



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: FEBRUARY 1, 2022**

FROM: MAYOR PATRICIA LOCK DAWSON (CHAIR); WARDS: ALL
COUNCILMEMBER ERIN EDWARDS (CO-CHAIR);
COUNCILMEMBER STEVE HEMENWAY (CO-CHAIR)

SUBJECT: SANTA ANA RIVER WORKING GROUP FINAL REPORT

ISSUE:

The Santa Ana River is the namesake of the City of Riverside, but it has been ignored, unsafe, and underutilized in recent years. What would it look like for the City of Riverside to transform its reach of the Santa Ana River into a driver for economic growth and a destination to be enjoyed by families for generations?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Receive and file this report from the Santa Ana River Working Group;
2. Direct the City Manager to:
 - a. Develop a scope of services for a public outreach process that includes:
 - i. A survey to identify, the level of community interest for investing in the initiative, interested private residents/groups to help spearhead the initiative; and
 - ii. A coordination plan with public and private landowners to identify potential opportunities and development constraints.
 - b. Explore possible structures for the creation of a community-led group tasked with continuing the work of the Santa Ana River Working Group to ensure longevity of the initiative; and
3. Direct the City Manager to seek potential funding for future project steps that include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Baseline analysis identifying opportunities and development constraints;
 - b. Feasibility analysis (economic & physical) including ways to increase and leverage public and private investment;
 - c. Community engagement plan that includes:
 - i. Project visioning and defining the key components of the project, including the project boundaries, that illustrate the vision for the "River District"; and
 - ii. A public awareness campaign in support of the Santa Ana Riverside Working Group's Short-term and Long-term vision;
 - d. Environmental Impact Report; and
 - e. Development policy and regulatory framework.

BACKGROUND:

It has been nearly 20 years since the first Santa Ana River Task Force was created, followed by a series of Mayor's Blue-Ribbon Committees, the establishment of the Santa Ana River Trust, and the adoption/implementation of the Santa Ana River Parkways & Open Space Plan.

While some regional leaders and community members have been inspired by the river for years, in June 2021, Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson created a Working Group (Attachment 5) 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 (Attachment 5) 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.

Meeting #1 (Introduction): Discussed the group's purpose and received an overview of the Design Thinking process.

Meeting #2 (What If): Received presentations from other cities to examine the question of what if we could make the Santa Ana River function like rivers in San Antonio, Napa, Anaheim, and Tempe—detailing developments along their own rivers to discuss possibilities for the City of Riverside.

Meeting #3 (What Is): Received an overview of current activities, boundaries, and jurisdictions (Attachment 3) along the Santa Ana River and discussed barriers and opportunities for development (Attachment 2).

Barriers were identified such as: homeless encampments, lack of awareness about the river or where to access it, safety concerns that keep people from using existing amenities, a lack of water in the river, regulatory and jurisdictional challenges, insufficient funding for maintenance of existing trail infrastructure, and a lack of amenities such as restrooms and places for recreation.

Opportunities were identified such as: working with Riverside's many colleges and universities on student-led research projects along the river; linking the river to Downtown Riverside, our existing park system, Hole Lake, and the Innovation District; creating and installing educational and wayfinding signage; using recycled water to create more recreational activities; preserving natural areas while designating locations for development in the areas of commercial, entertainment, hospitality, and recreation; and developing a cohesive river experience in partnership with neighboring cities.

Meeting #4 (What Wows): Discussed a short-term and long-term vision for the future of the Santa Ana River such as a healthy, trash-free ecosystem; a playful place full of public art, recreation, and water features; a research and agricultural hub for students and residents; tourist destination with entertainment, bike & boat rentals, a retreat center, and programming for people of all ages and abilities.

Meeting #5 (What Works): Discussed what projects seem the most feasible and appropriate. Through this, we finalized the following Short-term and Long-term vision for the development of the City of Riverside's reach of the Santa Ana River:

Short-term

A modern visitor/cultural center that honors the history of the area, is respectful of Indigenous history, and connects the downtown entertainment district with the Santa Ana River.

Long-term

An innovative built environment—integrated with the natural setting—that is a nod to the City of Riverside's story (Attachment 1) and facilitates the development of an audacious destination for commerce, retail, hospitality, and recreation along the Santa Ana River.

Meeting #6 (Review Recommendations): Developed a report outline and recommendations for council consideration.

DISCUSSION:

To address gaps, the Working Group (Attachment 5) proposes the following foundational considerations to accomplish next steps:

Solidify the story: Revitalizing the river is personal. It's the origin and namesake for Riversiders. Any future developments along the river will be linked to the City's identity and, therefore, must strongly evoke "who we are and where we're going". To ensure that the City is attracting the right kind of development and amenities, there must be clarity about the river's story – past, present, and future. Stories about the river, rooted in Riverside's rich history of agriculture, its current use of recreation through hiking and biking, and its future use considering climate resiliency, improved recreational opportunity, and untapped economic potential.

Next steps include sharing the story (Attachment 1) drafted by this group within the wider community for feedback, engaging with Riverside communities to determine which stories of the river are of greatest interest, and working with a local firm to build the brand of Riverside's Santa Ana River (See "The Conversation about the river starts now.")

Strong stakeholder support and structure over time is critical: Development along the river cannot be solely a City project. A community group (or groups) must step up to build momentum around a shared vision and to show cohesive leadership. The Working Group (Attachment 5) heard from several cities with thriving rivers who noted that a project to revitalize a river takes years—possibly decades. So, it is important that the vision is led by a community or stakeholder group and not tied to any one elected official to ensure the vision and its leadership remain consistent over time. An example of such a group is Friends of the L.A. River.

Next steps include hosting a kick-off event to broaden the conversation and share the ideas of this Working Group (Attachment 5). The meeting would give insight into the possibility of identifying a community-led group, with strong support from local government entities, chambers of commerce, educational institutions, philanthropic organizations, artists, and other stakeholders. Membership of the group would have to be strategically designed, ensuring many entry points for community members over time.

The conversation about the river starts now: While some Riversiders have fond memories of playing in and around the Santa Ana River as children, many Riversiders today don't realize that there is a river in the City of Riverside. To build up to a completed project, Riversiders need to be (re)introduced to their river and inspired to see beyond what exists today. This can start in small and playful ways, such as pop-up restaurants or art installations. Smorgasburg in Los Angeles is an example of an event that reimagines and revitalizes a neighborhood by making it fun and showing residents what can be. Pop ups should be "Instagramable" and help create the brand for Riverside's reach of the Santa Ana River.

Next steps include partnering with local artists and restaurants, exploring the potential of the Armory in Fairmount Park as a pop-up space, planning events to highlight our parks and trail system along the river, exploring satellite events such as "Festival of Lights in the Park," and creating a communications campaign around our river—led by a local firm—to build the brand both within and outside of the City of Riverside. A year-round calendar of programming could be created to build momentum and drive engagement around key moments of the year (i.e., Earth Day.)

Determine early on the right balance between public and private use: The community must be clear about its values and economic goals for the river. Private development can create extraordinary opportunities for an enhanced public experience of the river, and it will be important not to lose sight of the river as a public space for residents and tourists alike.

Next steps include community engagement to determine the balance of public and private use. Current engagement opportunities in the River-side gateway project (already underway) is one vehicle to provide insight into this balance. Wider community engagement will be necessary along the length of the river, both within City limits and with our regional partners. To achieve this audacious vision, we must be intentional about including leadership in the cities surrounding the river (Jurupa Valley, Eastvale, Norco, Colton, and Corona) in this discussion.

Focus on key areas: Flowing for 11 miles through the City of Riverside alone, the Santa Ana River remains a mystery for many residents: how to access it, what recreational opportunities already exist, and determining its great potential. To bring the Working Group's vision to life, it would be advantageous to focus on key areas of the river bottom/trail where development and tourism would have the most impact and be easiest to realize.

Next steps include mapping the most accessible entry points; allowing people to drive to these locations. Once people are there, ensuring that educational and wayfinding signs direct visitors to local attractions and share information about the natural and built environment—connecting the river to Riverside's story.

In the longer term, we must work to create a "there" there. Seek input from community members and developers about how to bring these areas to life. The Working Group (Attachment 5) suggests focusing on areas of the river surrounding Fairmount Park and Mount Rubidoux, looking particularly at the area where the City of Riverside owns both sides of the river, in addition to Hole Lake. Additionally, strong consideration should be given for the creation of an Assessment District and/or the possibility of a collaborative and regional rezoning initiative along the river.

Bringing water to the river is one important way to increase playfulness, economic activity, and visibility: There is a strong interest in using the river as a destination location and economic engine, programmed by residents and tourists, with activities that could include kayaking, canoeing, and swimming. As it is likely cost prohibitive to wet the entire length and width of the river (and as there are environmental and regulatory constraints) smaller areas and connections

can be explored to “engineer a river” and create a fun river experience.

Next steps include determining areas such as the Springbrook Wash, Hole Lake, or smaller tributaries that might be appropriate and feasible to wet year-round. For areas of the river that will remain dry, begin thinking of them as destinations in their own right. For example, could an area like North Hill become a destination bluff?

To “put the river back in Riverside,” the river must feel safe: While not the focus of this Working Group (Attachment 5), safety concerns along the river must be addressed immediately to ensure that the Group’s short- and long-term visions are achieved. This must happen at both a city and regional level.

Next steps include continuing the work of the District 2 Homeless Collaborative and the Santa Ana River Encampment Outreach Plan, in addition to regular patrol by Riverside’s public safety teams.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

Strategic Priority and Goal

Arts, Culture and Recreation, Goal 1.1 – Strengthen Riverside’s portfolio of arts, culture, recreation, senior, and lifelong learning programs and amenities through expanded community partnerships, shared use opportunities, and fund development.

Arts, Culture and Recreation, Goal 1.2 – Enhance equitable access to arts, culture and recreational service offerings and facilities.

Arts, Culture and Recreation, Goal 1.3 – Improve parks, recreational amenities, open space, and trail development, and fulfill critical lifecycle and facility maintenance needs.

Arts, Culture and Recreation, Goal 1.4 – Prioritize safety at parks, trails, arts, cultural and recreational facilities.

Action 1.4.3 – Modify Safety Survey, analyze and prioritize safety results to address the public’s perception of safety at all arts, culture, entertainment and recreation events, programs, trails and facilities, including the Santa Ana River.

Community Well-Being, Goal 2.3 – Strengthen neighborhood identities and improve 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.

Economic Opportunity, Goal 3.1 – Facilitate partnerships and programs to develop, attract and retain innovative business sectors.

Economic Opportunity, Goal 3.3 – Cultivate a business climate that welcomes innovation, entrepreneurship, and investment.

Environmental Stewardship, Goal 4.2 – Sustainably manage local water resources to maximize reliability and advance water reuse to ensure safe, reliable, and affordable water to our community.

Environmental Stewardship, Goal 4.5 – Maintain and conserve 30% of Riverside’s natural

lands in green space including, but not limited to, agricultural lands and urban forests in order to protect and restore Riverside's rich biodiversity and accelerate the natural removal of carbon, furthering our community's climate resilience.

Action 4.5.1 – Pursue a variety of funding sources & partnership opportunities to preserve, protect and enliven the natural resource of the Santa Ana River through habitat and species conservation, advancement of 'One Water One Riverside', fire prevention engagement, regional collaboration with County and neighboring cities, homeless outreach, and investment in programming & placemaking at trailhead locations.

Action 4.5.2 – Deploy innovative access management techniques and policies along the Santa Ana River Trail and other open spaces to reduce damage to local ecosystems.

Infrastructure, Mobility & Connectivity, Goal 6.2 – Maintain, protect, and improve assets and infrastructure within the City's built environment to ensure and enhance reliability, resiliency, sustainability, and facilitate connectivity.

Infrastructure, Mobility & Connectivity, Goal 6.3 – Identify and pursue new and unique funding opportunities to develop, operate, maintain, and renew infrastructure and programs that meet the community's needs.

Cross-Cutting Threads

Community Trust – The development of the Santa Ana River will be a community-led vision.

Equity – There will be a variety of opportunities to ensure every member of the community has equal access to share in developments along the river.

Fiscal Responsibility – Developments along the river will rely on public-private partnerships and private sector investment.

Innovation – The long-term vision for the river includes an innovative built environment that will set us apart from other cities.

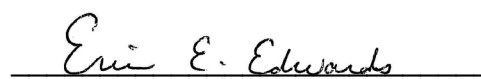
Sustainability & Resiliency – Developments along the river will consist of mindful planning that celebrates and protects existing ecosystems by providing educational opportunities to the public.

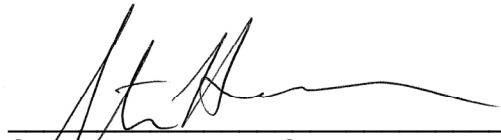
FISCAL IMPACT:

There will be a fiscal and personnel impact associated with this report; however, both need to be determined as related to the workplan (Action 1.4.3, Action 4.5.1, and Action 4.5.2).

Concurs with:


Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson


Erin Edwards, Councilmember
Ward 1



Steve Hemenway, Councilmember
Ward 7

Prepared by: Jake Orta, Assistant to the Mayor
Approved by: Rafael Guzman, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form: Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Attachments:

The Story of the River (Attachment 1)
Santa Ana River Working Group (Attachment 2)
Maps Presentation (Attachment 3)
SAR Fact Sheet (Attachment 4)
Mayor's Santa Ana River Working Group Membership (Attachment 5)