

APRIL 2017

# OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

 **OurLA2040**  
Our City. Our Future. Our Plan.



## Discussion Paper



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# FORWARD



**“People cut themselves off from their ties of the old life when they come to Los Angeles. They are looking for a place where they can be free, where they can do things they couldn’t do anywhere else.”**

**Tom Bradley,**  
*Former Mayor of Los Angeles*

**The City of Los Angeles** is a world-class city in terms of its influential economy, its diverse people, and the sheer scale of its built environment. The values and needs we have as a people have shifted dramatically as new trends in technology, economy, and environment emerged since the General Plan was comprehensively updated almost 50 years ago. OurLA2040 is the opportunity to update Los Angeles’ long-range vision, while guiding everyday decisions that affect the lives of all Angelenos through the year 2040. The intent of this series of six (6) ‘Discussion Papers’ is to be an informational tool that continues to spark discussion among community members and key policy makers alike to shape the future of Los Angeles.



# 3.0 OPEN SPACE: INTRODUCTION



**Our City's open spaces** provide immeasurable benefits that increase our quality of life in Los Angeles. Los Angeles' open spaces include the scenic treasures in the San Gabriel Mountain Range, our globally recognized beaches, an intricate network of rivers and trails, 36,000 acres of park and recreation spaces, and the pedestrian paths that connect us to these landmarks. The City is home to an expansive ecosystem with a diverse array of flora and fauna. Los Angeles is a city with unique biotic character, which is rare for most urban regions and is one of five global Mediterranean-type climate regions (the only one in the US), within one of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots. These locations also serve as habitat to a diverse collection of wildlife that coexist throughout our metropolis.

The ecological, economic, safety, and health benefits offered from our open spaces are abundant. They include major benefits such as: opportunities to capture and reuse water, carbon sequestration, heat island reduction, tourism, wildlife habitat, and recreation. While urban wildlife protection is not often an immediate priority for many cities, in Los Angeles, where spaces are limited and development competes with open space, special considerations are being established to protect our undeveloped lands and local wildlife, which include mountain lions, bobcats, deer, coyotes, and other species.

Within the City of Los Angeles there are several hundred small and large public recreational sites and many new planned projects that serve both local and regional needs. They offer amenities as diverse as the groups that utilize them. The Department of Recreation and Parks manages one of the City's most diverse portfolios which includes: parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, pools, monuments, museums, cultural venues, wilderness areas, beaches and boardwalks, child care centers, and golf courses. Many City documents have adopted policies to enhance access and increase open spaces. The Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles developed several park and open space objectives and policy topics to create a roadmap for increased accessible park acreage.

Beyond tangible benefits, open spaces provide a collective respite from our busy lives to connect us with nature, as well as with fellow Angelenos. The open space and park system in Los Angeles is a central part of civic life that serves multiple purposes and helps create and strengthen urban identity and fosters social cohesion. The multiple benefits created by open spaces are significant factors that contribute to our quality of life. They assure Angelenos have gathering places for families and social groups, and are inclusive, regardless of age and income levels.

# OPEN SPACE: TIMELINE

## LOS ANGELES POLICY AND PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



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## LOS ANGELES POLICY AND PROGRAM TRENDS THROUGH THE YEARS

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### **TODAY: Reimagining an Accessible Open Space Network**

The City's parks and recreational open spaces are experiencing a renaissance as local communities imagine a green network that is equitably dispersed and suits the needs of diverse park users. Faced with a park shortage, programs such as the "50 Parks Initiative" aim to bring more parks to more people. In 2015, the City introduced "A Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles" as part of the General Plan to promote programs that support physical activity and healthy environments. In 2016, "Measure A" guaranteed continued funding for development of the region's park system. The City's Quimby and Finn developer fee regulations were also revised in 2016 to more effectively fund park space in the city.



### **2000s: Conservation of Natural Resources**

Conservation efforts are at the forefront of the open space discussion as Los Angeles began to reimagine ecological resources. The Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve was established in 2003, the LA River Revitalization Master Plan was introduced in 2007, and the South Los Angeles Wetlands Park was conceived in 2008. The Conservation Element of the General Plan, revised in 2001, emphasized the importance of natural resources and supportive wildland policies. Programs such as Propositions O, 12, and 40 were passed during this period to support local park projects and natural resource protection.



### **1980-1990s: Revitalization of Urban Parks**

During this period, Los Angeles made efforts to revitalize urban park space and begin discussions on park equity for underserved communities. To this end, a number of programs were introduced: the Department of Recreation and Parks' Urban Impact Parks Program (1988), Proposition K's Los Angeles for Kids Program (1996), and the Los Angeles Police Department's Safe Parks Program (1997). At the turn of the decade in 2000, Recreation and Parks introduced the CLASS Parks Program to renew park facilities and instill pride and vibrancy in city neighborhoods. The Public Recreation Plan portion of the General Plan was introduced in 1980 to guide the development and disbursement of park resources.



### **1960-1970s: Regulation and Funding of Recreational Resources**

Formal regulation began framing a network of open space. The State of California introduced park developer fees in 1965, which was later adopted by the City in 1971. The California Coastal Act of 1976 guaranteed public access to the iconic shoreline beaches that are treasured by Angeleños today. On the heels of open space investment, the Department of Recreation and Parks' budget took a hit with the passage of Proposition 13 that limited increases on property taxes, which are allocated for various public services.



### **Pre 1960s: Laying the Foundation**

In the City's formative years, Los Angeles' policy makers began to witness sprawling development encroach on a nascent open space system. In 1930, the Olmstead brothers envisioned the City's open space as an extensive network of parks and trails with the Los Angeles River as the centerpiece, however the plan was never implemented. Unfortunately, the Army Corps of Engineers began to channelize the river with concrete in 1938 to prevent the frequent flooding events that plagued the city. By 1957, Los Angeles' began a new, robust open space system through Proposition B, which provided an unprecedented \$39.5 million in funds for recreation and park needs. This money was to be managed by the new Department of Recreation and Parks, established only a decade prior.





# 3.1: PARKS & RECREATION



## 150 YEARS

Age of Pershing Square, one of the City's earliest parks<sup>1</sup>

## 60%

Percentage of natural open spaces in LA that are not formally landscaped<sup>2</sup>

## 9.9

Acreage of parkland per capita citywide<sup>3</sup>

## 39

Completed parks from the 50 Parks Initiative<sup>4</sup>

## \$58 MILLION

LAUSD funding for partnerships that open up existing school facilities for community recreational use<sup>5</sup>

## \$94 MILLION

Annual yield from Measure A dedicated to our local parks, beaches and open space areas<sup>6</sup>

## BACKGROUND

Our City has a long history of developing parks and open spaces dating back to the late 18th century. The Department of Recreation and Parks was formally established in 1889 and several major parks were developed around the City by the beginning of the 20th Century. Today, these early parks still account for a large fraction of park and open space in the City. As the City began to grow in population, the Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan was created to establish a vast 700,000 acre network of accessible and connected open spaces, parklands, and parkways with special consideration for working class residents. Unfortunately, the plan was shelved due to economic constraints and shifting civic priorities of the time. Today, Los Angeles is home to nearly 36,000 acres of parks and open space.<sup>7</sup> Over the past decade the City and local partners have assessed the quality and accessibility of our parks and open spaces in four major reports: The Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) Needs Assessment (2009), Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment (2016), LA Parks Condition Survey and Report Card (2016), and The Trust for Public Land's Annual City Park Facts. These reports included an extensive analysis about park location, usage, quantity, tree canopy from park spaces, and demographic data of park users.

## ANALYSIS OF ISSUES AND TRENDS

Although the City has a higher number of park acreage per capita in comparison to other large cities, the acreage is not distributed equally citywide. When localized at the council district or neighborhood levels, some areas have significantly less. For example, the neighborhoods of Westlake, Southeast Los Angeles and Vermont Square all have less than one acre of park or open space per capita. To address this park acreage shortfall, many strategies have been introduced over that past several years to acquire, maintain, and build new park spaces, with special consideration for densely populated areas. One of those strategies, The 50 Parks Initiative, has been successful in increasing new park spaces. The objectives of The 50 Parks Initiative are also consistent with objectives of The Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles, which aims to increase access to parks, where 75% of all residents are within a ¼ mile walk of a park or open space facility. The initiative collaborated with various non-profits to help provide resources, in some cases offering financial assistance, maintenance, and management of each park to help offset expenses.

Due to the increasing expenses of parkland and open space development, innovative financing methods and rehabilitation of industrial properties have emerged as strategies in park and open space development. The City's revised Parks Fee Ordinance establishes in-lieu developer fees, known as Quimby and Finn Fees, to more efficiently improve existing park facilities in park-poor neighborhoods. These fees can pay for capital improvements to existing park facilities, but are exempt from funding park programming, maintenance and management.

Partnerships between local public agencies are another means for creating new parks, open spaces and providing programs to meet shortages of available land and reduce overall costs. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has partnered with the City, to leverage existing school



resources to increase park equity citywide through a Joint-Use Development Bond Program, which allows the community to utilize school facilities during non-school hours. As a result, there are many shared LAUSD facilities used for recreation across the City. Additionally, non-profit organizations such as the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust are proposing innovative solutions to transform vacant industrial lots into land assets that can be transformed into high quality parks in disadvantaged communities. High cost from land acquisitions and long term operational costs for parks are a financial challenge for the City. In 2016, voters approved Measure A, a countywide measure, which aims to build more parks and protect open spaces by implementing a parcel tax of 1.5 cents per square foot of land.

Community residents have expressed the need for modernized facilities and an equitable distribution of these facilities throughout the City. A high demand exists for walking, hiking, and biking trails in Los Angeles. Facility intensive amenities such as fitness and exercise facilities, aquatic facilities, and indoor gyms also ranked highly through community input.

Conversely, sports fields and equestrian trails rank as a lower priority throughout Los Angeles.

### **CURRENT GENERAL PLAN POLICIES**

Policies within the current General Plan emphasize sustainable design, accessibility, plazas and play areas, support increasing parks and the promotion of equitable distribution of sites, and joint use agreements. The plan recognizes the lack of parks in certain areas of the City and the need for improved distribution (Framework Element 6.4.2; Open Space Element 4.2.1). The General Plan currently reflects the direction in park policy to identify spaces outside the conventional definitions of park space and maximize underutilized spaces (Framework Element 6.4.7, 6.4.8). The Public Recreation Plan recommends service levels and standards for neighborhood/ community recreational sites, but does not provide standards for regional or large urban parks. Additionally, the list of policies for recreational facilities do not include current citywide needs for trails and increased accessibility.

### **FUTURE DIRECTION**

Increasing park and open space access and acreage for Angelenos would result in a healthier and more livable Los Angeles. Increasing the quantity of smaller parks and amenities like walking trails, bike paths, and other recreational facilities offer public health benefits, especially when connected to a vast and accessible network. The health benefits of parks are well supported, yet portions of Los Angeles are in need of new infrastructure. Continuing innovative methods to define and create parks helps increase equitable access to quality parks. What kinds of policies can help improve local parks and open spaces through the General Plan? How can we develop a network of parks and open spaces throughout the City that also helps protect and enhance our natural environment? What are potential partnerships that can help increase park space in our City?





## 3.2: RIVERS & BEACHES



### 20 MILES

Length of shoreline in Los Angeles, not including the Port of Los Angeles

### 51 MILES

Full length of the Los Angeles River<sup>8</sup>

### 10 MILLION

Annual average number of visitors to Venice Beach<sup>9</sup>

### 207 MILLION GALLONS PER DAY

Discharge of the Los Angeles River into the Pacific Ocean<sup>10</sup>

### 238 PROJECTS

Identified by the Los Angeles River Master Plan<sup>11</sup>

### UNTIL THE 1980s

The Hyperion Wastewater Treatment Plant was a significant contributor to pollution in our ocean<sup>12</sup>

### BACKGROUND

Los Angeles is full of diverse waterways that share a rich history and cultural significance not only for Angelenos, but for a worldwide audience. These bodies of water are not only important to the City's ecological and recreational value but also serve as cultural landmarks that help shape our City. The Los Angeles River (River) and its historic viaducts appear frequently in films, television shows and music videos. Our beaches have had a more storied role, while the River has taken a secondary role. But over the last decade, many efforts to revitalize the River have reshaped perceptions elevating our river's prominence and enhancing it as a priority for Angelenos.

Our rivers and beaches offer a multitude of recreational, open space, economic and educational opportunities that attract audiences, locally and regionally. Our shoreline intermittently extends north from San Pedro to Venice Beach to the Pacific Palisades. Inland, we have "rediscovered" our River, which transverses 32 miles within City limits and flows an additional 19 miles before emptying into the Pacific Ocean in Long Beach. Similar to our beaches, our rivers are segmented in terms of connectivity and accessibility. There are many gaps along the River that do not allow continuous pedestrian travel in large segments of the City, most notably the Downtown and Valley sections.

Historically, our bodies of water have dealt with effects from human impacts, which have resulted in closures, negligence and advisories affecting access and enjoyment of the resources. Our waterways have been altered for industrial, commercial and safety purposes. Local rivers have been altered by channelization due to flooding, drainage, and pollution from manufacturing and urban development. Since our rivers flow directly into the Pacific Ocean, many of our river's challenges are shared with our ocean. These bodies of water are governed by a complex multijurisdictional system that includes local, state, and federal agencies.

The negative impacts of channelization have recently led many Angelenos to reimagine the possibilities of revitalized urban waterways. Years prior to any formal policies or development, some of our rivers were utilized by residents as informal open spaces. The Ballona Creek Trail and Bike Path was one of the first bicycle paths developed along a waterway. It shifted the paradigm of our local waterways and spurred the revitalization of the River in the 1980's. As a result, many tributaries of the River such as the Pacoima Wash, Arroyo Seco and Aliso Creek have recently initiated revitalization efforts spearheaded by river and open space advocates. For many 'park-poor' communities, a revitalized River and waterways offer the potential to improve physical, mental, and community health opportunities through the creation of river parkways and bikeways.<sup>13</sup> RiverRecent attempts to protect and enhance our beaches and rivers aim to balance safety management, wildland restoration, regional mobility, watershed protection, access for the general public, and economic development.

### **ANALYSIS OF ISSUES AND TRENDS**

Demand for accessibility to our waterways has increased recent efforts by our City to create better access through development of adjacent public spaces, enhancement of conservation practices, and improvement of safety features. Since our beaches and rivers have access points that are often geographically isolated, measures have been created to develop a



permeable water's edge that is more accessible, such as the case for the River and portions of the Arroyo Seco. In 2007, the City introduced the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (LARRMP), which established multi-beneficial capital projects and key parcels for future acquisition to increase access along the River. Examples of these efforts are coming to fruition through the recent completion of several parks and public spaces along the River.

The quality of our waterways is continually challenged by pollution from runoff. Collective measures from multiple agencies to coordinate efforts for watershed management, stormwater management, open space development and water conservation are being developed to improve regional and citywide protection of rivers and beaches. Many of the new parks, open spaces and developments along waterways also feature water conservation amenities. For example Marsh Park features bioswales to capture run-off before entering the River and North Atwater Park has expanded its riparian habitat and floodplain. The City recently approved Alternative 20, which looks to enhance and restore the ecosystem of a large segment of the River.

The Coastal Act (1972) established articles to enhance and protect public access to beaches, marine life, and water quality in beach communities. Additionally, local development standards have helped maintain access to beaches through Coastal Clearances, which offer approvals for new developments near the coast. The City's Local Coastal Program indicates the location and intensity of land uses for developments near coasts to protect access, enhance public coastal access and conserve marine life and protect water quality. The Metro Extension Line to Santa Monica (Expo Line Phase 2) made our beaches more accessible to Angelenos. The proposed Crenshaw/LAX line will further increase connectivity with South Los Angeles to destinations west.

New ordinances like the Low Impact Development Ordinance require specific private development projects to mitigate runoff and capture rainwater. In 1985, regulations were placed on pollutants that enter into waterways as a part of the Clean Water Act (1972). Progress has been made to ensure the preservation of our waterways, but there is continuing pressure from plastic pollution, climate change, and overfishing.<sup>14</sup>

## GENERAL PLAN

The current Conservation Element of the General Plan establishes that our beaches fall under the jurisdiction of the City and County and reinforces federal conservation policies protecting waterways. In the Framework Element, it is stated that paths along our beaches should be connected to our City's network of greenways. The Conservation and Open Space elements both concentrate on erosion, floodplain management, open spaces, greenways, watershed protection and conservation. In future policies it will be important to address the multi-beneficial role these bodies of water have for local water management and recreational users.

## FUTURE DIRECTION

The high demand for access to our waterways creates many opportunities, but also requires effective management to ensure limited environmental degradation, adequate public access and environmentally sensitive developments. It is necessary for all public agencies, private firms and nonprofit agencies to coordinate regional efforts that affect the region at large, especially for coordination of capital improvement projects near waterways. Protecting our beaches and rivers and ensuring equitable public access are paramount to achieving more open space for Angelenos. What types of citywide policies can the General Plan develop that would help protect rivers and beaches and would improve local open spaces? How can development standards and coastal plans enhance coastal access within the city? How will climate change affect future General Plan policies regarding beaches and rivers?





# 3.3: WILDLANDS



## 200 SQUARE MILES

Home range of adult mountain lions<sup>15</sup>

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## 10

Significant Ecological Areas  
within Los Angeles<sup>16</sup>

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## 719 ACRES

Total area along the Los Angeles River  
to be restored by Alternative 20<sup>17</sup>

## BACKGROUND

The City of Los Angeles' footprint encompasses both mediterranean and semi-arid climate typologies with altitudes ranging from sea level to 5,075 ft. in the San Gabriel Mountains. The varying terrains include uplands, wetlands and coastal plains. These disparate characteristics come together to create a unique geography that offers residents and visitors a menu of diverse natural environments. Our wildlands refers to these special natural environments that pepper our City and remain unaltered but are under constant pressure from our expanding metropolis and human encroachment. Wildlands serve as the primary habitat for local flora and fauna. Los Angeles' landscape has undergone drastic natural and man-made changes since the late 1800s that have challenged these habitats, decreased connectivity for residents, local animals and plant species, altered waterways, and increased invasive species. These changes were spurred by rapid industrialization and urbanization, which forever altered Los Angeles' landscape and biodiversity.

The remaining wildlands within Los Angeles are home to hundreds of species of animals and plants and also serve as a temporary layover for many migratory animals. The rich degree of biodiversity is rare for a city of this size and magnitude. Los Angeles is one of two global cities that serve as home to big cats. The other, Mumbai, is home to leopards near the City's periphery. Our wildlands are home to more than just traditional urban

animals and include many medium and large-sized mammals such as coyotes, bobcats, skunks, grey foxes, mountain lions, grey squirrels, and black bears transverse some regions of our City. A prime example is our resident male mountain lion, P-22. P-22 has been successfully residing in the hills of Griffith Park for the past few years. He arrived by miraculously crossing two major freeways, which now leaves him landlocked from other mountain lions and critical habitats.

Our City's wildlands offer multiple benefits that extend beyond recreational opportunities and species habitat. They help in supporting groundwater recharge, flood management, preserving biodiversity, and carbon management and sequestration, as well as offering aesthetics and cultural value. While it is difficult to quantify the local and regional economic utility our wildlands provide us, it is easy to see the intrinsic value in protecting them.

In order to protect our wildlands, we have identified and preserved specific existing open spaces through Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs) and Coastal Resource Areas (CRAs) designations. SEAs are required to have unique natural habitats and biodiversity. Their designations help shape policies that influence nearby developments, thus adding a protective layer for the physical landscape and wildlife. Within the City there are several SEAs and CRAs identified by the County of Los Angeles and City, but the lists are not currently aligned.

### **ANALYSIS OF ISSUES AND TRENDS**

Early urbanization of Los Angeles caused habitat fragmentation through physical barriers created by freeways, fencing, and subdivisions. The results have created many wildlife-human conflicts, especially near wildlands and in the City's foothill communities. In the past decade, there have been many mountain lion fatalities due to vehicular collisions on local freeways. Urbanization reduced the quality and quantity of our wildlands through physical disturbances, pollution,

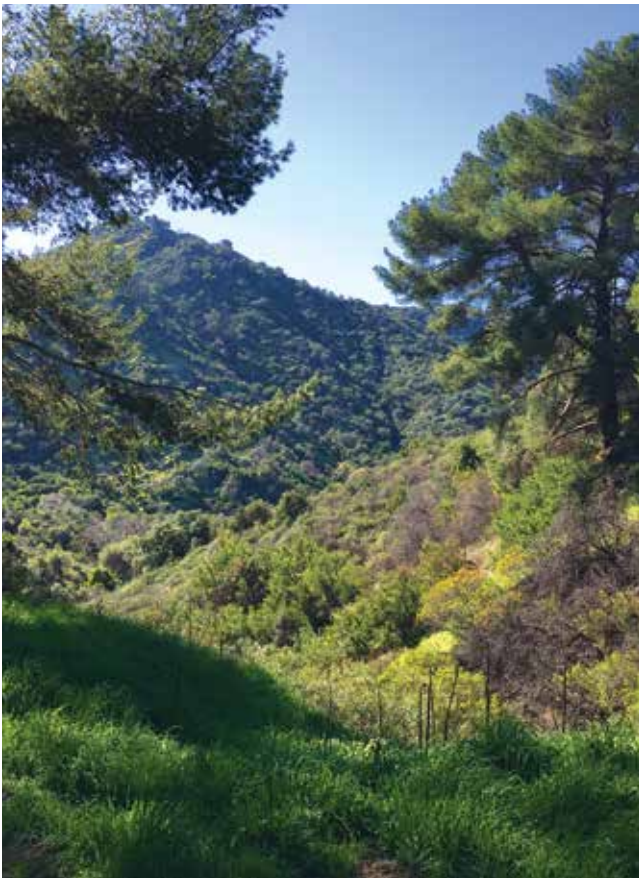
grading hydrologic alteration, and invasive species. To protect threatened habitat, additional SEAs and wildlife corridors/habitats may be warranted. Several recent studies conducted by Caltrans and the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) have identified crucial local and regional habitat and networks for wildlife.

The California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project<sup>18</sup>, led by the DFW and Caltrans, identified areas in LA County where critical habitat spaces and linkages are located. The objectives of the project are to inform local governments about the needs of creating awareness and policies that protect species travel particularly for geo-isolated medium and large size mammals (e.g. mountain lions, mule deer, coyotes, gray foxes and bobcats) in many portions of our City but with particular focus on the western edges of the San Fernando Valley. Through the use of under-crossing, Caltrans is creating corridors that reduce animal-vehicle conflicts and created multi-beneficial access for humans.

There is a high degree of overlap between parks and open space development and wildlands. As the City restores the LA River and looks to complete the federally sponsored Alternative 20 project, hundreds of new acres for wildlife will be created. In fact, the California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project identified the Los Angeles River as the primary connection within city limits between local wildlife habitats (i.e. Santa Monica Mountains, Verdugo Mountains, and Mount Hollywood). These projects will create wildlife habitat and when completed provide safer passage for wildlife.

### **GENERAL PLAN POLICIES**

The current Framework, Open Space, and Conservation Elements of the General Plan address wildlife corridors and the preservation of habitat linkages, establishment of wildlife buffers, creation/ protection of open spaces and conservation.



Specifically, the General Plan calls for an integrated citywide/regional open space system that is accessible and unthreatened by development. There are currently no specific development standards that promote the enhancement of wildlands by addressing a specific region or target species. Many of the existing policies call to protect, conserve, and enhance our watershed, SEAs, wildlife habitats, and other natural resources but are vague in respect to the details. Some of the new Community Plans like West Adams and Sylmar, established policies that minimize and regulate development and designate publicly owned land as open space for the purpose of protecting wildlife habitats and corridors.

### **FUTURE DIRECTION**

To preserve available wildlands, it is crucial to integrate policies such as preserving ecological

systems that protect flora and fauna. The migration of animals is a regional activity that occurs across City and County boundaries, as species do not abide by city limits or borders and require open space to roam. The Los Angeles River Revitalization and Alternative 20 projects serve as an opportunities to enhance connections for wildlife. How can our future policies capture how wildlife habitats interface with our City and overlap with other resource management goals and safety objectives to protect these lands, mitigate the effect of human activity, and reduce encroachment? What General Plan policies can help preserve the existence of open space and wildlife?



# 3.4: CONNECTIONS



**7,500 + 800**

Miles of streets + alleys within Los Angeles<sup>19</sup>

**700,000**

Street trees maintained by the City<sup>20</sup>

**9**

"People Street" projects<sup>21</sup>

**22**

"Great Street" projects<sup>22</sup>

**450**

Historic stairways in the City,  
which connected hillside communities  
to the Red Car lines<sup>23</sup>

## BACKGROUND

The City of Los Angeles is experiencing a resurgence of interest in creating and enhancing public meeting spaces and pedestrian connections that provide more intimate ways to experience our City. The open space network is being expanded by streetscape enhancements which include urban trees, green alleys, green streets, and parklets. Through citywide initiatives like Great Streets and People Streets, they are being interwoven into spaces that include our existing network of plazas, pocket parks, commercial corridors and recreational stairways. Collectively, they begin to create citywide pedestrian linkages between neighborhoods, create recreational opportunities, and increase pedestrian activity on streets. Connections and their amenities have broad appeal, as they evoke a historic time in Los Angeles, offering a city with a human scale and shared experiences.

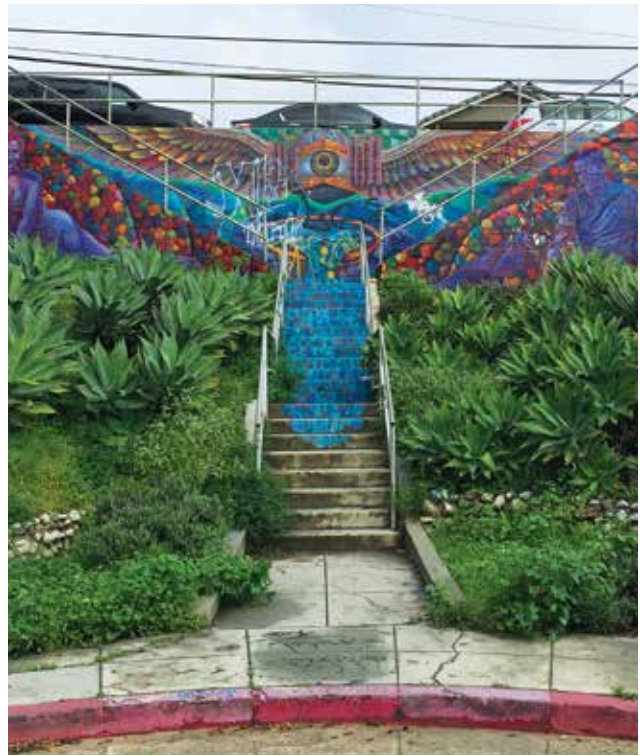
These new flexible-use spaces are being integrated into our urban fabric to foster connections between communities and public and private amenities. Connections are the networks that develop between transit, park space, civic centers, residences, and workplaces. Much like traditional neighborhood parks and open spaces that offer passive uses (e.g., picnicking, walking and other social events) and active uses (e.g., hiking, running, and other exercise activities), these public spaces provide multiple opportunities to commute, exercise, congregate, relax and people watch.

Well-patronized spaces within our communities function as community anchors to help establish an urban network that strengthens Los Angeles' identity. As is the case with El Pueblo de Los Angeles, Leimert Park Village Plaza, Sunset Triangle Plaza and Mariachi Plaza; these spaces help develop a strong sense of place. New urban parks, such as Grand Park, have evolved into a similar community gathering spaces for a multitude of daytime/evening uses that include event space, recreation, greenway and political assembly. These new locations are not defined by a singular use.

Forgotten vestiges in the City are now being rediscovered for opportunities to restore their initial function of pedestrian connectivity and add new opportunities. For example, the 450 historic stairways of Los Angeles were built around the 1920s and have been cataloged citywide. Sites like the Mt. Washington Stairway, Silverlake Stairway, Echo Park Staircase and Hollywoodland Staircase are a few of the historic destinations for Angelenos and tourists alike. The channelized Los Angeles River is being reimagined by local and regional plans to reclaim the river as a greenway connecting 51 miles of river from Canoga Park to Long Beach. These renewed connections throughout Los Angeles increase our quality of life by offering active travel alternatives throughout Los Angeles.

### ANALYSIS OF ISSUES AND TRENDS

There are many new programs supporting efforts to enhance connections by spurring activity in our streets and revitalizing commercial corridors. The Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) People St program aims to transform underutilized street spaces into parklets, plazas, and bike corrals. The results can be seen along Spring Street in downtown and NoHo Plaza in North Hollywood. The Mayor's Great Streets Initiative works with local partners to create complete streets to strengthen the identity and interconnectedness of our communities. The program aims to transform streets into vibrant public spaces,



with 15 initial pilot corridors and seven new projects targeted for economic, cultural, and transportation improvements. While both programs have only been in place a few years, they have taken significant steps towards building equity, strengthening neighborhoods, and fostering connections throughout our City.

Other physical amenities such as tree canopies create building blocks between our pedestrian networks. LADWP's City Plants program is currently working to increase green equity, provide environmental benefits and expand our tree canopy network by bringing these spaces to underserved communities. Several new related policy documents support the enhancement of connections, including the Mobility Plan 2035, Los Angeles Department of Transportation's Strategic Plan, Vision Zero, The Mayor's Sustainability Plan, Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan, and The Plan for Healthy Los Angeles. Additional programs and policies such as Park to Playa, County Bicycle Master Plan, Crest to Coast, Rim of the Valley, and Rail to Rail/River Active Transportation Corridor recently



have emerged as strategies to unify our pedestrian networks and bring greater access to Angelenos.

### **CURRENT GENERAL PLAN POLICIES**

The current General Plan supports the goals of improving access to parks and recreational facilities in the Framework, Open Space, and Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles Elements. Several policies support the development of recreational amenities, small parks, and open spaces for public access. Additionally, some policies support the development of public/private spaces and small parks through pedestrian-oriented plazas, benches, landscaped play areas, buffers, green infrastructure to create access to parks and green spaces, and other streetscape amenities. Through time and out of necessity, our understanding and demand of public spaces has evolved, requiring our City to reimagine what these spaces will look like as we continue to desire communities with more intimate pedestrian scale.

### **FUTURE DIRECTION**

Los Angeles has developed into a City that is highly diverse yet fragmented by infrastructure and various land uses. Can a future Los Angeles soften the barriers

that divide our City through complete streets, human-scale connectivity projects, and community-driven development of resources and amenities? The City has begun to transform underutilized spaces to bring open space amenities to underserved communities. These communities are harnessing resources available to them to create spaces for recreation and congregation. The development of complete streets and recreational spaces situated near transit and other hubs are great opportunities to bring communities closer together for green spaces, jobs, schools, businesses, and additional public services. How can the General Plan create policies that improve our connections as a city and to other related amenities such as parks, open spaces, rivers, and beaches?





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# NOTES





This background report is an informational tool intended to spark a community conversation around policy topics that will form the focus of OurLA2040, an effort led by the Los Angeles Department of City Planning to update citywide elements of the General Plan.



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