Turning Equity Into Reality Workshop, May 23, 2017

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From Concept to Reality

Many people worked over many months to create this Plan. More than 150 potential revitalization opportunities have been identified within the Lower LA River corridor through thousands of hours of deliberation and analyses. Hundreds of pages of technical documentation have been produced to document these activities (see Volume 2). This Plan represents a large investment of time—both professional and volunteer—and money as well as the desire of many stakeholders to making the river a place for relaxation, recreation and reflection for residents. However, without continued cooperation and commitment to meeting this Plan's objectives the results of this investment will not be realized.

Realizing the multiple benefits of the revitalization opportunities included in the Plan without causing detrimental and unintended consequences is only possible if 1) projects are actually implemented and 2) if this implementation is done with careful consideration of a project's impacts on surrounding communities, infrastructure, and the environment. The following sections provide guidelines for addressing these points.

Possible Strategy Selection and Prioritization Criteria

- Ability to be incorporated into an existing capital improvement or other funded project
- Alignment with priorities of non-governmental organization partner(s)
- Availability of grant funding associated with opportunity type or location
- Proximity to identified areas of need (e.g., community gardens in food deserts)
- Strong community support

Hollydale Park in City of South Gate

Selection

This Plan includes conceptual details for three highlighted projects as shown in Chapter 3, however, Volume 2, Chapter 2 provides details about many additional strategies that merit further consideration by cities and stakeholders. These revitalization opportunities were designed to have the potential to make progress towards as many community and environmental objectives as equitably as possible (Volume 2, Chapter 1), however, individual cities or stakeholders may want to select or prioritize additional projects based on additional criteria while reflecting back upon the Plan's objectives during project selection see possible selection and prioritization criteria above for a brief list of project requirements. When selecting projects be sure to refer to related existing plans such as the Los Angeles Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment.

Dominguez Gap Wetlands is a nature-based solution that enhances the river corridor

Nature-based Approaches

Studies show that human beings are healthier, happier and more productive when they live, work and learn in a vegetated environment. Vegetation provides physical benefits to people such as air and water purification and shade (Cecily Maller et. al., 2006; Tzoulas, Konstantinos, et al., 2007), however, less obvious are benefits such as elevated moods and increased motivation to participate in physical activity which improve health outcomes, lower stress and increased concentration levels. Nature-based solutions also improve environmental health by improving water, soil, and air quality at a regional scale. More and more access to green spaces is considered an environmental justice issue. The Working Group recommends that vegetation and nature-based approaches be incorporated into the revitalization opportunities outlined in this Plan wherever possible.

For more information on nature-based solutions, refer to The Watershed Education Plan or see the organizations below.

TreePeople is an environmental nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire, engage and support people to take personal responsibility for the urban environment, making it safe, healthy, fun and sustainable and to share our process as a model for the world. *www.treepeople.org/resources*

IUCN International Union for the Conservation of Nature. IUCN's mission is to provide expert guidance on integrated approaches to the management of natural and modified ecosystems to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. *www.iucn.org/ commissions/commission-ecosystem-management/our-work/nature-based-solutions*

THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND The Trust for Public Land is partnering with the local non-profits, agencies, and others to re-purpose several neighborhood alleys into vibrant, outdoor areas. *www.tpl.org/green-alleys# sm.0000zl4z272 ufcrpwxu1qhtuuld5f*

The Nature Conservancy The Nature Conservancy is working with engineers, elected officials, community planners, floodplain managers and conservationists to demonstrate the value of nature-based solutions. *www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/urgentissues/water/protecting-rivers/ natural-solutions-for-reducing-flood-risk.xml*

Gentrification is the transformation of working-class or vacant areas of the central city into middle-class residential or commercial use (Zuk et al, 2015).

Displacement is when a household is compelled to leave its residence or when any household is not permitted to move into a dwelling, by a change in conditions, which affect that dwelling or its immediate surroundings because of conditions that are beyond the household's control, occur despite the household's adherence to previously imposed conditions of occupancy, differs significantly and in a spatially concentrated fashion from changes in the housing market as a whole; and cause continued occupancy to be impossible, hazardous, or unaffordable" (Grier and Grier, 1978; Marcuse, 1986).

Placement and Scale

One of the primary considerations when selecting a location for—and scale of—a particular project should be maintaining the stability and cultural identity of the surrounding community and prevent environmental gentrification. Based on accepted indicators of high displacement risk—median household income, percent renters, percent college-educated and percent non-white—many of the communities around the river are particularly vulnerable to displacement caused by gentrification (see definition in sidebar). In addition, many locally-owned businesses in the watershed—which are key to the character, cultural identity and stability to many river neighborhoods—are vulnerable to the risks associated with gentrification because—according to a survey conducted by students at the UCLA Luskin Center for Public Affairs (Arriaga, Delia et al., 2017)—they lease space, they have informal leasing arrangements, they are not aware of resources available to help their business grow and thrive.

Even projects intended to revitalize the river and improve environmental conditions in the area could, ironically, end up harming existing residents if care is not taken when locating and designing projects. History has shown that large eco-investments can cause property values to increase therefore increasing taxes on homeowners and increasing rents for others. Displacement then causes residents to move to cheaper areas which are typically farther away from jobs and have higher environmental disparity and degradation. Or for particularly vulnerable populations, this investment induced displacement could cause homelessness.

One way to prevent these unintended consequences and maximize the benefits of revitalization investments equitably among existing communities, is to locate and design projects using strategies that are on a smaller scale in those areas particularly vulnerable to displacement (Curran, W. and T. Hamilton, 2012). This approach requires:

- Intensive community activism and coalition building,
- A democratic process for selecting strategies,
- Affordability protections for existing residents and business, and
- Designing small scattered projects rather than only big ticket ones which will attract intense investment.

Single family homes along river.

Utilizing these strategies will ensure that revitalization projects are those wanted and needed by the local communities and could also serve to more evenly distribute revitalization benefits around the river watershed. Smaller, neighborhood projects are also at a scale more readily relatable to residents therefore meaningful public input may be easier to get. Many of the opportunities outlined in Volume 2, Chapter 2 are small scale or could be scaled down depending on the needs of the neighborhood.

The process that created this Plan utilized the first two strategies extensively and has laid the groundwork for continued coordination and coalitions by incorporating a formal watershed education program. This program is a required by law and has been designed to increase community recognition of the value of the river, reconnect the communities to the river, and explore the importance of protecting the river's resources. The watershed education program builds off of the existing resources of the Working Group and other organizations that support the river and identifies gaps that need to be filled in order to strengthen engagement through watershed education. The program is designed to connect communities along to the river to one another and to the river itself. The program promotes continued outreach and advocacy, supplies tools for greater education, and provides a platform for community members to stay engaged with revitalization efforts.

In addition, the Working Group developed a Community Stabilization Toolkit—based on part on Public Counsel's Equity Principles—which includes a number of policies which could provide affordability protections. These policies could protect existing affordable housing stock and help ensure new affordable housing would be incorporated into new developments spurred by revitalization efforts. The Toolkit also includes ideas for helping to connect the local businesses with existing resources to help them adapt and benefit from revitalization as well as an option for preparing the local workforce to evolve as businesses change and grow.

Another way cities and advocate groups can experiment with revitalization approaches is to do them "tactically." This involves initiating small scale, inexpensive, incremental and often temporary concepts into a community to see how they are received. The projects require little commitment and have low risk. The Templates developed as part of this Plan (Chapter 3 and Volume 2, Chapter 3) are examples of the type of quickly implementable projects cities and communities can execute for easy revitalization of the river. Pop up gardens and parks are other examples that could be a part of revitalization efforts throughout the watershed.

Damsel fly on marsh grass near river south of Willow Street
Photo by Calvin Abe

Top left:
754 Post Street Parklet
Top right:
436 Balboa Street Parklet
Photos by Stella Kim, San Francisco Planning Department

Bottom right:
2410 California Street Parklet
Photo by Wendy Cheng, San Francisco Planning Department

Successful Example of Tactical Revitalization

San Francisco Pavement to Parks

San Francisco's Pavement to Parks initiative is a collaboration between city agencies and nonprofit partners. The program seeks to test the possibilities of underused streets and public rights-of-way by quickly and inexpensively converting them to new pedestrian spaces. It allows the City to work with local communities to temporarily test new ideas in the public realm and the projects are meant to be temporary and easily reversible. Seating, landscaping and pavement treatments are common features of all projects. The goals of the program are to:

- Reimagine the potential of city streets
- Encourage non-motorized transportation
- Enhance pedestrian safety and activities
- Foster neighborhood interaction
- Support local businesses

For more information visit:
http://pavementtoparks.org/about/

Successful Example of
Tactical Revitalization

Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Pop Up Gardens

Each year the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society creates temporary garden spaces on vacant or underutilized city land in Philadelphia. The PHS partners with local restaurants, food trucks and breweries to create outdoor garden spaces where people can come and eat, drink, listen to music and relax. Some of the gardens last for entire growing seasons, April–October, while others are more temporary. Proceeds from the Pop Up Gardens support the PHS City Harvest program that feeds more than 1,200 families using crops from community gardens in the city.

For more information visit:
https://phsonline.org/popups

Top:
City Pop Up Garden
Photo by Julia Lehman for PHS

Middle:
South Street Pop Up Garden
Photo by Rob Cardillo for PHS

Bottom:
South Street Pop Up Garden
Photo by Julia Lehman for PHS

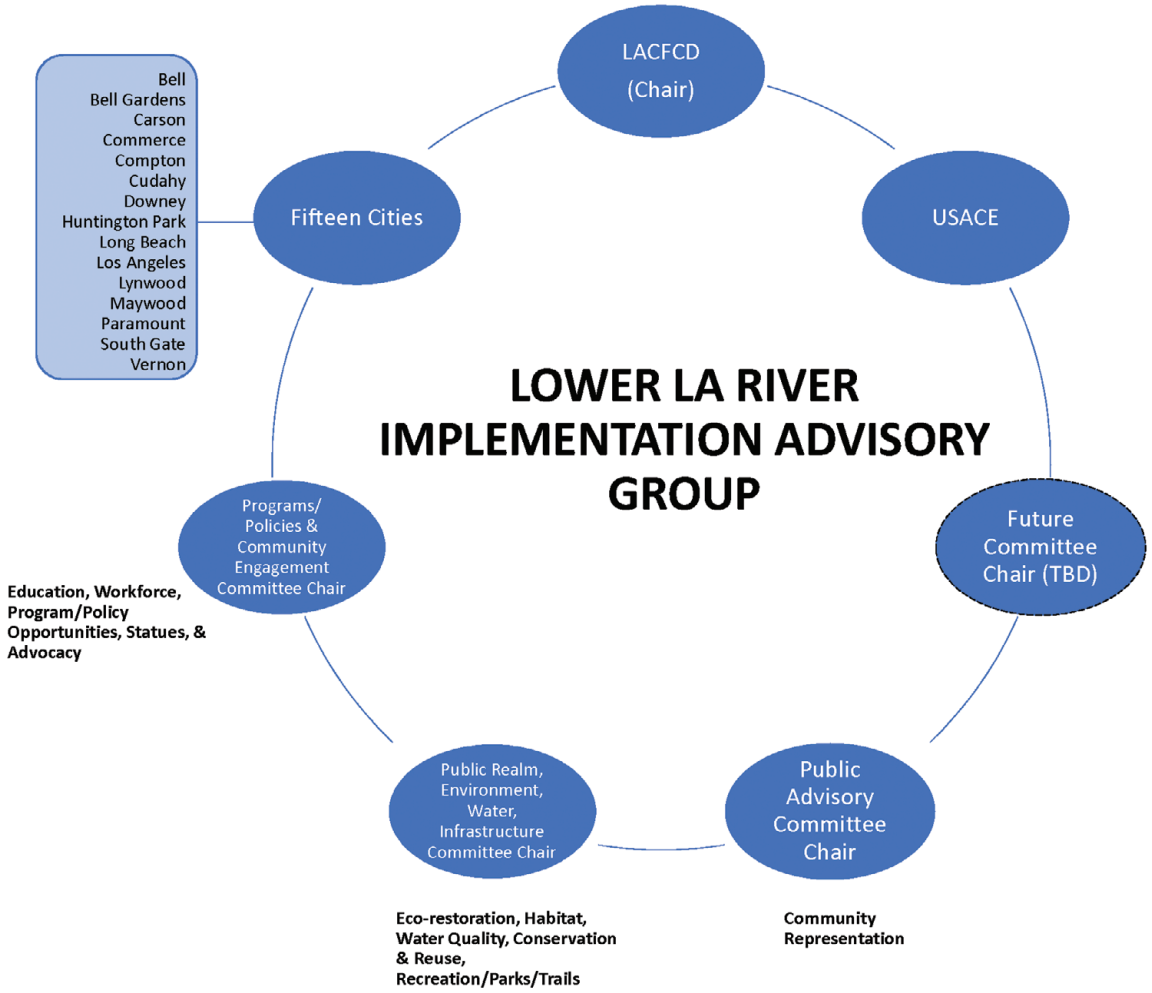
Birds resting on the hydraulic structures within the river north of the Willow Street Bridge.
Photo by Calvin Abe

Management Structure

The recommended management organization within the Plan is intended to facilitate implementation by providing program and project advice to applicants. The following Working Group ideals will be incorporated:

- Promotion of equitable investment among river communities
- Establishment of cohesive governance benefiting overall river revitalization
- Highlighting of incentives for urban greening
- Facilitation of multi-jurisdiction collaboration
- Consideration of the Plan's safety and security guidelines
- Incorporation of sustainable operations and maintenance
- An engaged public and community-driven process that embraces implementation of multi-participant projects

The Implementation Advisory Group incorporates widespread representation from jurisdictional agencies, non-profit organizations, stakeholders, and members of the public. Each committee or sub-group has a chairperson, and each of the fifteen cities has a representative. Future committees would be added as needed. The LA County Flood Control District would be the overall chair of the Implementation Advisory Group.



Note: Community Stewardship, Equity Issues, & Outreach included in each Subcommittee

Upon completion of the Lower Los Angeles River Revitalization Plan, the Implementation Advisory Group will ensure projects that are subsequently implemented are carried out in accordance with the plan, and that stakeholders continue to have a voice in plan implementation. In its role as an advisory body, the Implementation Advisory Group will strive to reach consensus on issues the before them, but ultimately, individual entities with jurisdiction along the river corridor will continue to have decision-making authority.

Management Purpose and Responsibilities

Once established, the Implementation Advisory Group would define their purpose and role based on the following items:

- Provide an open and accessible public venue for discussion of proposed projects/programs related to the Lower LA River;
- Ensure proposed projects/programs are consistent with the goals, objectives, and priorities of the Lower LA River Revitalization Plan;
- Maximize multi-use opportunities and community benefits by encouraging collaboration among the many project proponents, communities, and organizations in the project area;
- Advocate for the value of the Plan by helping its members and surrounding cities and communities understand and value the Plan;
- Identify a group to implement the Watershed Education Program; and
- Develop and maintain a "to-do" list that is continually updated and that will help keep the Implementation Advisory Group robust, active, and transparent.

There are local and regional issues that will come to the attention of the Implementation Advisory Group that are within the responsibilities of individual cities. While advisory decisions need to be consistent with the Plan's recommendations, they cannot override actions within the jurisdictional responsibility of member agencies.

Post-Plan Steps

The governance structure would be established once the Plan is formally approved with committees consisting of current Working Group Members, to be augmented after the process gets underway. Since the Implementation Advisory Group cannot fund or fully implement projects, a 2-phased process may occur:

Phase 1 establishes the Implementation Advisory Group partnership that advances implementation of the Plan according to the roles and responsibilities mentioned above. As the process continues, various guidelines and protocols will be developed to ensure that a comprehensive river program results in synergistic environmental and community gains.

Phase 2 creates a centralized District or Joint Powers Authority with funding and decision-making authority. At an appropriate time, the IAG will consider current models for implementation. During this time, the IAG will also consider ways to provide staffing along the river to meet educational and safety needs.

(Please refer to Chapter 4, Volume 2 for more information on governance.)

Funding

Successful implementation of the Plan will require financial strategies that help provide adequate funding. To this end, the Working Group has established the following priorities:

- Identification of a range of funding sources and associated project types associated with grants, capital improvements programs, and agency missions
- Sustainable and feasible capital projects
- Realistic range of project sizes and scales
- Integrated programs that can leverage economies of scale
- Coordinated public/private partnerships

This matrix illustrates the most likely sources for initial funding for a variety of projects. Importantly, there is an opportunity to leverage various funds by "mixing and matching" a combination of funding sources and applying the framework developed here in this Plan.

(Please refer to Chapter 4, Volume 2 for more information on Funding.)

Funding Options for Proposed Strategies

	River Modifications	Bridges & Trails	Parks & Open Space	Water Quality Projects	Operation & Maintenance
City Funding (Capital Improvement Programs/General Funds)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Existing LACFCD Funding	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County Water Resiliency Funding Measure			✓	✓	✓
Federal Funding (USACE, EPA)	✓			✓	✓
Grants	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parks Funding Bonds and Measures		✓	✓	✓	✓
Gateway COG Studies/Funding		✓		✓	✓
Metro		✓	✓		
Caltrans		✓			
Caltrans Cooperative Implementation Agreements				✓	
Stormwater Grants				✓	
Future Water Bond Allocations and Grants				✓	
Joint Funding with Watershed Groups				✓	✓
Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program			✓	✓	
Creation of Enhanced Infrastructure Finance Districts and/or Public Private Partnerships	✓	✓	✓	✓	

✓ *indicates the most likely source of initial funding*

References

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