



City Council Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: MAY 10, 2022**
FROM: PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT **WARDS: ALL**
SUBJECT: SANTA ANA RIVER WORKING GROUP UPDATE

ISSUE:

The City of Riverside is embarking on an effort to ‘put the river back in Riverside’ by transforming the Santa Ana River and creating the River District that will be a driver for economic growth and a destination to be enjoyed by families.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council receive and file the Santa Ana River Working Group update and provide input and direction.

BACKGROUND:

Last year, Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson created a Santa Ana River Working Group co-chaired by Ward 1 Councilmember Erin Edwards, and Ward 7 Councilmember Steven Hemenway. This group also included dedicated community members and public service professionals who aspire to put the river back in Riverside. The purpose of the group was to identify opportunities for development along the Santa Ana River and suggest strategies for implementation that will attract 1) City Investment, 2) Private Investment, and 3) Public Awareness.

Barriers were identified such as: homeless encampments, fire hazards, 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 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 residential, commercial, entertainment, hospitality, and recreation; and developing a cohesive river experience in partnership with neighboring cities.

The vision for the City of Riverside's reach of the Santa Ana River includes recreational and interpretive projects that honors the history of the area, is respectful of Indigenous history, and connects the downtown entertainment district with the Santa Ana River. Ultimately the vision is for an innovative built environment, that is integrated with the natural setting, and is a nod to the City of Riverside's story. New development will establish a destination for commerce, retail, hospitality, and recreation along the Santa Ana River.

On February 1, 2022, the City Council directed the City Manager to start project visioning and defining the key components of the "River District" project.

DISCUSSION:

The development of a River District will likely take years, if not decades, for full completion. Therefore, it is important to develop a strong shared vision with input from the community.

A core technical group of key staff members is being assembled to complete the day-to-day work that will be directed by the Santa Ana River Working Group. One of the first tasks is to develop a brand that represents the vision of the River District and 'put the river back in Riverside'. The problem will be further framed by evaluating the barriers, determine why some residents don't even know there is a river, and completing a baseline constraints analysis to examine property ownership, encumbrances, zoning, circulation, habitat, and flood plain.

The community engagement process will continue with community input meetings. Celebrations of the river are being planned, similar to past festivals like the 'Rock the River' event that was co-sponsored by environmentally based non-profits and conservancies. These events will be held adjacent to the river and can include a full day of activities including bird watching, hikes, fun runs, organized bike rides, food, crafts, and music. Staff are targeting the fourth weekend in September 2022, which aligns with World Rivers Day. Staff are also planning a series of short-term programs, such as pop-up food and entertainment, 'go human' bike and walk events, or art installations. A year-round calendar of programming and events will be created to build momentum and drive engagement around key moments throughout the year.

Safety concerns along the river are a high priority for staff and must be addressed to ensure that the Group's short- and long-term visions are achieved. To "put the river back in Riverside," the river must feel safe. Collaboration is taking place at a city and regional level, and these efforts are being synergized into the vision for the River District. Work is continuing with public safety and human services agencies to protect the sensitive habitat of the river corridor and to reduce fire risk. Several agencies are collaborating on regular river bottom patrols and cleanups. The City continues to investigate opportunities under the anti-camping ordinance in collaboration with the County of Riverside, since the majority of the river bottom property falls within the county's jurisdiction.

By July 2022, the core technical group comprised of City employees representing multiple departments will be established. The Santa Ana River Working Group will be reconvened and guide the core technical group that will begin a baseline constraints analysis and outline a viable community engagement process.

Staff are currently working on a strategy for funding through grants and by working with allied partners to determine synergy of efforts and investment.

By November 2022, an outline of short-term goals and the establishment of a long-term shared

vision will be established.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

The Santa Ana River Working Group supports **Strategic Priority 1 – Arts, Culture and Recreation, Strategic Priority 2 – Community Well-Being, Strategic Priority 3 – Economic Opportunity, and Strategic Priority 4 – Environmental Stewardship**. It also contributes to the following goals and action items:

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 *Very Brief* 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

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

1. **Community Trust** – The development of the Santa Ana River will be a community-led vision.
2. **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.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – Developments along the river will rely on public-private partnerships and private sector investment.
4. **Innovation** – The long-term vision for the river includes an innovative built environment that will set us apart from other cities.
5. **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).

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Certified as to availability of funds: Edward Enriquez, Chief Financial Officer/City Treasurer
Approved by: Kris Martinez, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form: Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Attachments:

1. February 1, 2022, City Council Report
2. Presentation