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September 18, 2012

Agenda Item X
MRCA
4/3/13

Ad Hoc Committee on the Los Angeles River
City Council

c/o Eric Villanueva
City Clerk

Dear Councilmember Reyes and Honorable Members:

COUNCIL FILE NO. 11-1403: RECREATIONAL ZONES ALONG THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

This letter is a response to your direction via C.F. 11-1403 to “report with near term recommendations for establishing recreational zones along the Los Angeles (LA) River in coordination with County agencies and the US Army Corps of Engineers” and your August 14, 2012 letter to act as a co-lead with the City’s Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) to prepare recommendations leading to: (1) establishment of an LA Glendale Narrows Recreational Zone from May to September 2013; and (2) establishment of a pilot boating program in the Glendale Narrows segment of the LA River starting in the summer of 2013.

Discussion

The City has received considerable feedback from the public requesting expanded public access to the LA River for recreational purposes; this has been reflected in a variety of actions:

- Approval of the LA River Revitalization Master Plan (C.F. 07-1342);
- Adoption of the LA River Memorandum of Understanding (C.F. 07-1342-S4), which resulted in establishment of the LA River Cooperation Committee with the LA County Flood Control District;
- Construction of portions of the LA River Bike Path (C.F. 96-0870-S1);
- Cost-sharing of the US Army Corps of Engineers’ LA River Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study (C.F. 06-0496), which will include a recreation plan;
- Support of that effort by the longest-standing LA River advocacy organization, Friends of the Los Angeles River (C.F. 10-0270-S2);
- Founding of the LA River Revitalization Corporation (C.F. 07-1342-S6), with a mission to “focus on development of parks, open space, housing, retail and jobs-producing uses” along river;
- Formation of the North East Riverfront Collaborative (C.F. 10-1451); and
- The RAP 2009 Citywide Community Needs Assessment which called for LA River improvements as “an issue that should be developed and improved for parks and recreation purposes.”

Moreover, the value of the LA River as a recreational resource has been acknowledged by the US Environmental Protection Agency in declaring the river a “traditionally navigable waterway” in 2010; the US Army Corps of Engineers in approving the first-ever pilot boating program on the river in 2011; in the US Department of the Interior’s selection of a portion of the LA River trail for inclusion in the National



Recreational Trail system in 2012; and in California Senate Bill 1201 (De León) on expanded public access to the LA River, which was passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor last month.

As per the 2008 LA City Council motion (C.F. 071342-S5), the following were identified as priority goals to guide the City's future actions:

- Grant the public access to and use of the River;
- Ensure the public feels safe when visiting the River;
- Protect the River's wildlife and habitat;
- Establish commitments from government to maintain effective access; and
- Develop economic opportunities stemming from River access, as appropriate.

In response to that motion, reports from the Los Angeles Police Department (C.F. 10-0891) and Los Angeles Fire Department (C.F. 07-1342-S5) cautioned that additional resources and actions would be needed to ensure the public's safety with expanded public access.

Additionally, the LA River Memorandum of Understanding (C.F. 07-1342-S4), which resulted in establishment of the LA River Cooperation Committee with the LA County Flood Control District, specified that the City and the County "agree to cooperate with each other in an attempt to develop a Los Angeles River Master Use Agreement that will establish the general rights and responsibilities of each party with respect to the use, by the City, of District property within the Los Angeles River...at a minimum, address[ing] the following...Operation and maintenance issues including but not limited to trash and rubbish removal, graffiti removal repairs, landscaping, and public access...Liability including but not limited to insurance and indemnification requirements...Security including but not limited to patrolling by law enforcement and the prevention of criminal or dangerous activity."

The LA River Cooperation Committee members include leaders of the City's Departments of Public Works, Recreation and Parks, and Water and Power. Representatives of those departments have met on a monthly basis since 2009 to outline the requirements for the LA River Master Use Agreement. A draft agreement is in process.

Meetings were convened by Lupe Vela, Senior Policy Director of the Ad Hoc River Committee in June and July 2012, which included City, County, and Corps staff along with staff of the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA)—a long-standing agency which, among other functions, operates and maintains recreational open space areas for public use. For example, the MRCA was a key partner and co-permittee with the Los Angeles Conservation Corps in operating and maintaining the first non-motorizing boating program in the Sepulveda Basin area of Los Angeles River, which was authorized by the US Army Corps last year.

Recommendations:

Implementation of a Recreational Zone in the Glendale Narrows stretch of the LA River, even on a short-term pilot scale, will require a significant amount of interagency coordination and program development; the pilot boating program is an example of this. To meet the May 2013 deadline for commencement of the Recreational Zone's operation, a recreation project manager should be assigned.

The example of the Conservation Corps, the MRCA, and other groups who have been effective within the region at implementing similar programs requiring similar skills and functions, demonstrates that a third-party organization or public agency can be successful operating and maintaining river projects. The Bureau of Engineering and the Department of Recreation and Parks hereby recommend:

- (1) The City, with concurrence from the River Cooperation Committee, issue a request for proposals for third-party organizations or public agencies to assume the role of the project manager for the Recreational Zone program;
- (2) The designated project management agency be added to the membership of the LA River Cooperation Committee, in consultation with the other Committee members;
- (3) The LA River Master Use Agreement be adopted by the LA River Cooperation Committee to facilitate implementation of the Recreational Zone and other similar projects;
- (4) The designated project manager involve others who have demonstrated their commitment to river stewardship, as much as is feasible in the operations and maintenance of the program; and
- (5) For financial support for the Recreational Zone, the City explore the option of allowing the designated project manager to charge the public for the services provided in order to reimburse the costs associated with the project management, and to cover the costs of the program's operations and maintenance, with any excess resources shared equally with the public agencies to reimburse their staff participation.

Fiscal Impact

City staff time would be required to support the effort's implementation; however, if the program generates its own funds, no other fiscal impacts are anticipated.

Please direct any questions regarding this report to Bureau of Engineering staff in the Los Angeles River Project Office: Carol Armstrong, (213) 485-5762 and Michael Affeldt, (213) 485-5733; and Department of Recreation and Parks staff: Darryl Ford, (213) 202-2682.

Sincerely,

Gary Lee Moore, P.E.
City Engineer
Bureau of Engineering

Sincerely,

Jon Kirk Mukri
General Manager
Department of Recreation and Parks

Attachments:

1. Council Motion 11-1403
2. Councilmember Ed P. Reyes' letter dated August 14, 2012

Cc:

Romel Pascual, Deputy Mayor, Environment and Sustainability
Lupe Vela, Council District 1
Deborah Weintraub, Chief Deputy City Engineer
Carol Armstrong, LA River Project Office
Michael Affeldt, LA River Project Office
Darryl Ford, Recreation and Parks
Laurie Hancock, Office of the City Administrative Officer