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October 30, 2007

The Honorable Tom LaBonge, Chair
The Honorable Jan Perry
The Honorable Janice Hahn
Arts, Parks, Health and Aging Committee
City Hall
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Support Fair Distribution of Quimby Funds for Recreation and Parks

Dear Chair LaBonge and Honorable Councilmembers:

We submit these public comments to support the fair distribution of Quimby funds as part of a fair system of financing and fees to improve parks and recreation in every neighborhood.

City Controller Laura Chick took a giant step forward to provide a blueprint for creating healthy parks, schools, and communities for all when she published the audit of the Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) almost two years ago. Since then, however, there have been several steps backwards.

The Controller's audit emphasized the need for a strategic plan to improve parks and recreation programs in every neighborhood, and eliminate unfair disparities; a fair system of park financing and fees; standards to measure equity and progress in achieving reform; a community needs assessment every five years; shared use of parks and schools; and improved park safety. One of the Controller's major recommendations is that the City "needs to strategically address issues of inequity regarding levels of service provided at parks citywide."¹ The audit is available at www.cityprojectca.org/blog/archives/255.

The distribution of Quimby funds has long exacerbated park inequities. Los Angeles is park poor, and there are unfair park, school, and health disparities throughout the City. As reported in the Los Angeles Times:

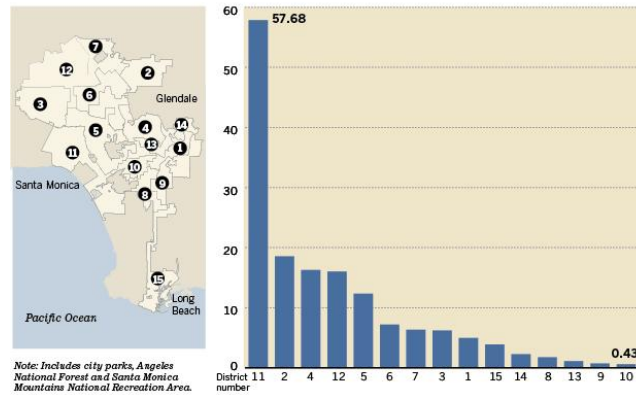
1. Performance Audit of Recreation and Community Services in the Department of Recreation and Parks, Jan. 6, 2006, at 10, available at www.cityprojectca.org/blog/wp-content/RecreationandCommunityServicesAudit.pdf.

Los Angeles parkland

The amount of park acreage available to L.A. residents varies widely from one part of the city to another. Nationally, some park planners recommend six to 10 acres of parks per 1,000 residents.

City Council districts

Acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, by council district



Note: Includes city parks, Angeles National Forest and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

Source: The City Project: "Healthy Parks, Schools and Communities," 2006

Los Angeles Times

Park inequities are extensively documented in the Policy Report by Robert García and Aubrey White, *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities: Mapping Green Access and Equity for the Los Angeles Region 11-12* (2006), Map 801 and Chart 801C.

The distribution of Quimby funds perpetuates the inequities, as reported recently in the Los Angeles Times. Thus, for example, City Council District 11 on the west side, which has the greatest total acres of parks and is disproportionately white and wealthy, has \$11.9 million in Quimby funds for park improvements. District 8 in South Los Angeles, which is park-poor and disproportionately populated by people of color and low income people, has only \$58,000. See Steve Hymon, *Few Parks, But City Sits on a Pile of Green*, L.A. Times, Oct. 20, 2007. See also Anna Scott, *Problems with Park Funds Mount*, Downtown News, Oct. 22, 2007; Anna Scott, *Land Eyed for Parks May Be Unavailable*, Downtown News, Oct. 29, 2007.

The Controller's audit and the Policy Report document park and funding inequities that city officials have known about for decades. The city of Los Angeles virtually abandoned parks, school construction, and public recreation in the wake of Proposition 13 in 1978, the taxpayers' revolt, which cut funding for local services, including parks and schools. In 1987 the Los Angeles Times reported that "[i]n scores of city parks across Los Angeles -- mostly cramped sites in poor neighborhoods -- fear is high. So pervasive are gangs, drug dealers and drunks, so limited are the programs and facilities, that the sites are known to parents and even some recreation directors as 'dead parks.'" Robin Kramer, then a city council deputy and now the mayor's chief of staff, acknowledged in that article that "there is tremendous under serving" of people in poor neighborhoods by the parks department.² In 1999, then-Mayor Richard Riordan told the Wall Street Journal that poorer communities have been short-changed by funding formulas for parks and recreation. "The way money is spread throughout the city has not been based on need as much as it has been about equally distributing funds" among the 15 council districts, according to the mayor.³ Park officials concurred. "It's a pattern we all understand," according to the then-director of planning and development for Recreation and Parks. "The urban areas of Los Angeles have less park facilities than the new areas or outer lying areas, where ordinances require that parks be developed when housing developments go in" (referring to Quimby ordinances).⁴ "I think the mayor's sincere in

² David Johnston, *Dead Parks*, L.A. TIMES, Sept. 3, 1987.

³ Shirley Leung, *Riordan Seeks More Funds for Urban Core*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, April 28, 1999.

⁴ Jocelyn Stewart, *Officials Resort to Creativity to Meet Need for Parks*, LOS ANGELES TIMES, June 15, 1998. Accord, Shirley Leung, *Riordan Seeks More Funds for Urban Core*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, April 28, 1999.

his desire to address these inequities," Robert García told the Wall Street Journal, but "I don't think the city is doing enough."⁵

The City Project has made every effort to work with the Mayor's Office and RAP to implement the reforms called for in the Controller's audit. In April 2006, for example, we met with officials from the Mayor's Office and RAP to discuss the unfair park disparities and outline a plan for change. Memo from Robert García to the Mayor, April 16, 2006; accord, Letter from Robert García to the Mayor, November 29, 2005; Letter from Robert García to Deputy Mayor Raymond Cortines, August 8, 2007.

Almost two years after the Controller published the blueprint for reform, however, little has changed. The community needs assessment called for in the audit is not scheduled for release until at least February or March of 2008 – more than two years after the release of the audit. We have requested but have not received a time frame for publishing the strategic plan called for in the audit.

We nevertheless remain eager to work with the community and with the honorable members of this Committee, the City, the Mayor's Office, and Recreation and Parks to help implement the Controller's reforms and help create healthy, livable communities for all. To that end, we recommend the following principles for the investment of Quimby funds.

Quimby funds should be invested fairly and equitably to ensure that everyone – especially people of color and low income communities who suffer most from park, school field, and health disparities – benefits from the creation of parks and park improvements. The process for deciding how those funds are invested, and the outcomes of those decisions, should be open, fair and beneficial to all. The investment of Quimby funds should be guided by a city and region wide vision to improve parks, recreation, and health in every neighborhood. Quimby park investments should be planned with other infrastructure investments such as school construction and modernization funds for the shared use of parks and schools. Quimby funds should provide for the diverse needs of diverse users, including balanced parks with active recreation to promote human health. Employment benefits from Quimby investments should be distributed fairly through, for example, green jobs for local workers. Quimby funds should be targeted to alleviate or mitigate the continuing history and pattern of unfair park, school, and health disparities. The City should affirmatively comply with civil rights, environmental, and other laws in allocating Quimby funds. Quimby fees should be invested according to standards for measuring progress and equity. *See generally* García and White, *supra*, at pages 8-12, 14, 16-18, 19-24.

We look forward to meeting with each of you to create healthy, livable communities for all.

Sincerely,

Robert García
Executive Director and Counsel

Jason Insdorf
Law Fellow

Raul Macías
Anahuak Youth Association

Cc: Controller Laura Chick
