Date: May 9, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Council

From: Councilmember Kristina Duggan
Vice Mayor Cindy Allen
Councilmember Mary Zendejas

Subject: Impacts Related to Sewage Spills

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Request the City Manager to work with the Climate, Environment, and Coastal Protection Committee to report on environmental, public health, social, fiscal and economic impacts on the City of Long Beach from sewage spills; and, provide a progress report on the City's projects funded by Measure W and projects countywide related to eliminating sewage from entering our water ways and ocean, within 120 days.

Request the City Manager work with the Regional Water Quality Control Board and any other enforcement agencies to prepare a report on recent sewage spills in Long Beach which violated the Clean Water Act and/or other related regulations which such report shall include: name of responsible agency or entity, date of occurrence, date(s) of any water area closures, amount of sewage spilled, and impact costs reported.

Request the City Manager work with the City Attorney to research and provide options for the City to seek compensatory damages and reimbursement for costs incurred by the City related to sewage spills.

DISCUSSION:

There has been a strong push to expeditiously address factors damaging our environment and I believe we must have a similar sense of urgency to address sewage entering our waterways and oceans.

On April 22nd, thousands of Southern California residents celebrated Earth Day by going to beaches for cleanup activities and to get outside to take advantage of the warm weather. On this same day in Long Beach, our residents were faced with the irony that waters were closed on Earth Day because 250,000 gallons of sewage entered our ocean from the Los Angeles River. This comes in the wake of 18,000 gallons of sewage entering our waterways and ocean in March which also closed our beaches.

I appreciate the leaders who advocated for the passing of Measure W which is making significant investments in Los Angeles County's wastewater system. These leaders recognized sewage spills have much greater impacts than closing the beach for a couple of days, and we must build upon this initiative by taking steps to expedite the prohibition of sewage entering our waterways and ocean.

Environmental and Public Health Impacts
We all understand there are negative environmental and public health impacts of dumping sewage into our waterways and ocean. For over 70 years, government agencies in the United States have been tightening regulations on wastewater treatment because of these impacts. We have had many discussions and initiatives to improve the local water quality including removing the breakwater, installing algae beds, improvements at the Port, reducing water runoff, and improving wastewater treatment.

As we continue investing to improve our water quality, understanding the local impacts on the environment and public health of sewage entering our waterways and ocean will help shape the future discussions and recommendations of the Climate, Environment, and Coastal Protection Committee.

Social Impacts
While environmental and public health impacts are at the forefront of discussions regarding sewage spills, rarely do we hear discussions about the impact of closing over 7 miles of beaches has on our communities. Furthermore, we hear little about the social impacts of having hundreds of tons of debris sit in piles on our beaches waiting to dry out before removal.

The 7 miles of coastline in Long Beach serves as open space for tens of thousands of residents who want to get outside, participate in recreational activities, and spend time with friends and family. Just as there are negative impacts on our communities resulting from closing our parks and community centers, there are negative impacts on our communities when we close our beaches.

While these impacts may not be quantifiable, the negative impacts should be measured which will aid future discussions and recommendations for the Climate, Environment, and Coastal Protection Committee.

Economic Impacts
As part of the Mayor Richardson's Grow Long Beach initiative, the City Council has tasked our City Manager, Economic Development team, and Economic Development and Opportunity Committee with expanding main industries to grow revenues to close the projected budget deficit and replace revenue from oil. One of these main industries is tourism.

The City of Long Beach competes with other cities in Southern California by showcasing our coastline and coastal attractions to lure visitors from outside the City to stay at our hotels and patronize our businesses. These sewage spills decimate our efforts to increase tourism when waters within miles of Long Beach are minimally affected.

"We're sorry to hear about those being affected by the beach closures in Long Beach," says Misti Kerns, President and CEO of Santa Monica Travel & Tourism. "As they are working hard to protect the health and safety of the residents, visitors and natural habitats, we welcome those that are impacted to Santa Monica, to make the most of the warm weekend.[1]

While we cannot blame other cities for offering alternative beaches to visitors that do not pose a health risk, we must hold agencies accountable for polluting Long Beach's biggest attraction: the ocean.

As part of this accountability, we must identify the negative impacts these sewage spills have on our local economy, both short term losses and long-term losses caused by damages to Long Beach's reputation.

This item has been reviewed by Budget Analyst Joe R. Guerrero on May 4, 2023.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Request the City Manager to work with the Climate, Environment, and Coastal Protection Committee to report on impacts of sewage spills and work with the City Attorney to research and provide options for the City to seek compensatory damages and reimbursement for costs incurred by the City related to sewage spills. The requested action is anticipated to require moderate level of staff hours beyond the budgeted scope of duties and a moderate impact on meeting other City Council priorities.

EQUITY LENS STATEMENT:

Staff will consider issues of equity and access with any program proposals brought forward to ensure the City's commitment for everyone reaching their highest level of health and potential for a successful life, regardless of background, neighborhood, or identity.

[1] Sewage spill at Long Beach won't affect Santa Monica sunworshippers - Santa Monica Daily Press (smdp.com)