

City of Arts & Innovation

# City Council Memorandum

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**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL**      **DATE: DECEMBER 12, 2023**  
**FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**      **WARDS: ALL**  
**DEPARTMENT**  
**SUBJECT: BLUE ZONES PROGRAM OVERVIEW, UPDATE AND CONSIDERATION OF**  
**CITY SPONSORSHIP**

## **ISSUE:**

Consider the support of a Blue Zones project in the City of Riverside so that the City may become a Blue Zone certified City where residents live measurably longer, healthier and happier lives.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the City Council:

1. Receive a Blue Zone overview and update;
2. Recommend the City sponsor a portion of the Blue Zones program cost in the amount of \$208,300 or 1% of the total Blue Zones program costs, in order to activate a third party approved 50% matching grant valued at \$10,400,000; contingent on the remaining Blue Zones program costs being fully fundraised and committed; and
3. Direct staff to draft a Resolution supporting the City of Riverside Blue Zone project and return to Council for adoption.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The concept of blue zones grew out of the demographic work conducted by Gianni Pes and Michel Poulain, who identified regions of the world with the highest concentration of centenarians.

Blue Zones are communities identified as having populations living measurably longer, happier lives with lower rates of chronic diseases and a higher quality of life than the average. The Blue Zones Project began as a New York Times bestseller by National Geographic Fellow Dan Buettner and has evolved into a global movement that is now inspiring cities around the world to make changes so residents live, longer, healthier, and happier lives. Blue Zones Project seeks to improve the well-being of communities by applying best practices to make the healthy choice the easy choice through built environment, food, and tobacco policy change; environmental changes within worksites, schools, restaurants, grocery stores, and



**BLUE ZONES™**

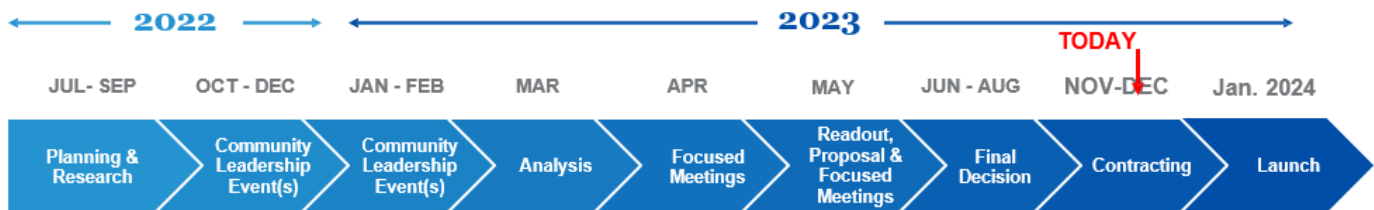
faith/civic organizations; and engagement activities that promote social support for healthy behaviors, volunteering, and purpose. The Project optimizes:

- The built environment: Improving roads and transportation options, parks, and public spaces
- Municipal policies and ordinances: Promoting activity and discouraging junk food marketing and smoking
- Restaurants, schools, grocery stores, faith-based organizations, and workplaces: Building healthier options into the places people spend most of their time
- Social networks: Forming and nurturing social groups that support healthy habits
- Habitat: Helping people design homes that nudge them into eating less and moving more
- Inner selves: Encouraging people to reduce stress, find their purpose, and give back to the community

On June 21, 2022, the City Council approved a proposal by the Riverside University Health System to conduct an assessment to determine the City of Riverside’s eligibility in a Blue Zone Program. The assessment was at no cost to the City and fully funded by the Riverside University Health System.

A Blue Zones assessment of the City of Riverside began in July 2022 and wrapped up in mid-2023 as depicted in the chart below.

**Chart. Blue Zones Timeline and Milestones**



Recently, the Inland Empire Health Program (IEHP) approved a matching grant equivalent to \$10,400,000 to cover up to 50% of Blue Zone program costs for the City of Riverside. The matching grant is contingent on the City of Riverside actively participating in the program and the City serving as a program sponsor. As a result, one of the recommendations contained in this Report is for the City of Riverside to consider active participation and program sponsorship.

This item was scheduled to be heard by the Economic Development, Placemaking, Branding and Marketing Committee on November 30, 2023. Due to lack of quorum the item could not be presented for the Committee to consider a recommendation. Given the time sensitivity of the external funding match opportunity, Councilmember Fierro has supported the item coming directly to the Council for consideration at this time.

**DISCUSSION:**

Readiness Measurement: The City of Riverside was deemed a strong candidate for a Blue Zone certification process because the City met four key criteria:

1. Alignment of community’s current initiatives and strategic plans with Blue Zones
2. Leadership support across sectors

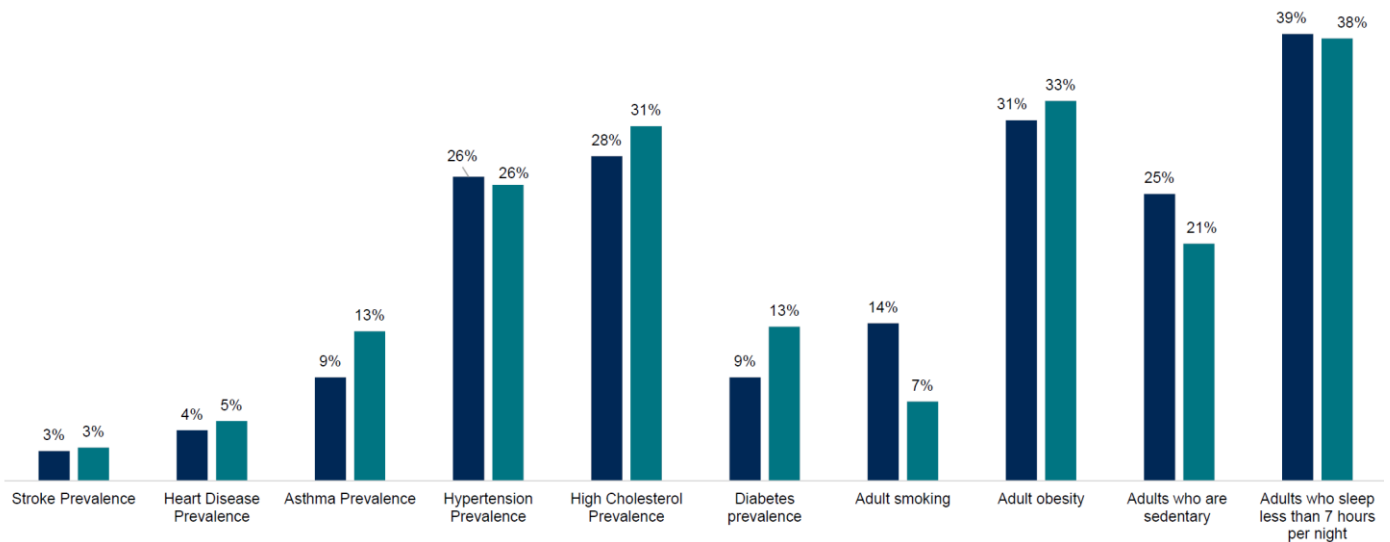
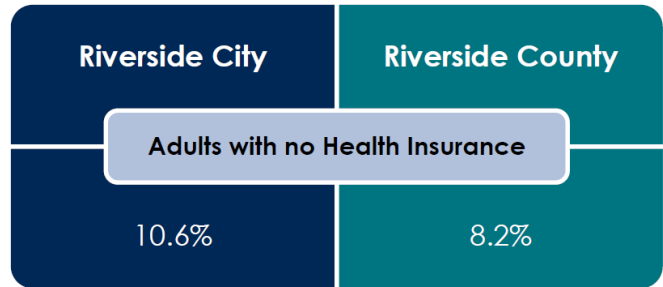
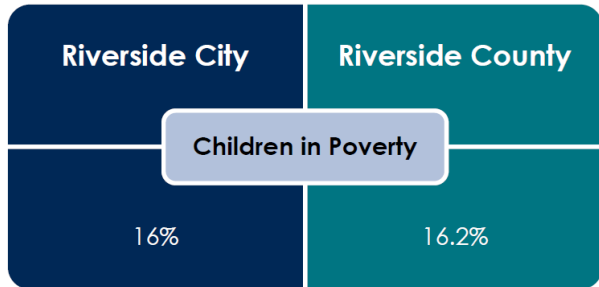
- 3. Governing body support and continuity
- 4. Well-being improvement opportunities

**Overall value includes:**

- ✓ Projected Medical Cost Savings of **-\$164.7M**
- ✓ Reductions in projected workforce lost productivity of **-\$228.9M over the next decade**
- ✓ Projected **-\$159 average annual per capita medical savings and productivity improvement value** for the adult population over the next decade
- ✓ Approximately **\$75.2M** in direct and indirect **benefits to the regional economy**
- ✓ Billions of expected **positive media** and brand impressions
- ✓ Additional related follow-on **community grants, gifts, and investments**
- ✓ Cumulative total **value of over \$468.8 million** for Riverside area

Assessment Report: The Blue Zones Assessment, Readiness and Feasibility Report is attached. The Report evaluated well-being, policy, places and people through the lenses of assets and strengths, challenges and threads to overcome and opportunities.

In terms of the community health profile (see below), there are several challenges for the City of Riverside to lean into including poverty, adults with no health insurance, and prevalence of asthma, hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, obesity and sleep.



Value and Measuring Impact: The “Placemat” (attached) further highlights disease prevalence challenges and the potential for changed outcomes. The potential value created for the City of Riverside is noted in terms of modified behaviors and disease. In doing so, the cumulative projected impact on medical cost savings, productivity savings and regional economic performance is estimated to \$468 million in cumulative projected value.

Some of the key findings include pertaining to Policy, Places and People are provided below:

### Policy

Blue Zones found that in terms of the built environment, the established downtown and neighborhoods, natural amenities and social gathering spaces and committed leadership were strengths. Several threats and challenges to the built environment were also noted including maintenance of new infrastructure and creation of new housing units. A more detailed analysis can be found on pages 60-99 of the attached Assessment including a policy menu for each category with action items, level of effort and applicable strategies.

Key assets of the Food Environment include a dynamic shared leadership to support the local food environment and existing and planned community food assets to support innovation in food culture and infrastructure, supportive local zoning, broad based commitment to local food and healthy eating and a mature hunger relief system. A more detailed review of the Food Environment can be found on pages 100-131 of the attached Assessment. An assessment of Alcohol (pgs. 133 - 149) and Tobacco (pgs. 151-153) are provided as well with a similar menu of policy options.

### Places

Schools are a key component of a successful Blue Zones program. During focus group discussions, challenges were noted with respect to mental health (stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness), economic hardships and financial instabilities, as well as negative effects associated with social media consumption. Several opportunity areas were identified including implementation of a well-being metric and thoughtful evaluation of existing health policies and strategies.

Worksites represent half of our waking life and, as a result, are brought into the Blue Zones through voluntary pledges to support more employment movement, eating less junk food, making meaningful connections with coworkers, and helping people find purpose. Some opportunity areas involve leadership training opportunities to share the value of focusing on employee health, targeting some of the greatest areas for improvement including obesity, high cholesterol, smoking, and sleep.

Blue Zones would also focus on restaurants and grocery stores soliciting voluntary pledges around best practices like healthier offerings, more options for healthier dishes and portion sizes.

### People

Civic organizations and faith-based organizations have a unique ability to connect and engage many residents from a wide range of backgrounds. Faith and civic leaders would be involved with designing the well-being plan for the community and for mobilizing support and amplifying the work. For these reasons, civic and faith-based organization involvement is critical to the success of a Blue Zones program.

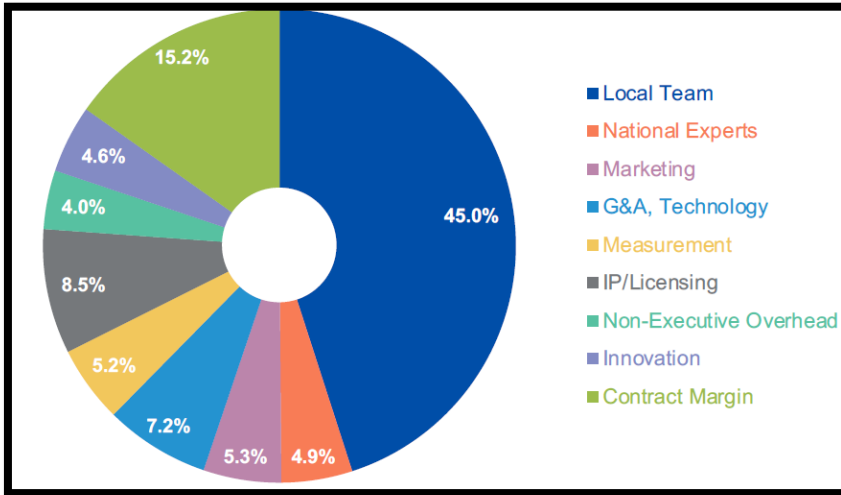
Program Duration: The Blue Zones certification path takes place over a 5 year and 9-month period starting in 2024 and ending in 2029.

Program Cost: The City of Riverside Blue Zone program cost is \$20,830,000 with IEHP recently

authorizing a matching grant equivalent to 50% of the total program costs or up to \$10,415,000. Should the City of Riverside sponsor 1% or \$208,300, then the amount remaining to sponsor/fundraise is \$10,206,700.

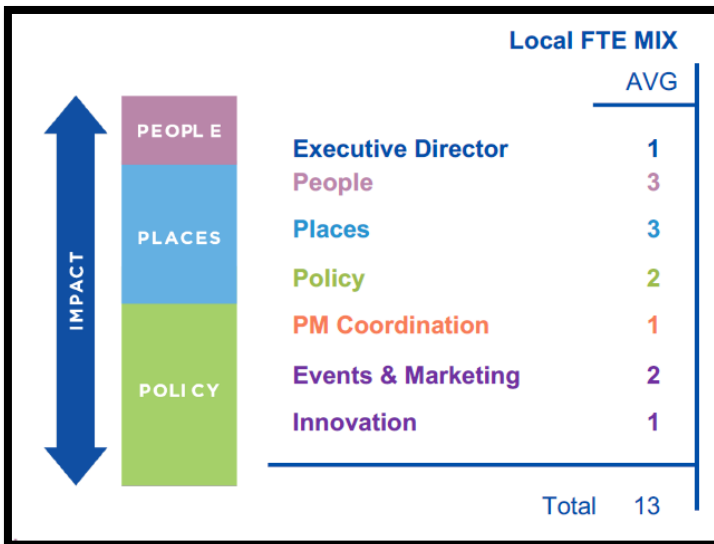
The program costs are divided into nine costs centers (see Chart below) with the local team comprising 45% of the total cost.

**Chart. Resource Allocation**



The chart below provides a break down the 13 full-time positions comprising the “local team”.

**Chart. Local Hire Mix**



**STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

The goals of the Blue Zone Project® align with Strategic Priority 2 – Community Well-Being and Goal 2.2: Strengthening neighborhood identities and improving community health and the physical environment through amenities and programs that foster an increased sense of community and enhanced feelings of pride and belonging citywide.

This item aligns with each of the Cross-Cutting Threads as follows:

1. Community Trust – Activities and actions of possible Blue Zone Project® benefit the City’s

diverse populations and result in greater public good.

2. Equity – Blue Zone Project® tenants are applicable and support the City’s racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, identity, geographic, and other attributes of diversity and are committed to advancing the fairness of treatment, recognition of rights, and equitable distribution of services to ensure every member of the community has equal access to share the benefits of community progress.

3. Fiscal Responsibility – The City of Riverside’s collaboration with the Riverside University Health System provides a prudent steward of public funds and ensures responsible management of the City’s financial resources while providing quality public services to all.

4. Innovation – Evaluation to determine the adaptation of the Blue Zone Program® is inventive and timely in meeting the community’s changing needs and preparing for the future through collaborative partnerships and adaptive processes.

5. Sustainability & Resiliency – Considerations of programs that build community wellbeing contributes to Riverside’s commitment to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future and ensure the City’s capacity to persevere, adapt and grow during good and difficult times alike.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The fiscal impact of this action is dependent on the Committee’s recommendation pertaining to sponsorship to the City Council. Should a 1% or \$208,300 City sponsorship be recommended by Committee to City Council, then funding could be secured through various means, including, but not limited to American Rescue Plan funds or General Fund available fund balance.

In coordination with: City Manager’s Office

Prepared by: Jennifer A. Lilley, Community and Economic Development Director  
Certified as to availability of funds: Kristie Thomas, Finance Director/Assistant Chief Financial Officer  
Approved by: Rafael Guzman, Assistant City Manager  
Approved as to form: Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Attachments:

1. [Blue Zones Assessment](https://www.flipsnack.com/bluezones/blue-zones-riverside-report/full-view.html)  
(<https://www.flipsnack.com/bluezones/blue-zones-riverside-report/full-view.html>)
2. Placemat titled Cost of Doing Nothing, Creating Value and Measuring Impact
3. Presentation