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Subject: Parks Strategic Plan

-EXTERNAL-

Gazettes Another View - Equity Needed in Parks
By Diana Lejins

Numerous points in the Parks, Recreation, and Marine (PRM) 10-year Strategic Plan are outstanding, but are they just fluff.?

"Parks and open space are free resources that yield tremendous social, physical, and mental health benefits."

"Our parks and open spaces are vital to our personal health, improving our mind and body, and our community health, making our neighborhoods more attractive places to live and work."

"Parks have always been an important place of gathering."

During the 1920s, redlining based on racial makeup of a neighborhood, "forced people of color to live in areas of Long Beach that are more crowded and have little green space." "The Ku Klux Klan had a strong presence in Long Beach and held large demonstrations around the city, including in our local parks."

"To this day, these neighborhoods lack sufficient access to parks space, further inhibiting their quality of life."

These residents have a life expectancy that is approximately 5 years lower than those in the more park-rich areas.

Additionally, the west side has historically been piled high with industrial buildings and other facilities with high levels of pollution that are not conducive to clean air and healthy living. Asthma rates among Long Beach children are the highest in the region, with related hospitalizations also the highest. In fact, the area along the Los Angeles River is known as "Asthma Alley" and ranks the worst in the United States for air quality.

The homes in the more-impacted poorer neighborhoods have comparatively little yard space. And there are relatively few pools in those areas. In contrast, the eastside homes often have pools and large yards in which to play and entertain. With a dearth of parkland and open space, it is truly a double whammy for those in west-north-central (WNC) Long Beach.

*Very little has changed in over a hundred years.

The Strategic Plan further states:

"We aim to honor and correct the histories of park and open space creation and position park equity as a central concept to this strategic plan."

Commitment to park equity goals: "End systemic racism in Long Beach"

"Improve health and wellness In the City by eliminating social and economic disparities"

"The PRM Strategic Plan considers racial equity integral in the conversation of park equity"

Yet, very little is actually being done to resolve this chasm of disparity. This city continues to disregard viable possibilities, spend taxpayer dollars frivolously on eastside items such as the \$3+ million artificial grass field with another 3 million estimated for maintenance, and disregards much needed repairs on existing park amenities. Just this month our beautiful iconic swan died most likely due to an inadequate filtration system at the El Dorado Park duck pond.

Then, there's the Queen Mary. Spending \$500 million to renovate it is unconscionable. That consideration shouldn't even be on the table.

Other inequities include a \$100+ million pool, renovation of the Belmont Pier, \$9 million for a beach concession stand, creating an eastside greenbelt along the San Gabriel River. These may be lofty ideas but they are all on the eastside with comparatively little investment in the WNC areas where the need for parks is dire. The current ratio of parks and open spaces east vs. west-north-central is an appalling 17:1 acres. The inequity of this is staggering and shameful. The idea of busing kids to eastside facilities only adds insult to injury.

It is very telling that there are at least 5 public golf courses on the east side and zero in the WNC areas.

Take a look at the fallow Willow Springs Park that has the potential of growing into a stellar facility providing much-needed respite and recreation to underserved areas of the city. These are the types of projects we should be focusing on.

Consider the 70-acre RiverPark situation by the Los Angeles River. This prime piece of land was historically designated as open space, and the council unanimously approved the Riverlink plan update that included this parcel. But around 2019 the mayor and city council backtracked and rezoned it as neo-industrial. Subsequently, a campaign-contributing pay-to-play developer is attempting to install an ill-planned, pollution-producing RV lot. How would you like that going up in your neighborhood or replacing an eastside park.?

While I commend the Commission's sentiments, the actions of our mayor and council make the words of the Strategic Plan seem empty and condescending. The city is constantly patronizing citizens about equity and making promises but doing very little about it.

The dramatic systemic inequities of Long Beach have hugely fragmented our city. To quote a well-known authority on the subject of inequality, Dr. Martin Luther King, "An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

We must demand that city hall rights these wrongs post haste.!

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