


Date: July 20, 2023

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

Subject: **Transmittal of Letter to Parks and Recreation Commission**

Please see the attached letter which was provided to the members of the Parks and Recreation Commission today regarding the City of Long Beach Memorial Bench Program.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me.

ATTACHMENT

CC: DAWN MCINTOSH, CITY ATTORNEY
DOUGLAS P. HAUBERT, CITY PROSECUTOR
LAURA L. DOUD, CITY AUDITOR
LINDA F. TATUM, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER
TERESA CHANDLER, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
TYLER CURLEY, ACTING DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
APRIL WALKER, ADMINISTRATIVE DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
MEREDITH REYNOLDS, SPECIAL DEPUTY CITY MANAGER FOR RECOVERY
KEVIN LEE, CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
MONIQUE DE LA GARZA, CITY CLERK

July 20, 2023

To the members of the Parks and Recreation Commission:

First, thank you for your service to our City. As Commissioners, you have a deep love of our City and devote a considerable amount of your time working to make our Park system the best it can be.

The purpose of this letter is to raise concern regarding the Memorial Bench Program. This program was designed to provide a mechanism for our community to both honor the lives and service of our residents, while also providing much needed additional fundraising dollars to our parks. When City staff proposed this program it was to also ensure consistency in our parks, allowing some personalization of the benches to honor individuals, but keeping a consistent look to our parks. As you know, the Parks and Recreation Commission holds an important responsibility in the review and approval process for the Memorial Bench Program.

We learned this week that in October of last year, the Commission approved two applications to allow the Arts Council to paint benches in City parks as part of the Memorial Bench Program, in exchange for the donation. This is not in keeping with the current policy, which outlines a specific type of bench that can be requested with a personalized plaque. While the circumstances and context of the individuals being memorialized may not have been fully explained or evident to the Commission, it is important to share my concerns.

One of the approved benches includes a political message, which goes far beyond the intent of honoring someone's life and uses public assets to further a specific personal cause. In that specific case and as reported in the media, the applicants have stated publicly their belief that the resident was murdered by our Long Beach Police officers. The facts of that case, as investigated by outside agencies and determined by the District Attorney after detailed review, were that Long Beach Police officers responded to a call of a man discharging a firearm at cars, ignoring officer orders to drop the weapon, and was putting community lives in danger when an officer involved shooting occurred. The officer involved shooting, after significant internal and external review, was found to be within policy and no charges against the officers were filed. Yet the intent of the bench approved by the Commission is to imply that the Long Beach Police Department was guilty of murder. That action is not in keeping with the Memorial Bench Program as designed. While we understand and support the need for families and friends to grieve and remember loved ones regardless of how those loved ones were lost, to do so in this manner with the use of public assets can impact the basic principles of community policing and public trust that our police department is committed to providing.



Beyond my concern for this specific incident, as City Manager I am concerned that future applications could be submitted to the Commission to further specific personal causes or political messages. That is certainly not the intent of the program, to allow individuals with resources to pay to display a message in our City parks.

As City Manager, I am asking you on a go forward basis to deny future applications for painted benches or any memorial benches that go beyond those envisioned in the program as currently outlined. I will be amending the policy in the future to be clear that the Memorial Bench Program is not intended to further specific agendas or political messages, whether directed at the Police Department or any other community, State or national issue, so that the program is simply a dedication to honor the memory of community members and their service.

Thank you for your consideration and continued service.



Tom Modica
City Manager



Wally Hebeish
Police Chief

CC: Brent Dennis, Director of Parks, Recreation and Marine
Griselda Suarez, Executive Director, Arts Council for Long Beach
Trinka Rowsell, Partners of Parks