



Neighborhood Council of Westchester Playa

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March 2, 2021

Hon. Mike Bonin Councilmember, 11th District
200 N. Spring Street,
Room 475
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Councilman Bonin,

Over the past year and a half, the Governmental Affairs Committee (GAC) and the Educational Committee have discussed ways to improve park access within Westchester and Playa Del Rey. Other than Westchester Park, which many residents do not feel is safe, there are no dedicated parks or areas to recreate in the neighborhood. However, there are many suitable recreation facilities at LAUSD campuses throughout the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Council of Westchester Playa Del Rey (NCWPDR) asks that the Councilmember's office work directly with LAUSD to allow Westchester residents access to these facilities through the existing Community Parks Program.

The GAC first discussed this issue at the September 2019 committee meeting where it learned about the Community Parks Program from a staff member with LAUSD Board Member Nick Melvoin's office. The committee expressed an interest in the idea and conducted an analysis of the recreational assets at LAUSD campuses in Westchester. The committee concluded that the two best campuses to be included in the program would be Open School (east Westchester) and Cowan (west Westchester) due to the quality of their facilities. The item was then brought forward to the Educational Committee where a subcommittee was formed. This letter is presented by the subcommittee and represents the culmination of these efforts.

The City's 2020 Community Plan Update for Westchester presents that 20% of the neighborhood is open space, using Playa Vista and the beaches as evidence. However, no parks are located within the core residential areas east of Pershing, north of Manchester and west of the 405. In its 2016 Park Needs Assessment report, LA County classified Westchester as an area of "High Park Need."

Much of this is a result of the rapid development and minimal community planning of Westchester in the 1940s. "At Westchester, the tremendous need for housing permitted other needs to go unattended," writes author Dana Cuff in a book about mid-century urban development in Los Angeles. William Hanlon, chief of operations at Marlow-Burns, one of the major early developers of Westchester, said, "Every tract we went into, we wanted schools and churches because that created value... We didn't go in for parks." The consequence of these decisions 80 years ago has left the neighborhood bereft of any

recreational opportunities for the community. (quotes are from “The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism” by Dana Cuff pgs. 244-45).


However, a cost-effective solution employed by cities across the nation exists in plain sight: granting the public access to LAUSD recreational facilities. There are several LAUSD campuses in Westchester with basketball courts, fields and handball courts among other assets that would be of immense value to the public after school hours and on weekends.

This solution is very much in the realm of the possible. Residents in Burbank and Culver City are able to recreate at school facilities, an arrangement often worked out in a MOU between the City and the school district. There is no reason why this arrangement could not exist in Westchester and, more broadly, across the city of Los Angeles.

There is even an existing program called the Community Parks Program which is operated by People for Parks under the LA Neighborhood Land Trust under which these facilities could be used. Moreover, there are now many funding sources for parks. These sources range from Measure A passed in 2016 to Prop 84 bonds and AB 209.

Roughly one in four Californians have no park they can walk to. During the last year, the need for park space has been even more acute. We ask that your office work directly with LAUSD to allow Westchester families and residents access to these facilities. We ask that the Councilmember’s office issue a response to this request within two months of the Board approval date and that a City Council resolution be enacted within six months.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Paula Gerez

President, Neighborhood Council of Westchester-Playa

CC:

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