



1055 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1660 Los Angeles, CA 90017-2499 T: (213)977-1035 F: (213)977-5457 www.cityprojectca.org

March 18, 2008

The Honorable Eric Garcetti
The Honorable Tom LaBonge
The Honorable Janice Hahn
Los Angeles City Council
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA

re: Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities Presentation before the City Council

Dear President Garcetti and Honorable Councilmembers:

Thank you for the opportunity to present our Policy Report *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities: Mapping Green Access and Equity for the City of Los Angeles (2007)* (“HPSC”) before the full Council on March 18, 2008. We have delivered the complete Report to each Councilmember with a poster-size map of each district showing access to parks, schools, and pools. We enthusiastically endorse Councilman’s LaBonge’s recommendation that each Councilmember assign a deputy to work on these matters. We look forward to continuing the conversation with individual Councilmembers. Children of color living in poverty with no access to cars have the worst access to parks, and to schools with five acres or more of playing fields, and the highest levels of obesity. The following is a summary of our recommendations to create healthy, livable communities for all.

1. Implement *now* Controller Laura Chick’s blueprint to improve recreation and parks in every neighborhood. The 2006 audit called for a strategic plan; a community needs assessment; standards to measure progress and equity and hold officials accountable; a fair system of finance and fees; shared use of parks and schools; and community safety in parks. Two years later the reforms have yet to be implemented. The current needs assessment is not tied to an overall strategic plan. Like Yogi Berra said, if you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up someplace else. We recommend that the strategic plan be completed within six months, and that the City Council receive progress reports from Recreation and Parks every 60 days to ensure the strategic plan is completed on time and implemented. *See* HPSC 11-12.

2. Invest Quimby park fees *now*. Controller Chick’s audit called for a fair system of finance and fees. Her recent audit showed that the City has \$129 million in unused Quimby park fees and no plan to use them. We recommend that the City work with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to create and upgrade parks with those funds now. The Conservancy has a proven record of working with the City, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and the community at Augustus Hawkins Park in South Los Angeles, Vista Hermosa in Pico Union, Ascot Hills in East Los Angeles, the Great Wall of Los Angeles, Griffith Park on the East Bank of the Los Angeles River, and Transit to Trails.

3. Implement a fair system of park finance and fees, and reform Quimby, based on need. The red hot spots on Map 801CD and individual CD maps pinpoint the communities with the greatest need for parks and recreation, as Councilwoman Hahn has emphasized. The City should raise funds through local park bond measures. Park funds should be invested based on need, measured by park poverty and economic poverty. The most park poor communities have less than 3 net acres of parks per thousand residents. Economic poverty ranges from poverty up to three times the poverty line for a family of four. Poverty is an alias for racial and ethnic inequities. HPSC 8-9, 14-16. The City should not use artificial formulas for park funding, including the one or two mile Quimby radius, that exacerbate inequities. Park funding should be based on need, not “walking distance to the park” or “1/4 mile

Healthy, Livable Communities For All

Board of Advisors: Chris Burrows Lydia Camarillo Virginia Keeny Robbie LaBelle Lyndon Parker
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to the park” or calls for “pocket parks.” Bus stops are a mile from most residents. L.A. will not provide more parks than bus stops. Nearby pocket parks are no answer if they do not serve community needs including the need for physical activity. With reducing obesity a goal, walking a mile to the park can help. HPSC 16.

4. Implement the joint use of parks, schools, and pools. We congratulate the City Council and LAUSD Board for passing joint use resolutions and look forward to the implementation to make optimal use of scarce land and public resources. HPSC 9-10. The Miguel Contreras and every other public pool should be open after school and on weekends. *See* www.tinyurl.com/2vdvfj. We also recommend that the City and LAUSD develop a plan now to give 700,000 children places and programs for physical activity when year-round schools end in 2010.

5. Support healthy parks, schools, and communities. Parks and schools should provide places and policies to help children move more, eat well, stay healthy, do their best in school and in life. Los Angeles needs to reduce childhood obesity levels ranging from 18.1% to 29.3%. HPSC 9-10. There is a national call to reverse childhood obesity by 2015. L.A. should do that sooner. We request that the Council support the physical education campaign by United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) to enforce physical education requirements in public schools, limit P.E. classes to 55 students per teacher, and have a credentialed P.E. teacher in every elementary school. *See* www.tinyurl.com/2hqpect.

6. Cultural and heritage monuments should reflect the diversity of Los Angeles. Out of over 700 official monuments in the City, only 60 pertain to women, people of color, and Native Americans. We are working with Judy Baca and SPARC (Social and Public Art Resource Center): (1) to restore and extend the Great Wall of Los Angeles with Councilwoman Gruel’s support; (2) create pilot projects linking over 100 Heritage Parkscape sites from the Great Wall, to Río de Los Angeles State Park, Los Angeles State Historic Park, and El Pueblo; and (3) restore L.A. as the mural capital of the world. We seek the Council’s support. *See* HPSC 7, www.tinyurl.com/2f7yuo, www.tinyurl.com/2knyq7.

7. Provide multibenefit green spaces for parks, schools, and conservation of water, air, and land. Infrastructure funds should be invested in multibenefit green spaces along the L.A. River and through the integrated regional water management plan. Green spaces can clean water and air, serve as flood control basins, and help reduce the urban carbon footprint and global warming to promote climate justice for all. HPSC 20.

8. Promote economic vitality through affordable housing, green jobs, and an even playing field for MBEs. The City should fight displacement and promote economic vitality through targeted investments. HPSC 20.

9. Sharing information. Pursuant to the Council’s March 18 motion, we request that the Bureau of Engineers and the Recreation and Parks Department share: (1) the source of Quimby fees electronically so we can map that with parks, schools, and demographics; (2) information to restore Griffith Park on the East Bank of the L.A. River; and any new park information so we can update the maps for each district, including President Garcetti’s.

10. Implement principles for regional equity, social justice and smart growth. Parks and schools are critical parts of healthy, livable communities for all. We look forward to working with you to ensure everyone, including low income communities and communities of color, shares equally in the benefits and burdens. HPSC 19-24.

Very truly yours,

Robert García
Executive Director and Counsel

Angela Mooney D’Arcy
Policy Director

Jason Insdorf
Law Fellow

Meagan Yellott
Program Director

cc: Honorable City Council Members
Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa
Controller Laura Chick