



Park and Recreation Commission

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE COMMISSIONERS **DATE: AUGUST 8, 2016**

FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: UPDATE REGARDING PROPOSED CASA BLANCA EDUCATIONAL GARDEN

ISSUE:

Receive for file and provide input to the Community & Economic Development Department regarding planning and subsequent development of a Casa Blanca Educational Garden on the City-owned vacant land behind the Casa Blanca Library.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Park and Recreation Commission receive for file an update from the Community & Economic Development Department on the planning and subsequent development of a Casa Blanca Educational Garden on the City-owned vacant land behind the Casa Blanca Library between Emerald Street and Freda Avenue.

BACKGROUND:

The Community & Economic Development Department (CEDD) is reviewing an educational garden concept for the 1.46 acres of vacant land owned by the City, identified as Assessor's Parcel Number 230-351-016, located behind the Casa Blanca Library. At present, the property may only be accessed through the parking lot serving the Casa Blanca Library and the Riverside Public Utilities Payment Center, or a fifteen foot wide alley off Freda Avenue.

In November 2015, CEDD presented the potential development of a Casa Blanca Educational Garden to both the Villegas Park Advisory Committee (PAC) and the Casa Blanca Community Action Group (CAG), with reference to the Orange County's Farm + Food Lab, located at the Irvine Great Park, as a model.

The Farm + Food Lab is a unique and interactive outdoor classroom for visitors of all ages, featuring themed raised-bed gardens, fruit trees, vertical gardening, a chicken coop, a worm compost bin and solar and wind-powered lights. It is a working and dynamic organic horticulture area with a mission to educate visitors about gardening, inspire innovative and unique ideas for growing food and facilitate a thriving community of people working in partnership.

CEDD organized a tour with four residents of the Casa Blanca neighborhood to visit the Farm + Food Lab. During the tour, the group learned about different planting methods, classes offered, sponsors, activities for children and the many different fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers planted throughout the facility. This experience also gave us the opportunity to discuss how to incorporate those ideas to represent the Casa Blanca neighborhood and its diverse community.

CEDD met with various entities to gauge interest on building potential partnerships with a variety of potential stakeholders including the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department,

PAC, CAG, Riverside Public Utilities, Riverside Public Library, Riverside Unified School District, County of Riverside, UCR Cooperative Extension and UCR Master Gardeners, as well as corporate and non-profit sponsors.

During a meeting with the City departments, Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director Cruz recommended that CEDD present the concept of a Casa Blanca Educational Garden to the Park and Recreation Commission for consideration. Through this partnership, the Casa Blanca Educational Garden will be an innovative recreational experience where residents of this neighborhood can learn, play, grow and socialize. The educational component will offer classes in gardening techniques that support water wise gardening education. A partnership with Parks, Recreation and Community Services and other entities will help to ensure a thriving, sustainable and successful project for the community.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Prepared by:	Rafael Guzman, Community & Economic Development Director
Approved by:	Adolfo Cruz, Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director
Approved by:	Alexander T. Nguyen, Assistant City Manager
Attachment:	Presentation