



Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: Recommendation to receive and file a report on the Hamilton Loop Vision Plan; and, accept Statutory Exemption SE-20-126. (District 9)
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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
1/19/2021	1	City Council	approve recommendation	Pass

Recommendation to receive and file a report on the Hamilton Loop Vision Plan; and, accept Statutory Exemption SE-20-126. (District 9)

On July 24, 2018, the Uptown Open Space Vision Plan was adopted by the City Council, which identifies new and innovative opportunities to fill the need for publicly-accessible open space and recreation facilities in Long Beach’s Ninth City Council District. The Hamilton Loop project, a greenbelt connector and walking loop around the 91 Freeway, was prototyped as the final community celebration activity of the Uptown Open Space Vision Plan during the Color Block Walk. Since that time, the Hamilton Loop Vision Plan has further developed the concept for this project.

The Hamilton Loop is a greenbelt connector that will transform freeway embankments, streets, sidewalks, underpasses, and intersections in the Hamilton Neighborhood in North Long Beach, re-envisioning the freeway’s infrastructure that has long divided and isolated this community. The Hamilton Loop proposes to use segments of land along the existing freeway embankment on both the north and south sides of the 91 Freeway from Atlantic Avenue to Cherry Avenue as a greenbelt with a walking path and small park amenities including seating, shade, fitness and play equipment, dog runs, and garden space. The existing freeway embankment is property owned by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

The Hamilton Loop Vision Plan (Vision Plan), included as Attachment A, serves as a visionary document to guide potential future development of Hamilton Loop. The Vision Plan includes an existing conditions analysis, examination of park opportunity tradeoffs, summary of the public outreach process, and community-driven vision and implementation strategies. The Vision Plan is a plan for future open space investment along the 91 Freeway, anticipated over a long-term horizon, which will be implemented incrementally over time as productive sponsorships or partnerships can be established or as capital, maintenance, and operating resources allow.

The Project Team coordinated with the Hamilton Neighborhood Association and the Ninth District City Council Office to host a series of community workshops and design charrettes over the course of nine months that empowered community members to examine and reimagine their seemingly limited park environment with creativity and imagination, while setting expectations in reality through a series of forced-choice decision-making workshops. Given the large and diverse population, the public outreach targeted those who have been historically been left out of the planning process, including communities of color, Spanish primary speakers, and youth and families. This involved hosting public workshops at widely-accessible locations and platforms throughout the Hamilton Neighborhood, including schools and several park and neighborhood events that attract diverse populations, ensuring that materials were available in various languages, consistent with the City's Language Access Policy. The public outreach activities were highly visually engaging so that community members of all ages would gain an increased awareness of the open space, active transportation, and land use planning process.

The first workshop series involved analyzing the freeway embankment's existing conditions, gathering information from the community about their observations, and evaluating potential amenities and roadway configurations to potentially maximize the amount of area for the greenbelt open space. Information was collected through in-person surveys and a prioritization exercise on what guiding principles future improvements to the freeway embankment should reflect. The survey was made available in-person at public workshops and was promoted through social media and by flyers that were shared with the Hamilton Neighborhood. Participants also engaged in a forced-choice open space activity that allowed participants to evaluate the tradeoffs of different street configurations with additional park space, traffic patterns, bike lanes, and parking. The outcome of the first workshop series was a community-proposed roadway configuration that included extending open space into the roadway, adding a bike lane, keeping one lane of parking, and turning the street into a one-way road. The second workshop series focused on refining the landscape and urban design options of the proposed new open space through public design charettes. Through a Design Your Park activity, players broke out into small groups with an illustrative map of the proposed Hamilton Loop project and within a limited budget and games pieces that depicted park amenities, matched desired amenities to areas where they could physically fit. The final design concept was presented at a design reveal celebration event at Michelle Obama Library.

After the design reveal celebration, a final draft of the final Hamilton Loop Vision Plan was prepared and presented to staff at Caltrans, as the proposed project would require permitted use of the freeway embankment, which they own. Caltrans was concurrently planning for a freeway widening project in the same area proposed for the Hamilton Loop, and after several meetings and negotiation, Caltrans has agreed to incorporate changes to the freeway and associated retaining walls so that the Hamilton Loop project can fit on the embankment land as proposed. City staff will be pursuing a use permit from Caltrans for the area so work can continue on the Hamilton Loop project concurrent with the Metro freeway widening project. Staff will return to the City Council for any City Council-required action at such time the use permit has been authorized by Caltrans.

The Vision Plan is designed to provide a complete picture for why, where, when, and how to improve publicly-accessible open space in the Hamilton Neighborhood. It is grounded by case studies, best practices, park data and statistics, considerable community input, and adopted policy, ensuring that the projects, programs, and policies proposed in the Vision Plan contain significant value. The Vision Plan also helps address the 0.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents in North Long Beach versus the 5.6 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents citywide by identifying amenities, more effectively lays out the park to effectively maximize open space programming and is an important step in seeking future grant funding opportunities.

The Hamilton Loop Vision Plan was produced in partnership with the Health and Human Services Department, the Parks, Recreation and Marine Department, the Ninth City Council District, and the Hamilton Neighborhood Association. The total cost of the Vision Plan was \$50,000 and was funded by the Department of Health and Human Services through a Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Zone grant from Kaiser Permanente. On November 19, 2020, the Parks and Recreation Commission approved the Vision Plan (Attachment B).

This matter was reviewed by Deputy City Attorney Arturo D. Sanchez on December 14, 2020 and by Revenue Management Officer Geraldine Alejo on December 17, 2020.

SUSTAINABILITY

While the Vision Plan has no immediate sustainability impact, the Hamilton Loop project developed through the implementation of the Vision Plan supports the City's existing pedestrian, bike, and park plans. These plans provide for safe connectivity between neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and parks, and create additional improvements to acres of open space in an underserved part of Long Beach. Future projects are anticipated to incorporate sustainable elements and materials, wherever possible, and comply with the City's green building and water efficiency policies.

The Vision Plan was reviewed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and was issued Statutory Exemption SE-20-126 (Attachment C).

City Council action is requested on January 19, 2021, to allow for the City to continue pursuing a use permit with Caltrans for use of the Interstate 91 Freeway embankment.

The total cost of the Vision Plan was \$50,000, and was funded by the Health and Human Services Department through a Healthy Eating Active Living Zone grant from Kaiser Permanente. The Vision Plan is intended to be the framework for future investment and provides initial cost estimates for project elements. Funding for all project elements has not yet been identified and further detailed cost estimates will be determined as implementation resources are identified. The Vision Plan is long-term and intended to be phased in over time, as projects, operations, and maintenance funding becomes available, or as greater stewardship from community and corporate partners is identified. This recommendation has no staffing impact beyond the normal budgeted scope of duties and is consistent with the existing City Council priorities. There is no local job impact associated with this recommendation.

Approve recommendation.

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BRENT DENNIS
DIRECTOR OF PARKS, RECREATION AND MARINE

APPROVED:

THOMAS B. MODICA
CITY MANAGER