



Park and Recreation Commission

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE COMMISSIONERS **DATE: JULY 21, 2025**
FROM: PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: VERBAL UPDATE ON THE RIVER DISTRICT FEASIBILITY STUDY

ISSUE:

Receive a verbal update on the River District Feasibility Study.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Park and Recreation Commission receive an update on the River District Feasibility Study; provide feedback and accept the report for file.

BACKGROUND:

In 2003, the Santa Ana River Task Force was created, followed by a series of Mayor's Blue-Ribbon Committees throughout the Santa Ana Watershed.

In 2014, through Senate Bill 1390, the California state legislature created the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program within the State Coastal Conservancy. The program addresses the resource and recreational goals of the Santa Ana River region, including open space, trails, wildlife habitat, agricultural land protection, water quality protection, educational use, and public access. The Conservancy makes grant funding available to help agencies and non-profit organizations move forward with projects to meet these resource and recreational goals.

On March 14, 2018, the Coastal Conservancy approved the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Open Space Plan – 'Expanding the River's Reach'.

On December 26, 2019, the City of Riverside entered into a grant agreement with the California Coastal Conservancy for the Riverside Gateway Project Suite Design and CEQA project in the amount of \$1,960,000. This planning effort received extensive community input concerning the design of 250 acres of undeveloped or underutilized City owned parkland that can serve as gateways to the river.

In June 2021, Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson created a Working Group, co-chaired by Ward 1 Councilmember, Erin Edwards and Ward 7 Councilmember, Steven Hemenway to determine methods of attracting: 1) City Investment; 2) Private Investment; and, 3) Public Awareness. The Santa Ana River Working Group is comprised of dedicated community members and public service professionals who aspire to put the river back in riverside. The group's purpose was to

identify opportunities for development along the Santa Ana River, provide recommendations on feasible projects, and suggest strategies for implementation. The group used the Design Thinking process to focus all discussions: What If, What Is, What Wows, and What Works.

On March 23, 2023, the City of Riverside posted the Request for Proposal to Planet Bids to procure a consultant to work on a River District Feasibility Study.

On April 6, 2023, the California State Coastal Conservancy approved and awarded the City of Riverside \$200,000 for a feasibility study to assess the viability of establishing a River District along the Santa Ana River.

On October 10, 2023, the City Council approved professional consultant services agreement for Request for Proposal No. 2268 with Economic Consultants Oregon, Ltd. for River District Feasibility Study in the amount of \$199,335.85 and adopted a resolution approving the acceptance of grant funds from the California State Coastal Conservancy for the Santa Ana River Riverside District Feasibility Study.

DISCUSSION:

The City of Riverside has embarked on an effort to ‘Put the river back in Riverside’ by creating the River District public realm that will be environmentally and fiscally sustainable and will better connect the community to the river. The California State Coastal Conservancy grant award for a feasibility study will allow the City to identify the boundaries of the River District, and define the resources needed to implement the Santa Ana River Task Force’s vision for the River District. The grant is a first steppingstone for the development of the Santa Ana River District.

The goal of the project is to ‘Put the river back in Riverside’ by developing the River District, a public realm that is environmentally and fiscally sustainable while connecting the community to the river. The desired outcomes include:

- Increasing Awareness and Excitement: Engage the community with marketing campaigns that showcase the potential of the River District as a safe and vibrant space to ‘Put the river back’ in the minds of Riversiders
- Improving Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion: Amplify the voices of underrepresented groups and create opportunities for all Riversiders to participate in planning and enjoying the River District.
- Promoting Safety and Access: Address safety concerns with thoughtful design, programming, and cleanup efforts to create welcoming entry points and pathways to the river.

The “Put the River Back in Riverside” campaign focuses on community connection through creating economic vitality while honoring the stewardship of the lands and waters.

The River District will be a financially sustainable district that funds the construction, operations and maintenance of the community safety and public amenities. It will also attract private development and serve as a self-generating district that invests fees and leases back into the district. Self-generating entity that attracts private investment to help fund public amenities.

Financial sustainability will be achieved through strong partnerships with the private sector and other non-profit organizations and public agencies and utilizing a toolbox of financial tools.

Environmental sustainability will also be achieved through strong partnerships. There are already extensive plans for habitat restoration in the river bottom and the responsible development of the Gateway Parks. The River District will be a truly sustainable public realm with a unique design, plant palate, amenities, and wayfinding.

Environmental challenges include:

- Trash
- Water quality
- Flood
- Erosion
- Invasive plants and animals
- Heat
- Fire

Environmental opportunities include:

- Resilience through climate adapted plants and shade
- Thoughtful restoration with native plants
- Reduce fire fuel by removing flammable invasive plants such as mustard and tumbleweed
- Increase awareness through education, volunteers, and community events.

The River District will be a driver for economic growth, and example of sustainability, and a destination to be enjoyed by the community.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Prepared and

Approved by: Pamela M. Galera, Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director

Attachment: Presentation