

REVISED REPORT

City Council Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL DATE: DECEMBER 1, 2020

FROM: COUNCILMEMBER ERIN EDWARDS WARDS: ALL

**SUBJECT: MEASURE Z - URGENT EXPENDITURE FOR THE SANTA ANA RIVER
OUTREACH PLAN TO PREVENT FIRES IN THE RIVER BOTTOM -
SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION OF \$175,571.63 ~~TO \$926,314.32~~ FROM THE
UNALLOCATED MEASURE Z FUND BALANCE**

ISSUES:

Approve the expenditure plan for the Santa Ana River Outreach Plan, appropriate \$175,571.63 ~~to \$926,314.32~~ from the unallocated Measure Z fund balance ~~based on the option selected~~, and approve a CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund, Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention, and Measure Z Subrecipient Agreement with Kingdom Causes (DBA City Net) to carry out the Santa Ana River Outreach Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Approve the expenditure plan for the Santa Ana River Outreach Plan;
2. Authorize a supplemental appropriation of \$175,571.63 ~~to \$926,314.32~~ from the unallocated Measure Z fund balance ~~based on the option selected~~ for the outreach plan;
3. Direct the City Attorney's Office to prepare a CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund, Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention, and Measure Z Subrecipient Agreement with Kingdom Causes (DBA City Net) to carry out the Santa Ana River Outreach Plan; and
4. Authorize the City Manager, or his designee, to execute a CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund, Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention, and Measure Z Subrecipient Agreement with Kingdom Causes (DBA City Net) for the Santa Ana River Outreach Plan.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

This report publishes on November 19, 2020 for the December 1, 2020 City Council meeting.

On November 24, 2020, the Budget Engagement Commission ~~will heard~~ this item for consideration ~~to recommend the City Council approve the expenditure plan for the Santa Ana River Outreach Plan and appropriate \$175,571.63 to \$926,314.32 from the unallocated Measure Z fund balance.~~ After four hours of discussion and extensive public comment, the Budget

Engagement Commission voted to deny the use of Measure Z funding for this project in an 8:3 vote, with one abstention. Taking into account the recommendation from the Commission and also considering the many viewpoints raised in both the Commissioners' discussion and in public comment. I respectfully request the City Council consider the item at the December 1, 2020 City Council meeting.

BACKGROUND:

Santa Ana River Bottom

The Santa Ana River Bottom is an extraordinary asset to Riverside—the city by the river. Whether it's biking the Santa Ana River Trail, taking in views from the historic neighborhoods on the bluffs, or playing in one of the many parks near the river, the Santa Ana River offers many opportunities for all.

The river also poses many challenges. Spanning Riverside County, the wild, largely-unmanaged lands that surround the river touch Eastvale, Corona, Norco, Jurupa Valley, and Riverside. The river bottom has many owners and jurisdictional boundaries: cities, counties, county departments, and conservation authorities, just to name a few. In the worst fire season that California has ever seen, Riverside's portion of the river bottom is a tinder box. When the Santa Ana winds blow, a spark from a warming fire or an unauthorized vehicle can set a whole neighborhood on fire.¹

In Riverside's Ward 1, the Grand, Wood Streets, Downtown, and Northside neighborhoods touch the river through parks, trails, and even residents' backyards. In Ward 1 alone, the Riverside Fire Department (RFD) has received 54 calls to put out fires in the river bottom between January-October 2020. In 2019, RFD responded to 45 fire related calls in the river bottom area during that same time frame. The current call volume produced this year puts the City on a trajectory to exceed the number of river bottom fires from the previous year. In the last month, RFD has been called to the river bottom four different times, including to Hole Lake in Ward 7. This year, we have seen more than 100 acres along the river burn so far.

Preventing fire in the river bottom will take a multi-layered approach. Many of these approaches are already underway.

- **Land management/weed abatement:** The City works hard to manage non-native species, like the Arundo, and the weeds/grasses that grow seasonally.² Due to the sensitive habitat along the Santa Ana River, permits must often be acquired through California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The permitting process, while important, can be arduous. City departments are coordinating to seek the necessary permits to limb up trees and create fire breaks.
- **Regional coordination:** The Ward 1 office is coordinating with the County of Riverside (County) to draft a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Led by County's Regional Park and Open Space District (County Parks), this MOU would coordinate all entities that touch the river bottom and—with their support--would allow one entity to take on the full ongoing management of the river bottom throughout the County. The first meeting to bring all entities together is in early December 2020.

1 <https://www.latimes.com/projects/california-fires-damage-climate-change-analysis/>

2 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-09-12-me-34700-story.html>

- **Controlling ATVs and unauthorized vehicles:** Not only are motorized vehicles dangerous to walkers and cyclists on the path, but they risk igniting the dry plants that surround the trail. Riverside’s Parks, Police, Fire, and Public Works Departments are analyzing all entrances to the river bottom and blocking those that allow vehicle access with boulders and/or bollards. This work is ongoing.
- **Addressing homelessness in the river bottom:** This issue is the focus of this ask to the Budget Engagement Commission and City Council. In recent years, more and more individuals experiencing homelessness have sought refuge in the river bottom. While the exact number of people is unknown, many of these individuals are considered chronically homeless, meaning they have spent more than one year in an unsheltered condition and are experiencing more than one chronic debilitating health condition: mental health challenges, substance abuse, or other medical conditions.

As people living in the river bottom cook their food or build nighttime warming fires, these fires can—and have in the past—quickly and unintentionally get out of control. With the winter and windy season upon us, these fires put everyone at great risk. **For the health and safety of those living in and around the river bottom and of Riverside’s firefighters, we must urgently move people out of the river bottom and into more permanent shelter.**

Collaboration to Address Homelessness (to date)

As several agencies have jurisdiction or oversight over large swaths of land in the river bottom, there have also been multiple collaborative efforts to address the population of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Santa Ana River areas.

- County and City homeless outreach teams collaborated in March 2020 to coordinate outreach, housing and supportive services at the onset of COVID-19 pandemic to educate the population of individuals experiencing homelessness on the importance and need for safety measures and provide non-congregate shelter opportunities through Project Room Key. The City’s homeless outreach team, including its non-profit partner (City Net), worked alongside with the County’s behavioral health, public health, animal control and probation teams, to contact individuals located in the area between Martha McLean Park to Van Buren Boulevard. As a result, dozens of unsheltered individuals were provided support; a veteran who had been homeless for 12 years, a woman 80 years of age, and two men nearing 70 years of age, are examples of the individuals who accepted the assistance as a result of this effort. In addition, OHS placed hand washing stations and restroom facilities near the Santa Ana River to support good hygiene practices that were funded through the State COVID-19 Emergency Homelessness Funding.
- The City’s Public Safety and Engagement Team has also addressed several homeless encampments along and within the Santa Ana River areas near Fairmount Park, providing outreach services. OHS has programmed continued outreach efforts to this area and intends to use a portion of state Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) grant funding specifically for these efforts.

A Time-Sensitive Opportunity

In August 2020, the City Council approved an allocation plan totaling approximately \$28 million in CARES Act funding to address the many impacts of COVID-19 on our community. This funding was allocated after a survey process to hear directly from the Riverside community about their needs and hopes for this funding. The funding was split between 1) Housing/Homelessness; 2) Community and Business Support; and 3) Organizational needs for COVID-19 Compliance.

Since then, City staff has worked tirelessly to encumber and expend CARES Act funds. As the realities of COVID-19 shifted in real-time, staff found that not all the proposed expenditures materialized as was intended. As of the writing this report, it is estimated that \$3 – 4 million of CARES Act funding will need to be reallocated and spent before December 30, 2020 deadline.

Re-allocating funding to launch this program is consistent with the CARES Act and feedback received through the community survey. Further, using CARES Act funds in this way would leverage an additional \$322,000 from the County of Riverside toward this project that would not otherwise be available.

While the work required to prevent fires in the river bottom—such as addressing encampments—is ongoing, there is an urgency to acting now. Due to the realities of a dry winter combined with the number of warming fires in the river bottom each day, the fire risk must be reduced immediately while other longer-term solutions remain in progress.

DISCUSSION:

The City's Office of Homeless Solutions (OHS) has a history of providing outreach, housing and supportive services to those who live and encamp in the Santa Ana River area. The majority of the individuals experiencing homelessness have experienced trauma and are therefore reluctant to accept services; this requires a targeted, intensive, and comprehensive outreach effort.

Following the success of "A MAP Home"—a targeted outreach effort along Massachusetts Avenue (adjacent to the Hulen Campus) in September 2020 funded with CARES Act funds—OHS intends to implement a similar approach for the Santa Ana River Outreach Plan.

The model employed along Massachusetts Avenue was built upon best practices. The Santa Ana River Outreach Plan will build upon this model, piloting the idea in a new context (wildlands) with a harder-to-serve population. Undertaking the steps outlined below in a small area of the river bottom will address an urgent need in the most fire-prone, hardest-to-reach area and provide insight into how to modify the model in the river bottom context to improve and build upon the program in the future.

With funding for this pilot initiative, the OHS will employ:

1. A Data Driven approach – a complete census of individuals experiencing homelessness in the chosen area in order to assess the demographics to program services. The specific area in the river bottom will be chosen based upon data from the Riverside Fire Department that specifically targets sections of the river bottom that are most at risk and hardest to reach in a fire emergency.³

3. Attachment 3 outlines four distinct areas the RFD has identified that could benefit from targeted intense outreach efforts to assist in reducing the risk of fire. Each of these areas identify the estimated number of individuals experiencing homelessness, the vegetation and fire risk, and adjacent jurisdiction impacted.

2. Outreach Services – CDC guidance on “Whole Community Approach,” in responding to the unsheltered homeless population, by involving key stakeholders such as mental health, behavioral health, substance abuse and medical support systems.
3. Shelter Services – Since CDC guidance encourages non-congregate housing options, staff will work with City Net to master lease motel/hotel rooms and operate a 24/7 interim shelter program.
4. Permanent Housing Placements – While clients are housed in interim shelter in motels/hotels, outreach and case management supportive services staff will work with clients to bridge them from temporary housing into permanent housing placements through the City’s HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) Program Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) and County of Riverside’s Rapid Rehousing funds.
5. Safety – A safety component to support the homeless crisis response will be implemented by the Riverside Police Department due to the recent crime reports in the area. The safety component will also reduce recidivism and encourage a restorative justice model.

Funding for the successful implementation of this plan will come from several sources.

- OHS staff would allocate \$202,379 in HHAP funds in support of this effort;
- The County of Riverside will allocate \$322,000 in state grant funds;
- The City will allocate \$465,000 ~~–\$816,233.81~~ in federal HOME TBRA Program funds;
- Riverside’s CARES Act funding would be reallocated ~~if this plan is approved in an amount that depends upon the option selected~~ in the amount of \$218,200.32; and
- The funding requested from the unallocated Measure Z fund balance will be used to ensure individuals will remain housed for at least one year. **This funding is critical as CARES Act funding can only be used for expenses through December 30, 2020.**

The table below summarizes the options presented for the Budget Engagement Commission’s consideration (Attachment 2).

OPTION	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED	TOTAL PROGRAM COST	CITY HHAP	COUNTY HHAP	CARES ACT FUNDING	HOME TBRA	FUNDING SHORTFALL (Measure Z)
1	38	\$1,383,150.95	\$202,379.00	\$322,000.00	\$218,200.32	\$465,000.00	\$175,571.63
2	48	\$1,834,209.95	\$202,379.00	\$322,000.00	\$258,062.24	\$679,000.00	\$372,768.71
3	75	\$2,622,921.30	\$202,379.00	\$322,000.00	\$355,994.17	\$816,233.81	\$926,314.32

Given the Budget Engagement Commission’s recommendation but also weighing this against the urgent need faced by residents, firefighters, and people living in the Riverbottom, I respectfully request that City Council consider only Option 1 in the chart above on December 1, 2020.


FISCAL IMPACT:

The fiscal impact associated with approval of the Expenditure Plan for the Santa Ana River

Outreach Plan will total \$175,571.63 to ~~\$926,314.32~~ from the unallocated Measure Z fund balance ~~depending on the option selected.~~

The City will also need to amend its HUD Annual Action Plan through a future City Council action to allocate ~~between~~ \$465,000 ~~-\$816,233.81~~ in HOME Program funds towards the TBRA Program. These funds are available in the HOME Unprogrammed Account No. 2835200-453001.

Submitted by:


ERIN EDWARDS, COUNCILMEMBER
Ward 1

Certified as to
availability of funds: Edward Enriquez, Chief Financial Officer/City Treasurer
Approved as to form: Kristi J. Smith, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Santa Ana River Outreach Plan
2. Proposed Expenditure Plan/Budget
3. Homeless Mitigation Plan/Map by Riverside Fire Department
4. Measure Z Spending Plan
5. Presentation