

CATEGORY: Policy

COMMITTEE: PHS & Homeless

PURPOSE: CIS in support of the City of Los Angeles Council File 21-0063 to assess the number of underutilized parcels owned by the City or city agencies

BACKGROUND:

In order to address the ongoing homelessness crisis and create more policy opportunities to create new housing using City resources, the Los Angeles City Council has ordered the Chief Legislative Analyst, Department of General Services, Department of Recreation and Parks, Department of Water and Power and all other city departments that own land report back on the underutilization of city-owned parcels and potential of using them for temporary or permanent supportive housing for those residents of the City of Los Angeles currently housed.

The City's motion, as written, is the following:

"The current homelessness crisis has had an enormous impact on the future and wellbeing of Los Angeles. Homeless individuals are on countless streets, in city parks, and under freeways. Despite voter approved measures which allocated billions of dollars to addressing homelessness, the homeless population has only increased. One of the challenges that is often cited when discussing how to house the homeless is available land. Land acquisition can be expensive and, unless there is a willing seller, very time consuming.

The City owns an enormous amount of land throughout its almost 470 square miles of territory. While much of this land is utilized for libraries, parks, police stations, and fire stations, a sizable amount of land is unused or underutilized. The city has done previous analyses to determine if land is suitable for homeless housing and staff reports have shown very little land that is available for use.

However, the city needs to look at this through a new lens that is focused solely on the technical and financial aspects of building homeless housing - not future uses or plans. Furthermore, while there are restrictions on how certain land can be used, temporary housing has been constructed on many sites and successfully housed homeless individuals.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Chief Legislative Analyst, in coordination with the City Administrative Officer, Department of General Services, Department of Recreation and Parks, Department of Water and Power, and all other city departments who own land to report back on the underutilization of all city-owned properties and the feasibility of using them for temporary or permanent homeless housing; and,

I FURTHER MOVE that ability to use a property shall be based on technical, financial, and legal feasibility and not future uses for any given property; and, I FURTHER MOVE that this report also analyze any previous studies of city yards and shops to determine which ones are under utilized, arranged poorly, or can be consolidated with other city yards; and,

I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of General Services and other necessary departments evaluate all leases of city facilities to outside entities to determine if the leases can be modified to provide space for homeless housing; and,

I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of Recreation and Parks report on all parcels owned by the department that are not deed restricted for park purposes and determine if under section 594(c),(d), and (e) of the Los Angeles City Charter any land is unsuitable for park usage.

I FURTHER MOVE that these aforementioned reports be transmitted back to Council within 30 days of the adoption of this motion.”

Whereas, the last Greater Los Angeles Homeless county indicated that over 41,200 Angelenos are currently experiencing homelessness;¹ and

Whereas, the City of Los Angeles owns almost 470 square miles of property; and

Whereas, Chong (2020) demonstrated that 16 percent of development costs in Los Angeles County are for the purchase of land, almost 9 times the amount for a development in any of the surrounding counties;²

¹ “2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count.” Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA). <<https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=726-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-results>>.

² Chong, Hoyu. “Demystifying the High Cost of Multifamily Housing Construction in Southern California.” University of California Riverside School of Business Center for Economic Forecasting and Development. February 2020. <https://uceconomicforecast.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/UCR_CEFD_Multifamily_Housing_White-Paper_3_2020.pdf>.

Los Angeles launched a Green New Deal in 2019 to “battle against climate change”¹ and also wants to take “aggressive measures to combat further climate impacts.”² A 2019 study showed that green space provides co-benefits to “climate change” and “human health” including “reduction of urban heat island” and “mortality from all causes.”³ Even the EPA touts the benefits of green space regarding climate change as well as an “improved quality of life.”⁴

Yet, the ParkScore for Los Angeles is 71 out of 100 while New York City’s ParkScore is 11. The ParkScore was calculated by The Trust For Public Land, created in 1972 “to bring the benefits of parks and nature to the places, people, and communities that needed them most.”⁵

CALCULATED BY THE FOLLOWING RATINGS:

Amenities - 24 out of 100
Equity - 32 out of 100
Access - 45 out of 100
Acreage - 51 out of 100
Investment - 60 out of 100

COMPARED TO 100 LARGEST U.S. CITIES:

Playgrounds - 4th percentile
Dog Parks - 8th percentile
SplashPads - 14th percentile
Basketball Hoops - 40th percentile
Bathrooms - 43rd percentile
Recreation/Senior Centers - 55th percentile

LOS ANGELES’S PARK SPENDING PER CAPITA COMPARED TO THE NATIONAL AVERAGES:

City Agency -	80% versus 85%	Private organizations -	2% versus 5%
Other public agencies -	3% versus 6%	Monetized volunteer hours -	15% versus 4%

Los Angeles City’s recent budget included \$1 billion to the homeless with only \$75 million (or 7.5% of a billion) to “overdue repairs at parks and recreation facilities.”⁶ The population of Greater Los Angeles is just under 19 million. The motion states that “the last Greater Los Angeles Homeless count indicated that over 41,200 Angelenos are currently experiencing homelessness” which is 0.2% of the Greater Los Angeles population. If the count were for Los Angeles City, it would be 1%. Either figure is too high; yet, providing green space to 100% of the population benefits all!

THE MOTION:

Regarding CF 21-0063, the Mar Vista Community Council is against unless amended to remove the requirement for the Department of Recreation and Parks report. Additionally, if any of the 470 square miles of city property are located within communities with insufficient green space, property will be converted to sufficient green space first as Los Angeles needs to increase, not decrease its green space for all residents whether house or unhoused.

¹ <https://plan.lamayor.org/>

² <https://www.lacitysan.org/>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6553580/>

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/m7ctxhnr>

⁵ <https://www.tpl.org/city/los-angeles-california>

⁶ <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-05-20/la-budget-parks-lapd-homelessness>