



**R-20**

**Date:** April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**To:** Honorable Mayor Robert Garcia and Members of the City Council

**From:** Vice Mayor Rex Richardson, Ninth District  
Councilmember Suely Saro, Sixth District  
Councilmember Roberto Uranga, Seventh District  
Councilmember Al Austin, Eighth District

**Subject:** Doris Topsy-Elvord Community Center at Houghton Park

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

Recommendation to refer to the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Government, Personnel, and Elections Committee for consideration the naming of the newly renovated Houghton Community Center complex, the "Doris Topsy-Elvord Community Center" in recognition of the legacy, contributions, and service of beloved Long Beach citywide community leader, Vice Mayor Doris Topsy-Elvord.

And further, recommend the City Manager identify additional sites of significance to the African American community, and all underrepresented communities, for the purposes of historic preservation, landmarking, and inclusion in the updated Citywide Historic Context Statement.

**Discussion**

In June 2020, the City of Long Beach completed construction on the new Houghton Park Community Center. The new center encompasses 30,000 sq. ft. of programmable space, a newly built 6,400 square foot LEED certified conference space, new outdoor courtyards, a newly renovated social hall, two large multipurpose rooms, a weightlifting gym, computer lab, a sound/plant garden, and the original Houghton clubhouse – a historic landmark originally built in 1930.

As the new Houghton Park Complex offers new services and amenities to the community, the City of Long Beach has a unique opportunity to reimagine the identity and historic context of the facility to better connect and inspire the community, by naming the complex in honor of an inspirational citywide public servant, **Doris Topsy-Elvord.**

Doris Topsy-Elvord has been in Long Beach for more than 75 years, as a resident of Central and Uptown Long Beach and remains a lifelong resident. As such, her relationships and influence are deeply rooted, and citywide. She served with distinction, pioneered many firsts, and paved the way for Black leadership and civic engagement



across the city. Evidenced by her moniker, *Mother Doris*, Doris consistently uplifts others, and is respected and admired.

In 1992, she became the first Black woman elected to the Long Beach City Council and holds the distinction of being twice selected as the Vice Mayor of Long Beach in 1996 and 1998.

Mother Doris is a "*Mother of Equity*" and is credited for introducing equity to City Hall. She fought for policies to expand economic inclusion for residents and businesses of color. She helped co-found Long Beach's African American Heritage Society and led the successful proposal designating the home of civil rights icons Ernest and Lillian McBride a historic site. Nominated to serve as a Port of Long Beach Harbor Commissioner by then-Mayor Beverly O'Neill, Doris was the first Black individual and, at the time, only the third woman to serve on the five-member port commission in its nearly 80-year history. During her tenure at the port, she was instrumental in expanding the Port's Small Business Enterprise Program and the Green Port Policy. Both programs are still thriving today.

The new Houghton Park community center complex is designed to be a park that embodies Mother Doris' values. Through her advocacy and leadership, Doris created opportunities for diversity, equity, and inclusion - opportunities that will continue to be provided by the Community Center. It is designed to advance equity and improve the quality of life for residents. Upon completion of the renovations at the park's Center for Families and Youth this summer, the complex will offer new services for teens and families, with a new health clinic, public health services, Pacific Gateway Workforce Center, and workspace for community-based organizations.

Future plans for the park include signature playground, an indoor gym, and restoration of the historic clubhouse.

As one of only five regional parks within our city, Houghton Park has a regional service area. It serves the needs of seniors and youth with space for after school, teen, and senior programs. Some of the impactful services and programs offered include senior programs such as computer classes, social clubs and fitness activities, and youth programs like homework assistance, sports, arts and crafts, and a Youth Employment Network Program. These offerings to support community's youth, seniors, health, and social needs, encompass core tenets of Mother Doris' legacy. Naming the community center after Mother Doris will create not only a source of local pride, but citywide and regional pride.

According to City of Long Beach administrative policy (AR8-7), "City-owned land, buildings and facilities will not normally be named after living persons unless the City Council deems it appropriate to take such action on the basis of a significant contribution,



monetary or otherwise, which warrants a deviation from this policy guideline." Vice Mayor Doris Topsy-Elvord most certainly meets the exception to this policy.

As we approach Doris's 90th Birthday (June 2021), it is befitting that the City of Long Beach commemorates her extensive contributions by naming the new community center complex at Houghton Park, the *Doris Topsy-Elvord Community Center*.

Special thanks to the members of the Doris Topsy-Elvord Naming Steering Committee:

- Hon. Steven Neal
- Steven and Jackie Topsy
- Cecile Harris-Walters
- Sharon Diggs Jackson
- Marcus Tyson
- Anitra Dempsey
- Michelle Dobson
- Joni Ricks-Oddie
- Wayne Chaney

Special thanks to the Offices of Dr. Suely Saro, 6<sup>th</sup> District, Roberto Uranga, 7<sup>th</sup> District, and Al Austin, 8<sup>th</sup> for joining in support of this historic proposal.

### **Equity Lens**

The proposal is consistent with Long Beach Reconciliation Initiative – Initial Report:

Goal 1: Strategy 1. *End systemic racism in Long Beach, in all local government and partner agencies, through internal transformation.*

- A. *Read past research, integrate it, and build on it by continuing to document the role of racism throughout the history of Long Beach and incorporate it into the Historic Context Statement and racial equity timeline. Immediate*
- B. *Create a process to review the names of public parks, schools (in partnership with LBUSD), buildings, and monuments with a racial equity lens. Short Term*

In a column in the Hechinger Report in 2017, by Dr. Andre Perry, a contributing writer, is a David M. Rubenstein Fellow at The Brookings Institution founding dean of urban education at Davenport University in Grand Rapids, MI, racial equity in naming of public institutions and landmarks is about making history, not erasing it. "The built environment is so much more than shelter, urban planning and architecture — it reflects our very



commitment to democracy. Our statues are monuments of the state of our democracy as much as they honor our beloved.”

This recommendation is appropriate and acknowledges cultural context. The City of Long Beach is updating its Historic Context Statement and preparing its first-ever historic context statement focused on Race and Suburbanization. These documents allow decisions to be rooted in a deeper understanding of the City’s history and evolution, including the communities of color that have helped shape it.

This action also acknowledges the city’s evolution. The North Long Beach community is large and diverse. It is home to over 90,000 residents, encompassing 40% of the city’s Black residents – now the largest concentration of Black residents within the City of Long Beach. It is home to the Michelle Obama Neighborhood Library, Jordan High School, and a focal point for new community revitalization.

#### **Fiscal Impact**

As part of the recommendation, staff is requested to identify and costs associated with updating signage and appropriate recognition associated with the community center naming and dedication.

#### **Suggested Action**

Approve recommendation.

#### **Attachments:**

Exhibit 1: Photo of Houghton Park Community Center

Exhibit 2: Community Letter



ANNOUNCING THE PROPOSED NAMING OF  
THE HOUGHTON PARK COMMUNITY CENTER TO

Attachment A

# DORIS TOPSY-ELVORD COMMUNITY CENTER

*In honor of Mother Doris Topsy-Elvord, a distinguished City leader and  
the first African American woman elected to Long Beach City Council*



OFFICE OF VICE MAYOR REX RICHARDSON

April 6, 2021

Honorable Mayor Robert Garcia  
Honorable Rex Richardson, Vice Mayor, 9th District  
Honorable Members of the Long Beach City Council

**SUBJECT: "DORIS TOPSY-ELVORD COMMUNITY CENTER" at Houghton Park**

Dear Mayor and Members of the City Council,

We respectfully recommend naming the community center at Houghton Park the DORIS TOPSY-ELVORD COMMUNITY CENTER.

As Long Beach's first Black Councilwoman, two-term Vice Mayor, and Harbor Commissioner, Doris Topsy-Elvord (Doris) has a decades-long legacy of servant leadership that enhanced the lives of many in and around Long Beach. She served with distinction, pioneered many firsts, and paved the way for Black leadership and civic engagement across the city. Evidenced by her moniker, *Mother Doris*, Doris consistently uplifts others and is respected and admired. **As we approach Doris's 90th Birthday (June 2021), it is befitting that the City of Long Beach commemorates her extensive contributions by naming the new community center at Houghton Park the DORIS TOPSY-ELVORD COMMUNITY CENTER.**

Vice Mayor Topsy-Elvord has been in Long Beach for more than 75 years, including living in Central and Uptown Long Beach, and remains a lifelong resident. As such, her relationships and influence are deeply rooted and citywide. She attended and graduated from St. Anthony Elementary and High School, where she was the only Black student and later attended California State University, Long Beach.

In 1992, she became the first Black woman elected to the Long Beach City Council and holds the honor of being unanimously selected twice as the Vice Mayor of Long Beach in 1996 and 1998. She helped co-found the Long Beach African American Heritage Society and led the successful proposal designating the home of civil rights icons Ernest and Lillian McBride as a historic site. Nominated to serve as a Port of Long Beach Harbor Commissioner by then-Mayor Beverly O'Neill, Doris was the first Black and, at the time, only the third woman to serve on the five-member port commission in its nearly 80-year history. During her tenure at the port, she was instrumental in expanding the Port's Small Business Enterprise Program and the Green Port Policy. Both programs are still thriving today.

With the enduring support of her husband, Ralph, children, and grandchildren, Doris has a remarkable record of civic service, community engagement, stewardship, and leadership. Vice Mayor Doris represented all of Long Beach. Her civic service history, community engagement, and leadership continue to have lasting impacts on our entire city. Her commitment and stewardship earned her deep admiration and great respect from a wide breadth of friends, colleagues, educational and civic leaders, and countless others. In short, Doris created

opportunities for diversity, equity, and inclusion that did not exist prior to her advocacy and leadership.

The Doris Topsy-Elvord Community Center will encompass the community center at Houghton Park. The newly built community center boasts more than 26,000 square feet, with two large multi-purpose rooms, a courtyard, a Teen Digital Academy, a weightlifting gym, and a sound/plant garden. As a regional park, the center serves over 95,000 residents. Many impactful services and programs are offered, including senior citizen activities such as crafts and dancing, youth programs such as after school and sports, and meal programs.

Future development plans will transform the entire park into a comprehensive complex serving the community's youth, health, and social needs, core tenets of Mother Doris's legacy. Plans include a gym, a new signature playground, and the restoration of the original historic clubhouse. Set to open this summer is the North Health Facility, a health and workforce center to advance equity for North Long Beach residents.

Signage for the Doris Topsy-Elvord Community Center is envisioned to be prominently displayed along the main entrance. A dedication area outlining the significance of her service to the City of Long Beach will be displayed.

With respect and admiration, the undersigned wholeheartedly recommend to the Mayor and City Council that Doris Topsy-Elvord be commended and recognized for her countless and pioneering contributions to the Long Beach community along with her significant professional, educational, and civic accomplishments. And, ***therefore, we recommend naming the community complex at Houghton Park the "DORIS TOPSY-ELVORD COMMUNITY CENTER."***

Undersigned respectfully,

#### **Steering Committee Members**

Hon. Steven Neal

Anitra Dempsey

Steven and Jackie Topsy

Michelle Dobson

Cecile Harris-Walters

Joni Ricks-Oddie

Sharon Diggs Jackson

Wayne Chaney, Sr.

Marcus Tyson

**Community Leaders**

Ahmed Saafir, Community Leader

Minnie Douglas, Ed.D., R.N., Health  
Education Consultant

Robin S. Thorne, CEO, CTI Environmental,  
Inc.

Richard “Dick” Gaylord, Realtor

Felton Williams, Ph.D., LBUUSD Board  
President, Retired

Wilma D. Powell, Community Leader, City of  
Long Beach (Port of Long Beach) Retiree

Ms. Robbie N. Butler – Speak Up  
Empowerment Foundation, Inc.

Lydia A. Hollie, JD/MAED, Community  
Leader

Darick J. Simpson, Community Leader

Robert Jenkins, Community Leader

Dr. Lance Robert, Community Leader

Carl Kemp, Community Leader  
Dr. Oliver &  
Mrs. Lisa Brooks, Community Leaders

Beverly O’Neill, Mayor City of Long Beach

Sally Lewis, Community Leader

Tony Gales, Community Leader

Walter Larkins, Economic Development  
Commissioner

Barbara Sullivan George, Community Leader

Ivy Arlinda Goolsby, Community Leader

Phyllis Venable, CEO Silhouette Consulting  
Group

Lori Ann Farrell Harrison, Community  
Leader

Jean Bixby Smith, Bixby Family

Ron Nelson, Executive Director Long Beach  
Museum of Art

Gail Schwandner, Retired, Dean Workforce  
Development Long Beach City College

Dr. Ruth Hayes, Community Leader

Malcolm Bennett, International Realty and  
Investments

Steve Goodling, Long Beach Convention &  
Visitors Bureau

Senay Kenfe, Community Leader

Treana Allen, Community Leader

Dr. Sabrina Sanders, Community Leader

H. Maxie Viltz, Community Leader

Evelyn D. Knight, Community Leader

Dale E. Clinton, Civil Service Commissioner  
Retired, Community Leader

Carolyn Caldwell, Community Leader

Ron Arias, Director, Long Beach Health  
Department, Retired

Paula Wood, Executive Director of Success  
in Challenges Inc.

Aaron Blackburn, Derricks on Atlantic  
Restaurant, Private Investigator



Dr. Alex Norman, Community Leader

Rich Archbold, Community Leader

Dr. Farah Naz Khaleghi, Executive Director,  
Long Beach Community Improvement  
League

Gail Schwander, Vice President, Long Beach  
City College

Paul Garman, Musical Theater West

Gina Rushing McGuire, St. Anthony High  
School

Everett Glenn, Chairman & CEO, BOSS  
Programs

Ernest and Peggy Trotter Preacely,  
Community Leaders

#### **North Long Beach Neighborhood Leaders**

Val Lerch, Vice Mayor Ret.

Ralph Brook, Co-President, Houghton Park  
Neighborhood Association

Otis Hogan, Co-President, Houghton Park  
Neighborhood Association

Maricela Renteria De Rivera, Houghton Park  
Neighborhood Association

Jimmy Murray, Starr King Neighborhood  
Association

Shirley Murray, Star King Neighborhood  
Association

Jeff Rowe, President Neyham  
Neighborhood Association

#### **Faith Leaders**

Pastor Gregory Sanders

Colleen Bentley, Community Leader

Byron Bolton, Community Leader

Janet McCarthy, Community Leader

David & Sharon McLucas, Owners,  
Forgotten Images

Robin D. Perry, Esq., President, Long Beach  
Bar Association, Chairman, St. Mary Medical  
Center Foundation Board of Trustees

Maurice Anderson, Former Staff, Legislative  
Analyst

Davian Freeman, Former Staff, Legislative  
Analyst

Nicole Ballard, President, African American  
Heritage Society Long Beach

Juanita Dopplemore, President, Collins  
Neighborhood Association

Dan Pressburg, President, DeForest Park  
Neighborhood Association

Renette Mazza, Co-President, Hamilton  
Neighborhood Association

Jerry Fink, Co-President, Hamilton  
Neighborhood Association

Linda Campbell, Co-President, Hamilton  
Park Neighborhood Association

Nubia Cedeño, Chair, Citizens Advisory  
Commission on Disabilities

Bishop W.T. Ervin

Pastor Artis T. Lanier, Sr.

Dr. Leon Wood

Pastor Torie Russell, Sr.

Pastor, Reginald Giving, Sr.

Pastor Eddie Patterson

Dr. Bruce Riley