River, with most of the land located to the west of it. The smaller portion east of the river is connected to the largest piece of the 11-acre site and acts as a retention basin to control stormwater runoff. As plans progress to develop the 11-acre portion, current use of this basin is not compatible with activities expected at an open space park area. However, due to its condition, costly mitigation would be needed to allow for recreational use of the space. One possible use that could lower mitigation costs and aligns with the City's recently adopted Climate Action Plan (CAP) is converting the space to a migratory monarch butterfly preserve. This species became endangered in July of 2022; their winter habitats in California, like prairies, meadows, and grasslands, have shrunk rapidly from deforestation, development, and other disruptions. Offering these animals sanctuary could improve their population rates and provide residents with a spectacle during each migration season. Additionally, conversion for this purpose would allow the City to plant California native trees and drought tolerant plants, mitigating urban heat impacts per Adaptation Action EH-3 from the CAP. The possibility of utilizing this space alongside the 11-acre parcel warrants further investigation. For that reason, we are requesting the City Manager to investigate the feasibility of establishing a butterfly preserve on this parcel of land.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Due to time constraints, no fiscal analysis was conducted.