

Director's Corner

Parks, Recreation, Marine and Animal Care Services

February 2021 Highlights

Prepared by Director Brent Dennis

1. **PASSING OF PRM COWORKER REYNALDO LAGARDE:** Our department team was saddened over the holidays in learning of the passing of Community Recreation Services team member Reynaldo Lagarde from COVID, the first City of Long Beach staff member to succumb to the pandemic virus. Rey was passionate about his role in assuring the essential provision of meals to our senior community and had a distinguished career of service to the community during his years with PRM. I reached out to Rey's wife to offer our condolences and support which she greatly appreciated. A proposed memorial grove of trees is being studied for development in El Dorado Park West that could be dedicated to those who passed away while serving the community. Rey was a dear friend and kind colleague to all who had the pleasure to work with him over the years.
2. **COVID and COVID Vaccinations:** As of the authoring of this monthly report, our department continues to experience the impacts of the surge in COVID positive cases. To date, we have had 90 reported COVID positive cases and approximately 100 exposed and quarantined. Team members of Parks, Recreation, Marine and Animal Care Services are now to be scheduled to be offered COVID vaccines under the updated age-based priority system for vaccinations. Our Community Recreation Services team members who were involved with senior meals distribution have already been vaccinated as Tier 1A essential service providers in accordance with the State of California distribution priority protocols. Team members working in our day camps are now being scheduled for vaccinations as part of the essential services tier. Scheduling of the remainder of our PRM team is dependent upon the delivery or reliable quantities of the vaccine doses.
3. **PRM Weathering the Storms:** Overall, the PRM Department managed to weather the recent winter storms quite well. Only a few wind-fallen trees, but considerable amounts of downed branches and debris captured across park landscapes were efficiently addressed by Parks Maintenance Operations. Minor cases of area flooding were reported but no serious facility damage. The Marine Bureau team kept the beaches and marinas cleared of storm debris. Our park system's Calsense irrigation monitoring and controls performed well in shutting down to allow Mother Nature to do our watering. Inclement weather did cause the cancellation of our outdoor program offerings, but all senior meals continued to be provided reliably throughout the recent periods of stormy weather.
4. **New Service Priority Budgeting for Fiscal Year 2022:** A new budgeting process is being introduced for the next fiscal year where budgeting will be based upon prioritization of services with extensive community engagement opportunities. The FY/22 budget forecast still projects a possible \$30.0 million operating deficit. Heroes Act funding from the federal government could help soften the budget impacts expected as the economy slowly rebounds from COVID.

5. **Sunnyside Cemetery:** Sunnyside Cemetery transfer to the City of Long Beach is officially complete. The historic 14-acre property is an important asset that joins the adjacent municipal cemetery and Willow Springs Park in the heart of Long Beach. Significant site wide landscape maintenance and clean-up operations are already underway, and the cemetery has greened up thanks to the recent rainfall. Sitewide treatment to control gophers is also underway. I enjoyed an informative walking tour of Sunnyside in late January and met the volunteer manager who oversees dedicated cemetery volunteers as well as community service workers that are assigned to uncovering and regrading areas around grave markers and monuments.
6. **Major PRM Capital Projects Underway:** El Dorado East Regional Park will see upgrades at the main entrance to help facilitate annual pass holders through a separate lane with a vehicle identification/automated entry arm system. Both the Duck Pond Renovations and the Synthetic Soccer Field projects are moving forward as the bid process concludes and City Council approves the projects' funding. Golden Grove improvements are nearly completed in El Dorado Park. Public Works partners with PRM to manage capital improvement projects in parks.
7. **Mobile REcess and Learning Hubs:** Our mobile recreational programming that was launched in mid-October and expanded to ten sites including Grace Park on Fridays have been very successful. These programs are being continued through March 1, 2021, although the Grace Park site is being reconsidered for safety reasons following a recent drive-by shooting incident. Four Learning Hubs were activated to provide academic support, internet access, sports, fitness and safe afterschool activities at Houghton, McBride, Orizaba and Veterans parks weekdays from 7:30 am to 5 pm. All CARES Act program funding concluded December 31, 2020, so continued programming is general fund supported until March 1, 2021.
8. **Citywide Memorial Bench Master Plan:** Plans are underway to develop a citywide master plan that will illustrate potential donor opportunities for memorial benches in all parks, marina and beach areas. Partners of Parks is supporting two intern positions to accomplish the master plan.
9. **Hamilton Loop Vision Plan:** Long Beach City Council reviewed and approved the recommendations to 'file and receive' the Hamilton Loop Vision Plan. This sets the stage for more specific grant funding pursuits to help with park development phases over time.
10. **Furloughs:** PRM's first ten furlough Fridays have gone very well with no complaints from the community. Administrative offices were closed. Exceptions to operational closures included the El Dorado Nature Center, after school programs, and the Belmont pool, all of which remained open. The Marine Bureau chose to use Tuesdays as their furlough day of office closures since Fridays are their busiest business day. As a reminder, the FY/21 furlough program contributed \$11.0 million in savings towards the City of Long Beach's projected \$30.0 million operating deficit.
11. **HAPPY BLACK HISTORY MONTH!**