



“Open Space, Recreation, Biodiversity and Habitat” Nonprofit Workshop Summary

September 17, 2018

Workshop Overview

The “Our County” Stakeholder Engagement Team invited nonprofit organizations throughout Los Angeles County to provide input on the topics of Landscapes and Ecosystems for the County’s first Sustainability Plan. The “Open Space, Recreation, Biodiversity and Habitat” workshop, held on September 17, 2018 at the Los Angeles Trade Technical College, attracted attendees from nonprofit organizations, as well as several public agencies. The 5-hour workshop engaged 65 individuals representing 50 nonprofit organizations who participated in several key sessions to provide input on Landscapes and Ecosystems goals and strategies the “Our County” plan should emphasize. Approximately a third of the groups stated that their primary or secondary organizational focus was “parks/open space”, and another 20% represented “public health” or “environmental justice” as one of their primary concerns. The remaining participants cited housing, jobs, water and climate as their primary or secondary organizational interests.

The workshop provided an explanation of how the “Our County” plan will be developed and an overview of landscapes and ecosystem issues the County faces. After introducing the Landscape and Ecosystems Goals from the Landscape and Ecosystems Briefing document, attendees were broken up into three different groups according to their topic of interest (Housing and Land Use, Economy and Workforce Development, and Public Health & Safety), with each section led by a discussion facilitator, along with a butcher paper scribe and computer notetaker. Participants in each morning section were asked to provide comments on the proposed Landscape and Ecosystems Goals related to the topic, and then rotated into an additional topic area to provide comments. Participants reconvened in a short plenary session before lunch to hear brief “report backs” from breakout group facilitators on the key insights and recommendations from their discussions.

In the afternoon, participants were given a list of Draft Strategies and divided into five focus groups to allow for more in-depth discussion around a specific topic and draw out participants’ expertise on the policy area:

- Parks, Beaches, Recreation and Access
- Natural and Urban Biodiversity & Habitat and Climate Resilience
- Land Use (Infill-Exurban-Agriculture) and Displacement
- Multi-Benefit Projects: Green Infrastructure, Landscaping, Jobs, and Community Benefits
- The Los Angeles River



As part of the interactive discussion, participants were encouraged to propose alternative or additional priority recommendations to those contained in the Briefing document. Throughout the exercise, facilitators were present to help spur discussion while computer notetakers transcribed comments. After summarizing discussion and recording their proposals on butcher paper, participants then rotated to a different focus group topic to provide additional comment. Afterward, everyone gathered in the main room for a plenary session where they had the opportunity to vote for their priority recommendations via dot stickers on all the focus groups' priorities.

The following compilation represents a succinct synthesis of more than 350 comments that the Stakeholder Engagement team was able to capture through butcher paper notetaking, computer laptop transcription, as well as written comment cards received throughout the workshop. While each nonprofit organization brought their own unique set of recommendations and input for the "Our County" plan, there was general support for the proposed Landscapes and Ecosystems Goals as presented in the Briefing document. Additionally, several common themes emerged throughout the workshop that either seek to address missing issues or enhance the Landscapes and Ecosystems Goals. The following are the top themes identified:

Key Themes

- Improving open space and parks governance for more **meaningful community engagement, inclusive decision-making, and effective cross-agency coordination.**

In every workshop session, attendees commented on the need for better engagement with residents, more local control over public space, more intentional partnerships between agencies, and adequate funding to accomplish the proposed goals. They offered suggestions including hiring more culturally competent staff and encouraging participation of diverse stakeholder groups throughout the development process.
- Creating **climate-resilient and adaptive landscapes** of the future that restore, preserve, and protect the natural environment and biodiversity.

There were numerous recommendations related to improving the built and natural environment in a sustainable manner that adequately responds to both climate change and other shocks. From appropriate landscaping to permeable streets, attendees voiced strong support for investing green infrastructure throughout the County.
- Increasing **access and connectivity to parks and open space** through universal design, mobility improvements, and anti-displacement strategies.

Many attendees advocated for reducing barriers to accessing parks and open space by better accommodating the needs of people with disabilities, pedestrians, and transit-dependent users. There was also strong support for creating and preserving affordable housing near parks, beaches, and other recreational spaces (and vice versa) through several initiatives, including community-land trusts, targeted remediation of brownfields into parks, and expanded shuttle services to open space.

- Building **healthy and safe public spaces** that improve the quality of life for all, including unsheltered individuals.

Participants expressed strong support for toxic and crime-free parks that encourage everyday use and consider the immediate needs of homeless individuals. Many advocated for more health-conscious maintenance of greenery including the elimination of pesticides. Several others were against the criminalization of the poor, advising against the gating of public spaces and, instead, installing more restroom and shower facilities.
- Reconnecting residents to nature and the outdoors through culturally competent programming and educational opportunities that **advance ecological literacy**.

There were several suggestions to improve general understanding the relationship between human activities, the built environment, and ecosystem health. Attendees recommended culturally competent programming that uplifts indigenous history and practices with nature. Others also recommended for educating residents, developers, and decision-makers on the connection between the natural environment and human health.

Draft Goals

Participants' comments generally supported or coincided with all the Draft Goals from the Landscapes and Ecosystems Briefing, with an emphasis on community engagement, ecological restoration, and equitable access. In particular, Goals C, D, E, F, and G received the most comments. Feedback clarified key terms, recoupled issues, or surfaced unaddressed topics that consider climate change and prioritize the needs of disadvantaged communities. Many stakeholders, for instance, recommended clearer emphasis on measures that safeguard residents from "green" gentrification and land speculation resulting from parks and open space improvements. Further, there was strong support for holistic stewardship and management of public lands that enhance biodiversity and habitat. Appendix B includes a detailed summary of comments on Goals.

Detailed Strategies

The following are the top themes with detailed strategies from input received:

<p>IMPROVE PARKS AND OPEN SPACE GOVERNANCE FOR MORE INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING AND BETTER COORDINATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build local influence in unincorporated areas through the creation of Neighborhood Councils • Partner with diverse stakeholder groups, including residents, community based organizations, and nongovernmental organizations throughout the whole development process • Engage in shared use agreements with schools and other public entities that own open space • Hire culturally competent and language proficient staff to facilitate participatory budgeting and other activities to ensure communities’ priorities are reflected • Adequately fund agencies and increase cross-departmental coordination to accomplish goals
<p>CREATE CLIMATE-RESILIENT AND ADAPTIVE LANDSCAPES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt an urban forest management plan that is specific and includes deep soil watering • Implement green infrastructure projects, such as green alleys, with a variety of native vegetation (not just trees) that improve soil, air, and water quality • Improve habitat and biodiversity health by documenting and assessing metrics to set specific goals in the future • Reduce impervious surfaces throughout the County • Better balance mitigating flood risk and habitat restoration along the LA River • Increase percentage of cool roofs and adequate insulation in multifamily homes
<p>INCREASE ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY TO PARKS AND OPEN SPACE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately design sidewalks, paths, and trails to accommodate for tree growth and pedestrians with diverse disabilities • Remediate brownfields and other industrial land near disadvantaged communities into parks and open space for recreation • Adopt policies, programs, and regulations that safeguard renters from being displaced away from current and planned parks and open space • Improve transit and active transportation connectivity to open space • Make parks 24/7 accessible and ban the use of locked gates
<p>BUILD HEALTHY AND SAFE PUBLIC SPACES FOR ALL, INCLUDING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit development in high-hazard areas that are prone to floods and fires and that threaten to diminish open space • Ensure adequate notification of harmful conditions, especially water quality in beaches and lakes as well as pesticide use in vegetation • Develop non-toxic guidelines for the maintenance of parks and open space • Promote public safety in public spaces through community approved measures that do not criminalize homeless individuals • Increase amenities, such as bathroom and shower facilities, on public spaces • Conduct targeted enforcement and increase regulation of polluting industries near parks, open spaces, and natural resources, including the LA River

**ADVANCE
ECOLOGICAL
LITERACY**

- Collect data and produce research related to biodiversity, public health, transportation, and the economy
- Organize hikes, field trips, and other interactive to educate residents on nature and climate change, including youth disconnected from natural open spaces
- Maintain funding for culturally relevant sports and other recreational activities to encourage park use
- Promote environmental education and volunteering opportunities via social media
- Acknowledge and incorporate indigenous history and practices during the restoration of natural spaces, such as the LA River
- Train and retrain County workers to gain a better understanding of regenerative ecosystem management principles

Other themes, although not as prominent, also emerged, including:

- Providing adequate **workforce training and development** in the sustainable development and green infrastructure sectors that transition unemployed and underemployed populations into jobs with family-sustaining wages and benefits.
- Improving **emergency preparedness** for both climate and non-climate related disasters by proactively planning and strengthening social infrastructure.
- Reclaiming the public realm through resident-led **community gardening and agroforestry programs** to reduce food insecurity, build community, and support biodiversity.
- Developing more **funding and financing tools** to enable new park and open space development and to allow for proper ongoing operations, maintenance and programming services. In addition, the County's **procurement practices** should be revised to support an ecosystem-based approach, including the use of native plants in public spaces, locally-grown food, and other approaches that can use dollars to meet sustainability objectives.
- Investing in **multi-benefit park projects**, especially in disadvantaged communities, to address many goals including water capture and infiltration, reduction in urban heat island, and recreational opportunities.

A more detailed list of condensed comments is included in Appendix B.

Appendix A: “Open Space, Recreation, Biodiversity and Habitat” Workshop Attendee List

- Audobon Center at Debs Park
- Ballona Network
- Bike San Gabriel Valley
- Black Women for Wellness
- California Native Plant Society
- City Project
- Climate Resolve
- Communities for a Better Environment*
- Community Partners
- Conservation Corps of Long Beach
- Council for Watershed Health
- Day One*
- East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice*
- Enterprise Community Partners
- Environmental Defense Fund
- From Lot to Spot
- Heal the Bay
- Hunger Action Los Angeles
- LA Compost
- LA Conservation Corps
- LA Food Policy Council
- Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust
- Mujeres de la Tierra
- National Forest Foundation/ San Gabriel Mountains Community Collaborative
- Nature Conservancy
- Nature for All
- North East Trees
- Pacoima Beautiful*
- Prevention Institute
- Proyecto Pastoral
- Pukuu Cultural Community Services
- The River Project
- SCOPE LA*
- Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples
- Sierra Club Central Group
- SoCalCross
- Social Eco Education
- Social Justice Learning Institute



- SLATE-Z
- Southern CA Resource Services for Independent Living
- Strategic Actions for a Just Economy
- Theodore Payne Foundation
- Trust for Public Land
- TRUST South LA
- Union de Vecinos
- The Wilderness Society
- US Green Building Council
- William C. Velasquez Institute
- Youth Policy Institute

*Community based organization anchor