

Date: March 25, 2022

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Brent Dennis, Director of Parks, Recreation and Marine 

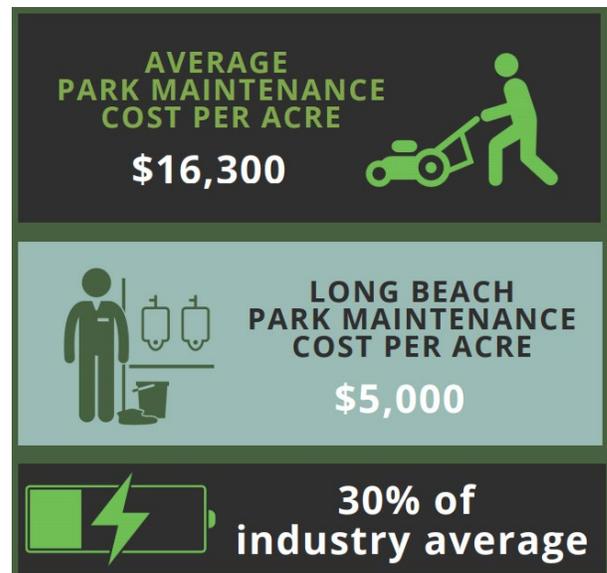
For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Parks Deferred Maintenance – 2020 Parks, Recreation and Marine Strategic Plan**

On July 11, 2017, the City Council requested the City Manager to direct the Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine (Department) to prepare a report on the current and long-term deferred park maintenance issues, specifically related to graffiti removal, trash pickup, restroom cleaning, playground upkeep, and proposals for partnerships for park support, revenue-raising, joint use agreements, and/or any other options to ensure optimal park conditions for all users. This memorandum is an updated response to this request. Previous memorandum updates were provided on [October 24, 2017](#) and [May 13, 2019](#).

Deferred Maintenance

The Department's management team agrees with the intent of the recommendation to enhance available funding and improve staffing levels to match expectations. As with all departments within the City organization, the Department is limited by available resources and cannot always provide the overall level of services desired. Maintenance for the City's over 165 parks and places, and 3,125 acres of open space, comprising 9.4 percent of land use in Long Beach, is currently underfunded. The City has a \$20 million park maintenance shortfall and is only structurally funded for 40 percent of the water needed for the total landscaped park acreage irrigation. Although it should be noted that the Department has access to additional funds on a limited basis, there is no annual park tree trimming budget and 14,000 of the City's 29,000 trees are classified as dead, diseased or dying. Additionally, while maintenance funding has been provided for recently opened parks or added amenities, this has not historically been the case, which continues to hamstring the department's ability to keep up with routine maintenance needs system-wide. This has lowered the park maintenance budget per acre and maintenance service levels at all City parks. Unfortunately, while excellent for a department with full resources, the Department must be able to align our resources with City



Council and Management expectations, which is cause for a realignment of staffing and material resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the essential role of our parks system. Aside from medical services and grocery stores, parks are the only other amenity that has been open throughout the entire duration of the pandemic. During the pandemic, the parks' freestanding restrooms remained open to the public, and essential workers continued to service the facilities and deliver supplies. As the Department strives to provide well-maintained restroom facilities, deferred capital improvements, coupled with increased vandalism, present unsustainable maintenance challenges. From FY 18 to FY 20, our parks system experienced an annual average of \$222,404 in vandalism that contributed to the deferred maintenance and unbudgeted expenses.

Improvements in efficiencies and workflow have been implemented. In 2018, a new grounds landscape contract was awarded that was revised to provide clarity and enhance the contractual understanding regarding service scope and intervals. Additionally, a robust contract enforcement section was vetted by the City Attorney's Office and introduced into the contract to provide a tool to deduct the cost of a task not completed by the contractor from the invoice amount. Furthermore, this contract is managed by an inspection and workorder system, developed in 2017, which allows the grounds maintenance staff the ability to proactively inspect parks weekly and produce workorders for deficiencies. In this manner, daily and weekly items, such as graffiti, trash, and playground cleaning can be inspected and kept in a satisfactory condition. The proactive inspection system has made measurable strides in maintaining optimal park conditions on a year-round basis.

Parks Make Long Beach Strategic Plan - Maintenance Priorities

In 2019, the Department kicked off an effort to update the Department's 2003 Strategic Plan. The Department Strategic plan covers the 10-year period from 2021 to 2031 and will guide how the Department will prioritize work, organize staff, and decide where to invest in programs and services. A robust and inclusive community engagement process began in May 2019, with thousands of community members providing feedback since then through community surveys, stakeholder workshops, and community events. While the effort was put on hold in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic and staff being reassigned to COVID-related support roles, it was reinitiated in January 2021.

During this outreach, several key themes emerged relating to a strong support for increased park maintenance to ensure our parks are safe, clean, accessible, and green. Strategic Plan objectives include priorities to fund park maintenance consistent with national park maintenance industry standards, develop effective data-driven preventative maintenance programs, and identify new funding sources for the maintenance and stewardship of each new project to maximize their lifespan.

Community feedback also pointed to important aspects of equity that are incorporated into the Strategic Plan. New parks, many developed in west, central and north Long Beach in recent

years, should be resourced equitably so that park maintenance and programming is provided to the same degree as other parks across Long Beach's park system. These new parks should be resourced adequately so that the quality of the park does not degrade faster than other parks in Long Beach's park system, inequitably inhibiting playability and access. Finally, park maintenance procedures should be data-driven and less reliant on complaints, which typically favor high-resource communities.

The Department has the ability to enter into public benefit partnerships as a way to enhance programming at our parks that requires the partner to take on the full responsibility of maintaining and operating their permitted or leased area. Public benefit agreements provide community-based partners with access to park land and selected buildings at a zero cost in exchange for enhanced programming for the public that is free or at a reduced fee, and these partners are required to pay for any costs associated with the maintenance and operations of the site. Currently, the Department has 102 public benefit partnerships. For example, the Conservation Corps Long Beach has leases that requires them to fully maintain and operate the 340 Nieto Building, the future location of the Environmental Center at Deforest Park, and to maintain the grounds at their future wood recovery site at Willow Springs Park. Additional examples of public benefit partners are Adventures do Dream and Long Beach Organic, Inc., who provide gardening and youth development programming that also helps reduce the Department's costs of maintenance without compromising activating park land. Not only do these public benefit partnerships help reduce the Department's ongoing maintenance and operations costs, but they help activate park areas that would otherwise have little to no activity, thus reducing the development of encampments and vandalism. However, entering into these public benefit partnerships does create a need for additional staff support to manage each agreement and ensure compliance. The Department manages over 189 agreements, 54 percent of which are public benefit agreements.

These park maintenance objectives are aligned with multiple other plans that rely on parks to be part of the solution for health outcomes and racial equity including the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, Youth and Emerging Adult Strategic Plan, Racial Equity and Reconciliation Plan, Long Beach Open Space Element, and the Los Angeles County Park Needs Assessment.

The draft Strategic Plan was presented to the City Council on January 18, 2022 and approved unanimously by the City Council.

Next Steps

During the FY 23 budget process, given the priority the City Council has placed on funding our existing maintenance requirements and having well-maintained parks, staff will be looking for solutions to right size existing maintenance responsibilities and obligations to better fund this core service to the community.

Parks Deferred Maintenance – 2020 PRM Strategic Plan

March 25, 2022

Page 4 of 4

Once again, the Department appreciates the City Council's efforts to help improve our services to the community. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (562) 570-3170 or at brent.dennis@longbeach.gov.

CC: CHARLES PARKIN, CITY ATTORNEY
DOUGLAS P. HAUBERT, CITY PROSECUTOR
LAURA L. DOUD, CITY AUDITOR
LINDA F. TATUM, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER
TERESA CHANDLER, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
APRIL WALKER, ADMINISTRATIVE DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
MONIQUE DE LA GARZA, CITY CLERK (REF. FILE #[17-0541 R-24](#))
DEPARTMENT HEADS