May 20, 2008

Councilman Tom LaBonge
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Room 480
Los Angeles, CA 90012

President Monica García
Los Angeles Unified School District
Board of Education
333 South Beaudry Avenue, 24th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017

re: Joint Use of Parks, Schools, and Pools -- Preliminary Comments

Dear Councilman LaBonge and President García:

I. Overview

We congratulate the City Council and Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education for each passing joint use resolutions recently. We understand that a working group has been meeting and that it plans to issue an interim report soon and a final report in July 2008. The City Project submits this letter to address the preliminary concerns we have both about the process and about substantive issues.

We summarize our concerns briefly here. These concerns are addressed at greater length in the following documents:

(1) the May 16, 2008, public comments by a diverse coalition that includes Anahuak Youth Association, Community Health Councils, Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles, Prevention Institute, and The City Project regarding the community needs assessment being conducted by the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) (attached); and


Participation by Community Groups and Organizations. The motions by the City Council and the LAUSD Board each call for participation by “community groups” and “community organizations” -- but there are none in the working group. With all due respect, neither People for Parks nor SEIU purport to be or are community groups or community organizations. In addition, there are no community groups or organizations on the working group dedicated to working for children on places and policies for physical activity and healthy eating in parks and schools. There should be, to comply with the letter and spirit of the resolutions, to ensure full and fair public participation in the
process, to maximize the quality of any work product, and ultimately to serve the best interests of the children and the people of Los Angeles.

We recommend that the working group in fact include community groups or organizations that work on helping students move more, eat well, stay healthy, and do their best in life and in school. Raul Macias and Anahuak Youth Association or their representatives are eager to participate in the working group. We are happy to provide additional recommendations.

Substantive Concerns. According to one participant, the working group is set to “hammer out the exact details” for joint use as follows.

1. “The working group believes that schools should have to apply to be a Community School Park. . . . Their site councils have to agree to having their schools selected as a CSP.”

2. “These are the basic elements of the needs-based site selection criterion:
   - Schools should be located in low income neighborhoods (we are looking at defining that as the % of families living in poverty in census tract)
   - Schools should serve low income students (Title one schools)
   - Schools should be located in areas without access to public parks in walking distance.
   - Density will also be factored in.”

Our substantive concerns based on those points are discussed in the following section.

II. Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities

The following are our preliminary concerns.

A Common Vision for Parks, Schools, and Pools. Los Angeles needs to implement a collective regional vision that will bring people together based on the values at stake for a comprehensive system of parks, schools, pools, and transit that promotes human health, a better environment, and economic vitality for all.

Los Angeles is park poor, and there are unfair park, school, and health disparities based on race, ethnicity, income, poverty, youth, and access to cars. Parks, schools, and pools must be improved for all ages in all neighborhoods, especially in the most underserved communities. Los Angeles must create places and policies in parks and schools for children to move more, eat well, stay healthy, and do their best in school and in life. Joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools should be part of that vision to achieve those goals.

The Values at Stake. The joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools should reflect the diverse values at stake. Parks, schools, and pools are places to have fun. Having fun goes hand-in-hand with other values including human health; youth development and academic performance; conservation values of clean air, water, and land; spiritual values in protecting
people and the earth; economic vitality; and sustainable regional planning. Fundamental principles of equal justice and democracy underlie each of these other values.

Health. The joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools needs to address the need for places and policies for physical activity and healthy eating to reduce obesity and improve health. The City and LAUSD should conduct a health impact assessment on the joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools as part of the process of developing a report and master agreement.

The joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools should enable LAUSD to enforce physical education requirements under state law requiring an average of 20 minutes a day in elementary school and 40 minutes in middle and high school.

The prevalence of childhood obesity by City Council district ranges from the highest level of 29.3% in district 9 (Parks) in South Los Angeles to 18.1% in district 5 (Weiss) in West L.A.

Obesity among school children in LAUSD has increased from 20.2% in 1999 to 26.1% in 2006, going from 1 in 5 children being obese to over 1 in 4. The percentage of overweight school children has generally been increasing in the long term at a faster rate at LAUSD than at other school districts in Los Angeles County, and will soon hit 30% – almost 1 in 3 children obese.

Master Agreement. There should be a master agreement for the joint use of parks, schools, and pools. Joint and community use should not depend on individual schools. That is what happens now, and it does not work. There were only 30 joint use agreements as of April 2006 between LAUSD and RAP. The master agreement should resolve issues of liability, staffing, and costs. Every park, school, and pool should be subject to the master agreement, in the absence of compelling reasons to exclude an individual park or school.

Need. Places and programs for joint use of parks, schools, and pools, should be targeted to serve the communities with the greatest need first. Need should be measured in terms of poverty of parks and school fields, and economic poverty. Poverty of parks and school fields should be defined as less than three net acres of parks or school fields per thousand residents. Economic poverty should be defined within a specific range that falls between the federal poverty line up to three times the federal poverty line. The annual income for a family of four to provide for its basic needs in Los Angeles was slightly more than $63,000 in 2005, more than three times the federal poverty level. The need standard should comply with the equal protection of the laws, including Title VI, Title IX, California Government Code 11135, and their regulations.

The City Project’s maps and analyses illustrate park and school needs by City Council District and by LAUSD Board member district, respectively. The maps and analyses are available on the web at: www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/sets/72157601161353796 and www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/sets/72157601164752423.
**Distance.** “Walking distance to the park” in the abstract should not be the relevant standard for determining the joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools.

There is no “correct” distance to evaluate fair access to parks, schools, and pools in the abstract. The optimal distance depends on the needs of the community, the type of facility including parks, schools, and pools, and access to cars and transit. The City Project mapping studies show that many areas in Los Angeles lie more than half a mile from the nearest park, but any distance in the abstract can be arbitrary and misleading, such as half-mile or quarter-mile access, walking distance, driving distance, etc.

The important concern is not distance alone but whether the park, school, or pool meets the needs of the community. With physical activity to reduce obesity and diabetes as a goal, for example, people can get physically active by walking half a mile or more to a park, school, or pool. With the shared use of parks, schools, and pools, the relevant distance is to the park, school, or pool, not to parks alone. If residents have access to a car or an affordable and reliable transit system, the distance to the park, school, or pool can be greater. Smaller parks and elementary school playgrounds within walking distance can serve the needs of younger children. Larger parks, and playing fields at middle and high schools, can provide places for physical activity and team sports for older children and adults, and can be within driving or busing rather than walking distance. In a high income community with large house lots and back yard pools, and ready access to cars and places like the Santa Monica Mountains, there is no need for a park, school, or pool within a quarter mile. A pocket park within walking distance may not adequately serve the needs of the community if there is no place to play. Even a large park, school field, and pool may not adequately serve the community if the population and use density are so high that demand exceeds available recreation space. One traditional environmental organization advocates a park within a quarter mile of each residence, and equates walking distance with a quarter mile, but it is difficult to consider this a serious policy proposal. The quarter mile or walking distance standard obscures the important considerations discussed above. Bus stops in Los Angeles are generally about a mile from most people. It is unrealistic to expect more parks than bus stops.

**Pools.** The Miguel Contreras Learning Complex epitomizes both the need for the joint use of parks, schools, and pools, and public interest in and support for joint use. There have been at least 20 articles calling on RAP and LAUSD to make public recreation facilities available for all to enjoy in response to the organizing campaign by Acorn and The City Project. The articles are available at www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/schools.html#miguelcontreraspool. Pools should be part of a joint use agreement between RAP and LAUSD.

**Summary.** The following is a summary of our preliminary concerns at the present time.

1. The joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools should be part of the strategic plan and community needs assessment that RAP should complete and release within the next six months.
2. The City, RAP, and LAUSD should develop and implement a master joint use agreement for the shared use of parks, schools, and pools.

3. The City, LAUSD, and RAP should develop a plan now to provide places and programs for physical activity and recreation when year-round schools end by 2010, and 700,000 students will be out on the streets each summer with nothing to do.

4. There need to be standards based on need to measure progress and equity and to hold officials accountable for improving joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools.

5. RAP and LAUSD should develop and implement standards for a fair system of finance and fees based on need, and compliance with equal protection standards. There should be stipends or scholarships and not “Pay to Play” at schools or parks for non-profit organizations that target underserved children whose parents could not otherwise afford recreation programs. Children’s programs such as soccer or baseball should take precedence over adult programs, even if adult leagues can pay more for the space.

6. RAP and LAUSD should conduct a health impact assessment to evaluate joint use and places and policies for physical activity and healthy eating in parks and schools, and to target reduction of obesity to a specific amount by a specific time.

7. RAP should implement healthy food and beverage policies in parks and recreation centers that meet or exceed the requirements for LAUSD and public schools.

8. The City, RAP, and LAUSD should provide places and recreation programs as alternatives to gangs, crime, and violence, as recommended in the Controller’s recent audit.

9. Safety in parks, schools, and pools, both real and perceived, should be improved.

10. Resources should be combined to create multibenefit parks, schools, pools, clean water projects, and flood control sites.

11. RAP and LAUSD should promote green jobs for local workers, and an even playing field for MBES – minority, women, and veteran owned business enterprises. The LAUSD Facilities Division has a program that is a best practice example of how to do this.

12. The City, RAP, and LAUSD should develop and implement a joint “Transit to Trails” program to take students on fun, educational trips to parks, beaches, forests, lakes, and other public natural spaces. Both the City and LAUSD have buses and drivers available.

13. The City, RAP, and LAUSD should expand the use of parks and schools to provide places and programs for cultural, historical, and artistic monuments that faithfully, completely, and accurately depict the history and diversity of Los Angeles, including people of color, women, and workers. Monuments should stimulate and provoke a greater understanding of, and dialogue
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on, diversity, democracy, and freedom. Parks and schools should be named after everyday heroes who reflect the diversity of Los Angeles.

14. The City, RAP, and LAUSD should implement principles to achieve regional equity, social justice, and regional growth through the joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools. We recommend the ten principles in the attached letter.

CONCLUSION

The City Project has long been an advocate for the joint use of parks, schools, and pools. For example, we are working with United Teachers of Los Angeles and others on the UTLA physical education campaign. I served as Chair of the LAUSD Citizens’ School Bond Oversight Committee from 2000 to 2005. We have helped create great new urban parks and preserved existing parks and open space. We look forward to working with the City Council, RAP, LAUSD, and the working group to develop and implement the joint and community use of parks, schools, and pools to achieve healthy, livable communities for all. We look forward to meeting with each of you and with the working group soon to discuss these concerns.

Sincerely,

Robert García  
Executive Director and Counsel

cc: Guy Mehula, LAUSD Facilities Chief  
    Paul Habib, Field Deputy, Councilman Jose Huizar  
    Raul Macias, Anahuac Youth Association  
    Lark Galloway, Community Health Councils  
    Mark Williams, Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles  
    Manal Aboeleta, Prevention Institute
May 16, 2008

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Mia Lehrer  
Mia Lehrer & Associates  
3780 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 250  
Los Angeles, CA 90010

re: Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities for All: Community Needs Assessment  
Response to Public Workshop Survey Questions

Dear Mr. Sanders, Mr. Mukri, and Ms. Lehrer:

We submit the following public comments on behalf of Anahuak Youth Association,  
Community Health Councils, Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles, Prevention  
Institute, and The City Project in response to the Public Workshop Survey Questions circulated  
by the Department of Recreation and Parks.

Anahuak Youth Association focuses on improving education, health, and the environment for  
thousands of disproportionately low income and Latino children in underserved communities in  
North East Los Angeles. It also provides group team soccer opportunities to children whose  
families cannot afford the fees charged by other local programs.

Community Health Councils (CHC) is a non-profit community-based health promotion,  
avocacy and policy organization. CHC works to strengthen community participation in defining  
state and local policies that impact healthcare access and quality and to increase access for  
uninsured, economically-disadvantaged and underserved populations.

Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles is a nonprofit public benefit community-based  
organization whose mission is to work for social justice and economic and environmental change  
within the South Central community.

Prevention Institute is a non-profit national center dedicated to improving community health and  
well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means  
taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. Since its founding in
1997, the organization has focused on injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, health disparities, nutrition and physical activity, and youth development.

The City Project is a multicultural policy and legal advocacy organization that is working to broaden access to parks and open space, especially in underserved communities, and to fight childhood obesity by guaranteeing that students get enough physical education.

We address each question in the order presented in the online survey.

(1) What are your general perceptions of the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks System?

Los Angeles needs to implement a collective regional vision that will bring people together based on the values at stake for a comprehensive system of parks, schools, rivers, beaches, mountains, forests, and transit to trails that promotes human health, a better environment, and economic vitality for all.

Los Angeles is park poor, and there are unfair park, school, and health disparities based on race, ethnicity, income, poverty, youth, and access to cars. Parks and recreation must be improved for all ages in all neighborhoods, and especially in the most underserved communities. Los Angeles must create places and policies in parks and schools for children to move more, eat well, stay healthy, and do their best in school and in life.

Children of color living in poverty with no access to a car in Los Angeles suffer from the worst access to parks, large schools fields, beaches, forests, trails, and other natural public places, and suffer from the highest levels of child obesity. These children and their families and friends do not have access to cars or a decent transit system to take them to parks, schools, and other natural public places. Disproportionately white and wealthy people with fewer children than the county average enjoy the best access to parks, school fields, beaches, forests, trails, and transportation. In a cruel irony, those who need the most have the least, and those who need less have the most.

The human health implications of the lack of places for physical activity are profound. These children disproportionately suffer from obesity, diabetes, and other diseases related to inactivity.

*See generally Robert Garcia and Aubrey White, Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities: Mapping Green Access and Equity for the Los Angeles Region, Maps 401, 801 (The City Project Policy Report 2007) (hereafter “Garcia and White, L.A. Region Report”). We have previously supplied hard copies of this Report. The Report is also available online at www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/mappinggreenaccess/documents/Healthy_Parks_Schools_Communities_textonly.pdf. Maps and analyses by City Council District are available at www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/sets/72157601161353796. Remarks of City Council members in response to this study are attached as Appendix A.*
Parks. As reported in the Los Angeles Times, for example, there are large disparities in the amount of park acreage for L.A. residents based on city council district, as illustrated in the following chart.¹

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**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 ten acres of parks per 1,000 residents.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>City Council districts</th>
<th>Acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, by council district</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>10</td>
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Note: Includes city parks, Angeles National Forest and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

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

Thus, for example, there is less than half an acre of parks per thousand residents in District 10, which includes the inner city of South Los Angeles. There are almost 60 acres of parks per thousand residents in District 11 in West Los Angeles. South Los Angeles is disproportionately populated by people of color and low income people. West Los Angeles is disproportionately white and wealthy. See García and White, *L.A. Region Report*, 8-10, Chart 801C and 801N.

**Childhood Obesity.** The levels of childhood obesity are intolerably high even for children in the best neighborhoods. Cities with less open area set aside as parks, recreational area, or wilderness

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area are more likely to have a higher prevalence of children who are obese, according to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

The prevalence of childhood obesity by City Council district is shown in the chart above. The highest level is 29.3% in district 9 (Parks) in South Los Angeles. Even the lowest level of 18.1% is unacceptably high in district 5 (Weiss) in West L.A. The prevalence of childhood obesity varies significantly among cities and communities, from a low of 4% in Manhattan Beach to a high of 37% in Maywood.

The County Health Department found a higher prevalence of obesity in cities or communities where the economic burden (higher poverty, lower educational attainment, more dependents, etc.) was greater compared to other cities and communities in the County.²

The County Health Department has documented that obesity among school children in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has increased from 20.2% in 1999 to 26.1% in 2006, going from 1 in 5 children being obese to over 1 in 4. The percentage of overweight school children has generally been increasing in the long term at a faster rate at LAUSD than at other school districts in Los Angeles County, and will soon hit 30% – almost 1 in 3 children obese. These facts are illustrated in the following chart.

² Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Preventing Childhood Obesity: the need to create healthy places. A Cities and Communities Health Report. October 2007.
The Controller’s Blue Print for Change

Los Angeles City Controller Laura Chick issued a blueprint to improve recreation and parks in every neighborhood in November 2005 and January 2006. The Controller’s audit echoes the concerns noted above and makes specific recommendations including: (1) a strategic plan to improve recreation and parks for all; (2) a timely community needs assessment; (3) standards to measure progress and equity and to hold officials accountable; (4) a fair system of finance and fees; (5) shared use of parks and schools; and (6) improved park safety. We agree with the Controller on the need for each of these reforms.

Over two years later the reforms have yet to be implemented. Indeed, the Controller’s recent audit of Quimby funds focuses acutely on the continuing need for a fair system of finance and fees. The current needs assessment is an important step. However, the needs assessment is taking far too long, and it is not tied to an overall strategic plan. As Yogi Bera said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up someplace else.” A reasonable time to complete the needs assessment and strategic plan would have been less than a year after the audit was published, or by January 2007.

“This has been a painfully slow process,” according to Controller. “I welcome The City Project’s involvement, but it is unfortunate that they have had to use their time and energy on something that should have already been completed by our Recreation and Parks Department.” Anna Scott, A Tale of Two Studies: Some Concerned Rec and Parks Report Replicates Work Already Done, Los Angeles Downtown News April 7, 2008.
We recommend that both the strategic plan and needs assessment be completed within six months, and that the City Council receive progress reports from Recreation and Parks every 30 days to ensure the strategic plan is completed on time and implemented effectively without further delay.

(2) How balanced do you think the recreation and parks system is in terms of park types, facilities, and programs?

The existing recreation and parks system is not balanced. There are unfair disparities in terms of park types, facilities, and programs based on neighborhood, race, ethnicity, income, poverty, youth, and access to cars.

We recommend as follows: People are entitled to a balanced system of parks and natural public places that serve the diverse needs of diverse users. Park and recreation plans, programs, and funding need to diversify interests in a balanced system that includes, for example, parks, schools, pools, places for physical activity to improve health, active recreation, passive recreation, beaches, mountains, and trails. The strategic plan and needs assessment should address and meet these diverse needs.

The Río de Los Angeles State Park at Taylor Yard is a best practice example of a well balanced park that provides active recreation with soccer fields, courts, a running track, and bike paths, as well as passive recreation, natural parkland, and picnic areas.

We recommend that the City and the Department develop and implement standards to measure reform and equity in achieving a balanced system of parks, facilities, and programs, as discussed below. For example, the strategic plan and needs assessment should address: What diverse programs does the community need? How is each need to be met? How much will it cost? Where will the money come from?

New Yorkers for Parks, for example, as part of their long range plan for City parks is calculating acres of parks for active recreation and acres for passive recreation.

Disparities Cited in the Controller’s Audit. The Controller’s January 5, 2006, audit of recreation and parks emphasized that “not all areas of the City have the same level of service in programs and activities.” Letter from Laura N. Chick, City Controller, City of Los Angeles, to Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa (Jan. 5, 2006). The audit cited the following disparities:

- Lower income populations and Latino, African-American, and Asian-Pacific Islander populations have dramatically less access to park resources.
- Residents’ access to adequate recreational opportunities is dependent upon their proximity to parkland, available modes of transportation, and hours of operation; use of parks is most intense in areas of low accessibility.
- While there is a significantly higher demand for park space among inner city residents, suburban residents have access to approximately twice the parkland.
• Suburban and non-inner city communities tend to have better maintained facilities than their inner city counterparts.
• Females tend to be underrepresented in parks and recreation programs, particularly team sports.
• Additional resources, whether through registration fees, Quimby fees (fees paid by developers of new residential properties), or any other source often exacerbate inequities unless they are strategically allocated to decrease such inequities.

Laura N. Chick, City Controller, Performance Audit of Recreation and Community Services in the Department of Recreation and Parks 11 (2006).

**Park Access.** Non-Hispanic white people enjoy better access to parks compared to people of color collectively, and compared to other individual racial or ethnic groups. The distribution of parks and recreation is not random with respect to race and ethnicity. Disparities in park access reflect the history and pattern of discriminatory land use planning, housing, and recreation policies in Los Angeles throughout much of the twentieth Century. García and White, *L.A. Region Report*, 14-18. Detailed maps and demographic analyses of access to parks based on race and ethnicity for the county and city, respectively, are available at www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/sets/72157602396544979, and www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/sets/72157601161353796.

**Culturally Diverse Parks.** We recommend that the strategic plan and needs assessment should address the fact that different people use parks differently, constructing meanings based on their own values, cultures, histories, and traditions. According to a UCLA study of cultural differences in the use of urban parks, for example, parks are primarily social gathering places for Hispanics. African Americans, more than any other racial group, tend to engage in sports in parks. Non-Hispanic whites tend to value a park solely for its passive qualities—its greenness, landscaping, and natural elements. They tend, as a result, to engage in solitary, self-oriented uses. Asian-American (specifically, Chinese) families were rare in parks studied. This does not mean that Asians do not value parks; this may reflect the failure of the parks to meet the needs of the Asian-American community. Other studies have reached similar conclusions about how Hispanics use forests and other natural public places differently. Most studies on leisure and urban recreation have focused on non-Hispanic whites. García and White, *L.A. Region Report* at 14.

Culturally appropriate parks need to provide recreation programs that go beyond competitive sports and include the range of activities needed and desired by diverse park users. Tai-chi, yoga, hip-hop, salsa, martial arts, jump rope—these are just examples of some of the diverse activities park users should access through programming.

Research suggests two potential explanations for differences in ethnic and racial recreation patterns. The *ethnicity hypothesis* posits that participation patterns result from culturally based differences in value systems and leisure socialization. Even when variables such as income, gender, area of residence, and household size are statistically controlled, ethnic and racial
differences in participation patterns persist. The *marginality hypothesis* suggests that under-participation of ethnic and racial groups results primarily from limited economic resources and historical and ongoing patterns of discrimination. Because people of color often occupy a subordinate position and hold a low station in the status hierarchy, they are less desired as leisure companions, leading to the creation of leisure spaces that are identified as non-Hispanic white or otherwise. *Id.* at 14.

*Compliance with Equal Protection Standards.* We recommend that the City and the Department proactively comply with the equal protection of the laws to redress the history and pattern of unfair park, school, and health disparities based on race and ethnicity. The City and Department should proactively comply with federal and state laws designed to achieve equal access to public resources, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations, California Government Code 11135 and its regulations, and the California statutory definition of environmental justice. Compliance with civil rights and environmental laws should be combined. *See generally* Garcia and White, *Los Angeles Region Report* at 16-22.

We recommend that the needs assessment and strategic plan explicitly address these issues of diversity and equal access to parks, recreation, and health.

(3) **What are the key issues facing the City as a whole related to Recreation and Parks?**

The key issues facing the City as a whole related to recreation and parks include the following.

1. *There needs to be a strategic plan to improve recreation and parks for all, and that plan needs to be developed and implemented within the next six months.***

2. *The community needs assessment needs to be an integral part of that strategic plan process, and should be completed expeditiously.*

3. *There need to be standards to measure progress and equity and to hold officials accountable for improving recreation and parks in every neighborhood.*

The strategic plan should set standards, for example, to meet park need, achieve equity in the distribution of park benefits, and improve health and reduce obesity.

*Need.* We recommend that places and programs to improve parks and recreation be targeted to serve the communities with the greatest need first. Need should be measured in terms of park poverty and economic poverty. Park poverty should be defined as less than three net acres of parks per thousand residents. (Net acres excludes large open space such as the Angeles National Forest—which is desirable but generally inaccessible.) Economic poverty should be defined within a specific range that falls between the federal poverty line up to three times the federal poverty line. The annual income for a family of four to provide for its basic needs in Los Angeles was slightly more than $63,000 in 2005, more than three times the federal poverty level.
See García and White, *L.A. Region Report*, 8-10. Targeting park and economic poverty will help achieve equity based on race and ethnicity, as poverty is generally an alias for race and ethnicity in this society.

The City Project’s mapping studies have identified the communities with the greatest need for parks and recreation in the City of Los Angeles. The maps and analyses have been delivered to each Council Member. Council Member Janice Hahn said on March 18, 2008, "It’s clear that Los Angeles is a park poor city with the majority of greenspace concentrated in too few corners of this city." "[The City Project’s] work in showing us all this is really letting us pinpoint where our own Department of Recreation and Parks can focus its resources on building more parks."

The maps and analyses are available on the web at www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/sets/72157601161353796.

"Distance to the Park. We recommend that places and programs for parks and recreation be based on need, not “walking distance to the park” or “1/4 mile to the park,” or calls for “pocket parks” in the abstract. The City should not use artificial formulas for park creation and funding that exacerbate inequities, such as the one or two mile radius under the Quimby park fees ordinance.

The Controller’s Quimby audit states that “[w]ith the increased availability of public transportation in many areas of the City today, residents may be more willing to travel further distances to parks than they were in the past.” Laura N. Chick, City of Los Angeles Office of the Controller, *Audit of Quimby Fee Collections and Uses* 19 (2008). We agree.

There is no “correct” distance to evaluate fair access to parks. The optimal distance depends on the needs of the community, the type of park, and access to cars and transit. As The City Project mapping studies show, many areas in Los Angeles lie more than half a mile from the nearest park, but any distance in the abstract can be arbitrary and misleading, such as half-mile or quarter mile access, walking distance, driving distance, etc. García and White, *L.A. Region Report* at 14.

The important concern is not distance alone but whether the park and recreation programs meet the needs of the community. With physical activity to reduce obesity and diabetes as a goal, for example, people can get physically active by walking half a mile or more to the park. With the shared use of parks and schools, the relevant distance is to the park or the school, not one or the other. If residents have access to a car or an affordable and reliable transit system, the distance to the park can be greater. Smaller parks and elementary school playgrounds within walking distance can serve the needs of younger children. Larger parks, and playing fields at middle and high schools, can provide places for physical activity and team sports for older children and adults, and can be within driving or busing rather than walking distance. In a high income community with large house lots, and ready access to cars and places like the Santa Monica Mountains, there is no need for a park within a quarter mile. A pocket park within walking distance may not adequately serve the needs of the community if there is no place to play in the park or any other nearby place. Even a large park may not adequately serve the community if the population and use density is so high that demand exceeds available park space. The 1930
Olmsted Report, which proposed a vision for a green, healthy and prosperous Los Angeles, suggested half a mile or more as a rule of thumb for distance to the park depending on the locality and other factors. *Id.*

One traditional environmental organization advocates a park within a quarter mile of each residence, and equates walking distance with a quarter mile, but it is difficult to consider this a serious policy proposal. The quarter mile or walking distance standard obscures the important considerations discussed above. Bus stops in Los Angeles are generally about a mile from most people. It is unrealistic to expect more parks than bus stops. *Id.*

4. *A fair system of finance and fees needs to be developed and implemented.*

The Controller’s audits have noted that park and recreation funding, whether through registration fees, Quimby fees, or any other source, often exacerbate inequities unless they are strategically allocated to decrease such inequities. Laura N. Chick, City Controller, *Performance Audit of Recreation and Community Services in the Department of Recreation and Parks* 11 (2006).

**We recommend** that the City and Department develop and implement standards for a fair system of finance and fees based on need and compliance with equal protection standards. Quimby park fees should be reformed to be fair and equitable. The City should help define the standards for distributing state park bond funds including Prop 84, and work to receive and distribute such funds equitably. The City should pass a new local park bond. Park fees should not favor adult over children’s activities.

Unfair park, program, and funding disparities are documented by demographic maps of park access in the City of Los Angeles, the Controller’s audits of Recreation and Parks, and an academic study showing that the allocation of local park bond funds exacerbates park inequities.3

City officials have known about funding inequities 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 a 1999 Los Angeles Times article that “there is tremendous under serving” of people in poor neighborhoods by the parks department.4 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.5 Park officials concurred. “It’s a

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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.”6 “I think the mayor's sincere in his desire to address these inequities,” Robert Garcia told the Wall Street Journal, but "I don't think the city is doing enough."7

**We recommend** that the City should also provide funding for maintenance and operation of parks. Too often city officials ask that no more parks be created because they do not have the resources to operate even existing parks.

5. **We recommend** that the City, the Department, and LAUSD develop and implement a master joint use agreement for the shared use of parks, schools, and pools.

We congratulate the City Council and LAUSD Board of Education for passing joint use resolutions recently. The City Project plans on submitting comments on that matter separately.

As Council Member José Huizar said on March 18, 2008, “In terms of the existing facilities, both on the city’s side and the school’s side, it’s just a matter of leadership and us working together to make that happen. The limited resources are there, we just have to optimize their use and, particularly, to focus the kids at our schools and how do we provide them the parks when they need them and how do we provide more of the schools’ facilities when the public needs them. And, unfortunately we are in a situation where we have budget constraints on both sides. The schools, for example, are asking local Little Leagues to pay increasing fees to use the schools. But, I think we’ve got to break that mold and think more creatively about how we ensure that we are working a lot closer together and that, there, is just a matter of leadership for us to collectively work together.”

“On the side of new facilities, I think there we have a tremendous opportunity, both on the school side where they’re still building new schools, why not create more parks while you’re building the schools, get creative how you design your schools so you provide a park or some open space for the community to use as well. And us too. As we move forward, hopefully we do get a park bond and we create those additional open space and parks, we do them near our schools so that our kids can benefit from them, given that many of our schools are cluttered with bungalows and very limited places for them to recreate.”

“[The City Project has] been, I think, a real lone voice on this item for a long time. We hope to amplify your voice because this is something that we continue to discuss and talk but we need to get you a big bullhorn and continue providing you that so that we make this an urgency for the city of Los Angeles and the school district.”

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7 Id.
6. **We recommend** that the City, LAUSD, and the Department should develop a plan now to provide places and programs for physical activity and recreation when year-round schools end by 2010, and 700,000 students will be out on the streets each summer with nothing to do.

7. **We recommend** that the strategic plan and needs assessment include a health impact assessment to evaluate places and policies for physical activity and healthy eating in parks and schools.

Parks and schools are the two institutions that can best serve the needs of children for physical activity and healthy eating. Parks and schools should provide places and policies to help children move more, eat well, stay healthy, and do their best in school and in life.

The Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (April 2007) (LARRMP) recognizes the links between parks, active recreation, and health at pages 5-26 to 5-29. The Master Plan recognizes that “[t]he relationship between improved public health and the availability of parks and open space – particularly those that provide active and passive recreation – are well known,” citing *inter alia* The City Project’s work by García and White. *Id.* at 5-26. “[A]pplying public health criteria to land-use and urban design decisions could substantially improve the health and quality of life of the American people.”

**We recommend** that the City set measurable standards to improve health and reduce obesity through parks and recreation programs. The Robert Woods Johnson Foundation has set a goal to stop and reverse childhood obesity by 2015. New Yorkers for Parks is setting standards to match the national averages for obesity (10.3%), diabetes (15%), and asthma (6%) as part of its Open Space Index and long term plan for New York City Parks. L.A. should do better and sooner. For example, Los Angeles should reduce childhood obesity levels to the national average by 2015.

The Department should provide places and policies for physical activity and healthy eating to help reduce obesity and diabetes, drawing on evidence-based research by the California Endowment and others.

**We recommend** that the Department conduct a health impact assessment as part of the community needs assessment and strategic plan to inform decision makers and the public about the impact of parks and recreation decisions, policies, and practices on human health. Health impact assessments can guide planning decisions by providing information on where parks and recreation should be

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placed or improved in light of public health considerations such as density, environmental exposures, safety, noise pollution, and so on.

8. **The Department should implement healthy food and beverage policies in parks and recreation centers that meet or exceed the requirements for public schools.**

We recommend that the Department should implement healthy food and beverage policies in parks and recreation centers that meet or exceed the requirements for public schools. See generally Stephen Isaacs and Ava Swartz, *Banning Junk Food and Soda Sales in the State’s Public Schools* (The California Endowment October 2006). See also City of Los Angeles Child Nutrition Policy (adopted by the City Council February 18, 2005).

Children in park-poor communities also have less access to healthy, affordable foods (e.g., in grocery stores) and greater exposure to junk food and soda pop of minimal nutritional value in fast food outlets. Schools recognize the links between learning, healthy eating, and physical fitness. Schools, childcare and after-school settings including parks have the opportunity to provide healthy foods during and after sports and recreation and in vending machines. It makes no sense for the places where children get active to serve junk food and soda pop without healthier options.

9. **The City and Department should provide places and programs as alternatives to gangs, crime, and violence.**

The Los Angeles City Controller recently issued an anti-gang strategy that includes parks and recreation. Laura N. Chick, City of Los Angeles Office of the Controller, Blueprint for a Comprehensive Citywide Anti-Gang Strategy (2008). The Report highlights recreation and sports as an integral part of a healthy community infrastructure. Too many of RAP’s recreational programs, such as its after school programs, sports programs, camps, youth aquatics, and golf academies, are focused on the general youth population, with little funding directed to at-risk youth who are most susceptible to being recruited by gangs. *Id.* at 8 (2008).

The Report lays out a number of recommendations for RAP to work with the Los Angeles Police Department and any new anti-gang office to develop recreation programs in gang prone areas that will serve the needs of the at-risk youth in these communities. We recommend that the City and Department implement these recommendations.

As Councilman Ed Reyes said on March 18, 2008, “These are problems that we have. The gang issue. We put a lot of money, a lot of policy language, discussion, meetings, but we haven’t looked at the core issues of what causes gangs, and that is the ability for children to live near parks, to have diversion, so that they are not sucked into the gang culture.” “The end consequence is that the kids in our neighborhoods are being shot to death. Our kids don’t have a place to play. They don’t have baseball diamonds, they don’t have soccer fields. . . . We need to put our policy language in line with our realities. I hope this Council understands that it does
take a brave act to do what’s right, and that we should sustain our policies so that we can allow for whole communities to live near parks.”

10. Park safety, both real and perceived, should be improved.

The last time the City did a community needs assessment, over half the respondents said they avoided local parks because of safety concerns. We recommend that the City conduct studies to address the perception and reality of parks and safety. The Los Angeles Police Department needs to provide public access to crime statistics in electronic form for such studies. Real and perceived safety can be achieved through culturally appropriate and ongoing programming (e.g., midnight basketball) at parks, good lighting, safe routes to and from parks, ongoing upkeep and maintenance, and providing residents with a sense of ownership and pride in their parks. Lighting in the parks at night extends the amount of time the parks are available to the community and improves safety. Public art in parks is also an important method for reflecting community ownership, fostering a historic sense of place, and creating an atmosphere and aesthetic of safety.

11. Resources should be combined to create multibenefit parks, school fields, clean water projects, and flood control sites.

We recommend that Los Angeles take full advantage of this historic opportunity to create multibenefit parks, school fields, clean water projects, and flood control sites through the process of revitalizing the Los Angeles River and through the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan for Greater Los Angeles County (IRWMP).

Parks, school fields, and other natural open spaces promote human health and conservation values including clean air, water, and ground, habitat protection, and climate justice. Green spaces in parks, schools, sports fields, and other public places can help clean water through natural filtration. Flood control basins can provide green space for parks and school fields. Green construction can also create green jobs for local workers and small business enterprises. Green spaces can help reduce the urban carbon footprint and global warming. Such land could otherwise be used for economic activities that generate heat and carbon. Los Angeles would benefit from investment in green spaces in underserved communities in the fight to stop global warming and achieve climate justice. See generally García and White, Los Angeles Region Report at 10-11; Robert García and Aubrey White, Healthy Parks, Schools, and Counties: Mapping Green Access and Equity for California (The City Project Policy Report 2007) at 9 (hereafter “García and White, California Report”).

Global warming is fundamentally an issue of human rights and environmental justice that connects the local to the global. With rising temperatures, human lives—particularly in people of color, low-income, and indigenous communities—are affected by compromised health, financial burdens, and social and cultural disruptions. Moreover, those who are most affected are least responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions that cause the problem—both globally and within the United States. These communities are the least able to bear the burdens of correcting it absent appropriate conservation, economic, and equitable measures.
11. We recommend that recreation and parks promote green jobs for local workers, and an even playing field for MBES – minority, women, and veteran owned business enterprises.

Parks and recreation helps to strengthen and stimulate California’s economy through recreation-related sales of clothing, equipment, fees and services, the revenues generated from the tourism and hospitality industries, and increased property values. Tens of billions of dollars in infrastructure bonds can be used to create local jobs and an even playing field for small business enterprises. Affordable housing and other forms of wealth creation can help stop gentrification and displacement when parks and schools revitalize communities. It is necessary to ensure that the economic benefits are distributed equitably. Id.

12. Transit to Trails

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) calls for public transportation to improve access for all to parks throughout Southern California in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). SCAG RTP Environmental Justice Report 11-13 (proposed final May 8, 2008). All income groups for the whole region will have greater park accessibility due to the infrastructure investments proposed in the 2008 RTP. However, a multi-agency effort must be undertaken in order to further address and remedy the issue of inequity of park access.” Id. at 24.

We recommend that the City and Department develop and implement a strategic plan for a “Transit to Trails” program to take people to parks, beaches, forests, lakes, and other public natural spaces. A Transit to Trails program would serve all the people of the City, but would be particularly useful to the working poor with limited or no access to cars, who are disproportionately people of color and low income. Transit to Trails would reduce traffic congestion and parking problems, improve air quality, and reduce run-off of polluted water into rivers and the ocean. Low cost transit service should link parks like the Los Angeles State Historic Park at the Cornfield and Rio del Los Angeles State Park at Taylor Yard. See García and White, L.A. Region Report at 12-14.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, Anahuak, and The City Project have implemented a successful Transit to Trails pilot project. More information is available at www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/forests.html.

13. Parks and Cultural, Historical, and Artistic Monuments

We recommend that the City and the Department use parks to provide sites for cultural, historical, and artistic monuments and programs.

Indeed, the Great Wall of Los Angeles along the Los Angeles River, and the Central Avenue Jazz Park and Tile Mural in South Los Angeles, are best practice examples of such art in the park. The Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan calls for a River Arts Program that celebrates the history of the River and the diverse cultures of its surrounding neighborhoods,
citing Judy Baca’s work and the work of The City Project on the Heritage Parkscape. LARRMP at pages 5-36 to 5-37 and 3-24.

Cultural, historical and artistic monuments should reflect the diversity of a place and its people. People of color and women have been vital to the creation of Los Angeles throughout the history of the City and the area.

Yet with almost 900 official cultural and historical landmarks in the City of Los Angeles as of January 2008, only about 76 relate to people of color, women, and Native American tribes. Images of 60 of those diverse monuments are shown in The City Project’s Monuments and Minorities set on flickr. Things are not getting any better as Los Angeles gets increasingly diverse — only about 16 out of 199 monuments added since 2000 relate to people of color or women. See Letter from Prof. Judy Baca and SPARC, Mujeres de la Tierra, LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) and The City Project to the Los Angeles Cultural and Heritage Commission (April 17, 2008).

Support for diversifying the cultural, historical, and artistic monuments of Los Angeles is widespread. For example, the National Latino Congreso adopted Resolution 8.04 on October 8, 2008, resolving “that the City of Los Angeles designate additional official cultural and historic landmarks that fully and fairly recognize the contributions of people of color and women to Los Angeles.”

Community members, activists and advocates have identified over 100 links along the Heritage Parkscape to serve as a “family album” for diverse communities from the Great Wall of Los Angeles to the Rio de Los Angeles State Park, the Los Angeles State Historic Park, and El Pueblo de Los Angeles. LARRMP at 3-24. Images of the Heritage Parkscape are available on the web at www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/heritageparkscape.html

Parks should include public art and cultural, historical, and artistic monuments that faithfully, completely, and accurately depict the history and diversity of Los Angeles, including people of color, women, and workers. Monuments should stimulate and provoke a greater understanding of, and dialogue on, diversity, democracy, and freedom.

Arts programs can engage youth, provide economic benefits, and provide intergenerational connections. Projects like the Great Wall of Los Angeles and the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program provide best-practice examples of how art can be institutionalized and funded. See generally Susan Anderson et al., The Power of Art: The Arts as an Effective Intervention Strategy for At-Risk Youth (The California Endowment undated).

(4) What parks and facilities are needed?

What Los Angeles needs most is to implement a regional vision based on the values at stake to bring people together to support a comprehensive system of parks, schools, recreation, and transit that will improve recreation, health, and the environment for all -- and leadership to implement the vision. A comprehensive region-wide system will provide balanced parks and
school fields that provide facilities and programs for passive and active recreation as well as culturally appropriate activities.

**We recommend** that places and programs for parks and recreation reflect the values at stake. Parks, school fields, beaches, rivers, mountains, forests, and other natural public places are places to have fun. Having fun goes hand-in-hand with other values including human health; youth development and academic performance; conservation values of clean air, water, and land; spiritual values in protecting people and the earth; economic vitality; and sustainable regional planning. Fundamental principles of equal justice and democracy underlie each of these other values. García and White, *Los Angeles Region Report* at 19-21.

**(5) What recreation programs are needed?**

See (1)-(4) above.

**(6) What do you think our short term (1-5 years) and long term (5+years) priorities should be?**

We are concerned by this framing of the issue for the following reasons. Short term is one year or less. Short term is by no means one to five years. Medium term is between one and five years. Long term is five years or more.

This is a significant point because it reveals the unreasonably slow pace at which the Department proceeds. Again, it has taken too long to begin the process of implementing the Controller’s blueprint for change, which was published over two years ago. The strategic plan and community needs assessment should have been completed in the short term – within one year.

**We recommend** that in the short term, both the strategic plan and community needs assessment be completed within six months, as discussed above.

In the medium term, each of the recommendations above should be implemented.

**We recommend** that training for park and recreation staff and officials be started in the short term and completed in the medium range. Staff and officials at all levels need to understand the significant links between parks and recreation and community health including physical activity and healthy eating, particularly for low income communities and communities of color. Staff and officials at all levels need to understand what are the barriers to healthy parks, schools, and communities to overcome those through a range of strategies.

**We recommend** that in the long term, the City and the Department implement the following 10 principles to seek social justice, regional equity and smart growth in planning healthy parks, schools, and communities. *See generally* García and White, *Los Angeles Region Report* at 22-24.
Principle 1. Infrastructure decisions involving natural public places have widespread impacts on health, housing, development, investment patterns, and quality of life. The decision-making process and outcomes of those decisions must be fair and beneficial to all.

Principle 2. Infrastructure investments should be guided by a regional vision based on the values at stake to bring people together for a comprehensive system of parks, schools, recreation, and transit to achieve results that are equitable; promote human health, the environment, and economic vitality; and serve diverse community needs.

Principle 3. Infrastructure areas should be planned together in complementary rather than conflicting ways to serve health, education, and human service needs; to fulfill critical governmental and societal responsibilities; and to produce equitable results. For example, there should be a master agreement for the shared use of parks and schools. Transit should provide access to parks and trails.

Principle 4. Budget priorities within infrastructure areas should be thoroughly assessed through an equity lens. For example, there is a need for both active and passive recreation in parks.

Principle 5. Employment and economic benefits associated with building and maintaining infrastructure, including parks and schools, should be distributed fairly among all communities.

Principle 6. Revenues to support infrastructure improvements, including parks and schools, should be collected and allocated fairly to distribute the benefits and burdens of these projects, and to overcome the pattern and history of unfair park, school, and health disparities.

Principle 7. Decision-making should be transparent and include mechanisms for everyone to contribute to the planning and policymaking process.

Principle 8. Standards for measuring equity and progress should be articulated and implemented to hold agencies accountable for healthy parks, schools, and communities.

Principle 9. Infrastructure investments and decisions including parks should proactively comply with federal and state laws designed to achieve equal access to public resources, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations, California Government Code 11135 and its regulations, and the California statutory definition of environmental justice. Compliance with civil rights and environmental laws should be combined.

Principle 10. Government agencies including the Department of Recreation and Parks – along with the philanthropic community -- must dedicate resources to enable community based organizations to serve their communities and actively participate in infrastructure planning and investments to create healthy, livable communities for all.
CONCLUSION

We look forward to continuing to work with the City and the Department of Recreation and Parks through the strategic planning and community needs assessment to implement the recommendations discussed above to achieve healthy, livable communities for all.

Sincerely,

Raul Macias
President
Anahuak Youth Association
Lark Galloway
President
Community Health Councils
Mark Williams
Director
Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles, Antes Columbus Football Club
Manal Aboeleta
Program Director
Prevention Institute

Robert García
Executive Director and Counsel
The City Project

Jason Insdorf
Law Fellow
The City Project

cc: Councilman Tom LaBonge
Controller Laura Chick
The City Project’s Executive Director and Counsel Robert García presented the Policy Report *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities: Mapping Green Access and Equity for the Los Angeles Region* before the full Los Angeles City Council on March 18, 2008. Council members responded in a public conversation about a fair system of park finance and fees including Quimby fees; regional grass roots support for parks and recreation; joint use of parks and schools; alleviating park, school, and health disparities based on race, ethnicity, and poverty; parks and recreation as an alternative to gangs, crime, and violence; and improving the quality of life in every community. Highlights are quoted below. View YouTube videos of the City Council hearing, download a summary of The City Project recommendations, and download the Policy Report at www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/mappinggreenaccess/index.html.

**Council Member Janice Hahn** "Thank you to Robert García of The City Project for giving us the presentation and really giving us a good picture of where parks are in the City of Los Angeles." "It’s clear that Los Angeles is a park poor city with the majority of greenspace concentrated in too few corners of this city."

"[The City Project’s] work in showing us all this is really letting us pinpoint where our own Department of Recreation and Parks can focus its resources on building more parks."

"We now know where the parks are, where they aren’t, where we need to spend more resources."

“How do we spend our dollars in a tough budget cycle. . . . If we’re going to shortchange people, and children, in this city, we are going to pay for it later. We know that if we don’t offer people a place to recreate, a place to play, a place to get involved in sports, then we are going to pay for it later. . . . We ought to pay for it on the front end by giving people more places to play, more places to recreate.” "The same parts of the city that are underserved in so many ways, clearly are underserved in terms of something which many people take for granted, and that is open space to play and recreate."

**Councilman Ed Reyes** “First of all, I thank Robert García for taking this work on a regional level, it’s important to see it that way.”

“These are problems that we have. The gang issue. We put a lot of money, a lot of policy language, discussion, meetings, but we haven’t looked at the core issues of what causes gangs, and that is the ability for children to live near parks, to have diversion, so that they are not sucked into the gang culture.”

“The end consequence is that the kids in our neighborhoods are being shot to death. Our kids don’t have a place to play. They don’t have baseball diamonds, they don’t have soccer fields. . . . We need to put our policy language in line with our realities. I hope this Council understands that it does take a brave act to do what’s right, and that we should sustain our policies so that we can allow for whole communities to live near parks.” “We should have a constructive dialogue without criticism and talk about what’s real in our land use patterns and allow these kids to play in parks.”

**Council Member José Huizar** “In terms of the existing facilities, both on the city’s side and the school’s side, it’s just a matter of leadership and us working together to make that happen. The limited resources are there, we just have to optimize their use and, particularly, to focus the kids at our schools and how do we provide them the parks when they need them and how do we provide more of the schools’ facilities when the public needs them. And, unfortunately we are in a situation where we have budget constraints on both sides. The schools, for example, are asking local Little Leagues to pay increasing fees to use the schools. But, I think we’ve got to break that mold and
think more creatively about how we ensure that we are working a lot closer together and that, there, is just a matter of leadership for us to collectively work together.”

“On the side of new facilities, I think there we have a tremendous opportunity, both on the school side where they’re still building new schools, why not create more parks while you’re building the schools, get creative how you design your schools so you provide a park or some open space for the community to use as well. And us too. As we move forward, hopefully we do get a park bond and we create those additional open space and parks, we do them near our schools so that our kids can benefit from them, given that many of our schools are cluttered with bungalows and very limited places for them to recreate.”

“[The City Project has] been, I think, a real lone voice on this item for a long time. We hope to amplify your voice because this is something that we continue to discuss and talk but we need to get you a big bullhorn and continue providing you that so that we make this an urgency for the city of Los Angeles and the school district.”

Council President Eric Garcetti  “Thank you for your continuing great work on park equity and bringing up issues that cut across race and class when looking at green space in our city.”

“CD 13 is the smallest district in the city, only 13 square miles. And so, people are saying ‘How do we create parks, we don’t have any land.’ And I believe, because we’ve shown almost tripling the number of parks in less than seven years in one council district that happens to be the smallest, that there’s no place in this city that we can’t find the space. It’s the political will, it’s the social will, it’s the community will to actually do this.”

“A skate park right along the L.A. river where we had kids six years who said, “If you need to put nature by the river do it, but just give us a skate park, for God’s sake.” And when we were able to do it, they designed it, they built it, they staff it now and I’ve got to tell you what it did to transform the Elysian Valley and to empower those kids in that neighborhood, keep them away from gangs, keep them out of trouble, and actually have a place to play. It is transformative.”

Council Member Wendy Greuel  “Thank you Robert for this presentation. We often find that parks are an integral part of the community and a neighborhood and particularly for those kids who have no other option in which to play.”

“Some people unfortunately in our city think a park brings problems. I think a park brings opportunities for us.”

“It’s about prevention, it’s about our healthy environment, it’s about creating better neighborhoods and quality of life, and this report and what you’re doing really helps us in that way.” “We know that if development happens on some of those potential parklands we will never get that land back for park space, never ever. I think it behooves us, and it is very important for us, to take a leadership role here. So I appreciate your presentation and Mr. LaBonge suggesting that you come here to the council chambers to look at ways in which we can better our community and environment.”

Council Member Tom LaBonge  “Every day is another opportunity to try to create more space for people to live a better life in a city. A city, if you look at a city, how it’s built, its parks, its places, its common grounds are so important. The City Project does just that. I hope we can focus on it [and that] you also afterwards get [the Policy Report] on this so you can share it with your staff and be part of the effort to create more public space for the improvement of quality of life in Los Angeles.”

“Members, if we explored ourselves, as well as our staff, to find some solutions to the challenge of open space. Because it is about alienation, if you don’t have a city, you want to live in you may feel alienated to its environment.”

“Please assign a deputy on your staff to really focus on this so you can take advantage of it.”

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