

Adopted By Riverside City Council
05/12/2026



PUT THE RIVER BACK IN RIVERSIDE

River District Analysis





Table of Contents

I ntrouction- - - - -	1
E xisting Conditions - - - - -	5
R iver District Vision - - - - -	11
R iver District Opportunities - - - - -	20
C ommunity Input and Partnerships - - - - -	27
I mplementation- - - - -	31
<hr/>	
A cknowledgments - - - - -	42





INTRODUCTION

The City of Riverside has embarked on an effort to “put the river back in Riverside” by creating a River District to transform Riverside and the surrounding areas.

The River District will be an environmentally and fiscally sustainable public realm that is beautiful, safe, walkable, inviting, and iconic that will reconnect Riverside to the Santa Ana River.

This is an important step in stitching together Downtown, the Innovation District, the Arts District, UCR, and residential neighborhoods and connecting them to the waterfront. The California State Coastal Conservancy grant award for a feasibility study has allowed the city to identify the boundaries of the River District, and define the resources needed to implement the Santa Ana River Task Force's vision for the River District.

Natural amenities like rivers, mountains, streams, and forests contribute to the quality of life of residents, improve public health, and have positive impacts on the economy. Yet most Riversiders don't even know that there is a river in our backyard, they don't know how to access the river, and they don't feel safe near the river. If the community is aware of the beauty of the river, they will love and protect it.

The River District will be built on four Pillars:

- ◆ **Engagement:** Public realm improvements need to be informed by the desires of the community. They need to reflect recreational demand and public safety. This includes those with fewer resources than others. The unhoused populations, some of whom live in the river bottom, are currently being engaged to offer services and transition them to permanent housing. Moving forward, the focus will be on public engagement including art, interpretation, and cultural representation.

Land Acknowledgement

The area surrounding the Santa Ana River in what is now the City of Riverside has long been home to Indigenous peoples whose deep connections to the land continue to this day. The region is part of the ancestral homelands of the Cahuilla, Gabrielino-Tongva, Luiseño (Payomkawichum), and Yuhaaviatam (a clan of the Maara'yam, also known as Serrano) peoples. Among these, the Cahuilla have had a prominent and enduring legacy in the region, with many of their descendants still residing here today. The City of Riverside acknowledges this legacy, recognizing the cultural and historical significance of the land to Native communities who have stewarded it for generations.

- ◆ **Enforcement:** Many residents don't feel safe near the river. The River District enforcement will secure the public realm and make it a safe place for families to enjoy.
- ◆ **Environment:** There are extensive plans for habitat restoration in the river bottom and the responsible development of the Gateway Parks. The River District will be a truly sustainable public realm with distinctive design elements, plant palette, amenities, and wayfinding.
- ◆ **Economics:** The River District will be planned for financial sustainability and be a catalyst for public and private investment.

The River District will be a driver for economic growth, an example of sustainability, and a destination to be enjoyed by the community. The Santa Ana River runs with a natural bottom for

about ten miles adjacent to the City of Riverside's northern edge. The river supports riparian habitat for native and endangered species and allows water to replenish aquifers. Though it is a treasured natural resource, it is also associated with difficult issues such as unauthorized encampments, littering, fire, and other illegal activities. The City of Riverside proposes to establish a River District to help address these issues and to turn the river frontage and adjacent lands into a vibrant environmental, recreational and social public realm that will attract public and private investment and increase public awareness and stewardship.

River District Problem Statement

Most Riversiders don't even know that there is a river, they don't know how to access and use it with stewardship, and they don't feel safe near the river.

Most Riversiders are unaware of the river's existence, how to access it, or feel unsafe near it. This lack of awareness and accessibility has left the river disconnected from the community it should serve, limiting its potential as a natural, cultural, and recreational resource. Public concerns, reflected in comments like "be safe" and mentions of vagrancy in the riverbed area, underscore both the safety and perception barriers that need to be overcome. Safety concerns are exacerbated by improper use of the river corridor, such as off-road vehicles that destroy habitat and campfires that add to the fire danger.

River District Purpose

The purpose of the River District is to "put the river back in Riverside" by developing a dedicated district, campaign, and funding mechanism to create a public realm that is environmentally and fiscally sustainable while connecting the community to the river. The desired outcomes include:

- ◆ **Increasing Awareness and Excitement:** Engage the community with marketing campaigns that showcase the potential of the River District as a safe and vibrant space to 'put the river back' in the minds of Riversiders.
- ◆ **Improving Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion:** Amplify the voices of underrepresented groups and create opportunities for all Riversiders to participate in planning and enjoying the River District.
- ◆ **Promoting Safety and Access:** Address safety concerns with thoughtful design, programming, and cleanup efforts to create welcoming entry points and pathways to the river. New amenities will encourage appropriate use and enhance the feeling of safety.
- ◆ **Restoration, Conservation and Recreation:** The City of Riverside owns approximately 800 acres of park land and open space within a mile of the Santa Ana River. During community outreach for the City's Riverside Gateway Parks planning effort, the community placed high priority on protecting and improving open space and habitat. As a result, about 80% of the approximately 280 acres included in the Riverside Gateway Parks planning project will be public open space, habitat, and native plant gardens, and 20% will be developed and improved for recreation.

The “Put the River Back in Riverside” campaign focuses on community connection through creating economic vitality while honoring the stewardship of the land, air, and water.

Opportunities on the River District

- ◆ The river is an irreplaceable natural amenity
- ◆ The City of Riverside owns over 800 acres of parkland within just 1 mile from the river
- ◆ The river has countless tributaries that have their own natural amenity and connectivity to the river
- ◆ The river traverses a large section of Riverside, creating a natural connection of nature and the built environment
- ◆ Many Riversiders have a cultural and nostalgic connection to the river
- ◆ The river is the namesake of the city and presents an opportunity to reclaim this identity in the public realm



River District Project History

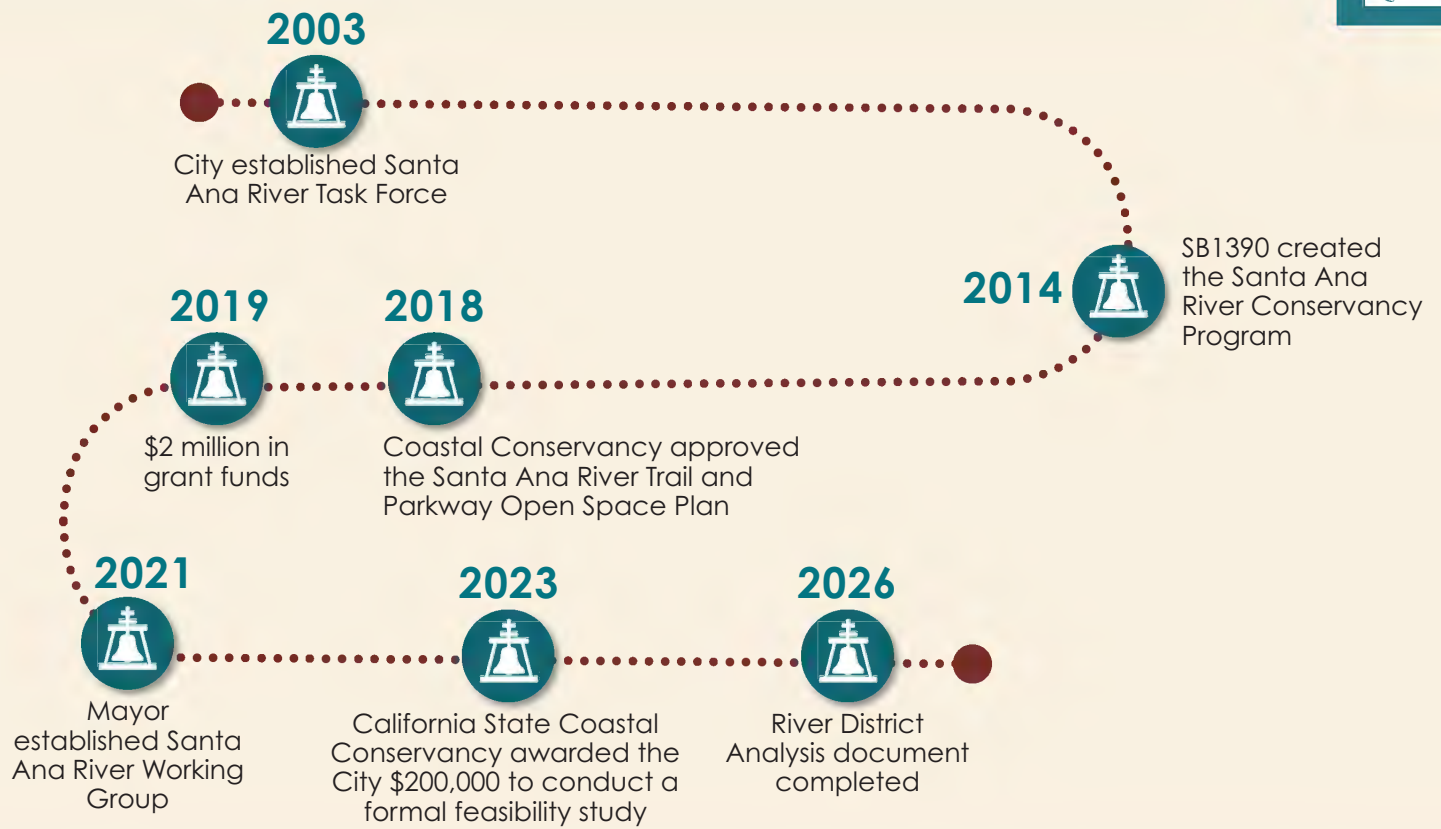
Efforts to revitalize the Santa Ana River corridor in Riverside date back to 2003, when the City established the Santa Ana River Task Force. This early initiative set the stage for broader regional collaboration, including a series of Mayor’s Blue-Ribbon Committees focused on the Santa Ana Watershed.

In 2014, California Senate Bill 1390 created the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program within the State Coastal Conservancy. This program was designed to support open space, habitat protection, recreation, and public access throughout the region. As part of this effort, the Coastal Conservancy approved the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Open Space Plan – Expanding the River’s Reach in 2018, laying the groundwork for future planning and investment.

Building on this momentum, the City of Riverside secured nearly \$2 million of California State Coastal Conservancy grant funds in 2019 to begin planning and environmental review for the Riverside Gateway Project Suite—a comprehensive effort to reimagine

250 acres of underutilized public land as community gateways to the river. This planning process included robust public engagement to shape the vision.

In 2021, Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson established the Santa Ana River Working Group, a community-led effort co-chaired by two City Councilmembers. The group explored opportunities to attract investment and raise public awareness, employing a Design Thinking approach to identify feasible riverfront development concepts. Most recently, in 2023, the California State Coastal Conservancy awarded Riverside \$200,000 to conduct a formal feasibility study for establishing a River District. This study represents the next step in evaluating the economic potential and implementation strategies with the goal of transforming the Santa Ana River corridor into a dynamic public realm with the goal of fiscal and environmental sustainability through appropriate economic development and investments.





EXISTING CONDITIONS

The River District encompasses the wild and beautiful Santa Ana River and adjacent lands within the City of Riverside. The City of Riverside owns and manages 800 acres of parkland within 1 mile (20-minute walk) of the Santa Ana River. Further, the County of Riverside, and other public agencies, own thousands of additional acres of habitat and recreational lands within this Parkway. In addition, there are many privately owned properties that contribute to the public realm.

Recent Restoration Efforts

The San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (San Bernardino Valley), on behalf of the Upper Santa Ana River Habitat Conservation Plan (Upper SAR HCP) is implementing habitat restoration across more than 500 acres along the Santa Ana River in the Riverside area. The restoration efforts will improve aquatic and riparian habitats within the Santa Ana River and its floodplain, and along with at least five Santa Ana River tributary streams and a wetland complex. Three projects currently underway (Hidden Valley, Lower Hole, and Anza Creeks) will create new and enhance existing habitat for native fishes, amphibians, reptiles, and riparian bird species. As a first phase of these projects, thousands of non-native palm trees are being removed from the river corridor. An additional stream and a wetland restoration project are expected to be underway soon (Old Ranch Creek, and Hidden Valley Wetlands). Planning efforts for the restoration of Sunnyslope Creek, located along the north bank of the Santa Ana River in Jurupa Valley, have also been initiated.

Agencies have invested millions to remove invasive weeds and manage open-space habitat in the Santa Ana River. In the vicinity of the planning area, agencies such as resource conservation districts, county and municipal agencies, nonprofits, the flood control district, and water agencies have

removed non-native plants such as *Arundo Donax* and tamarisk. Regrowth of native species benefits from the natural river bottom which allows for natural irrigation to re-emerging species.

Riverside Parks Summary

Riverside's existing core parks within or near the River District's sphere of influence are already used by the community. Visitor data was retrieved using Placer.ai, a third-party data provider that uses cell phone data to estimate visitor information in public places.

- ◆ Riverside's parks attract more than a million visits annually, with River District parks playing a major role in that activity. Fairmount Park is the most visited, drawing approximately 764,100 visits per year. It's followed by Ryan Bonaminio Park with 429,100 visits, and Mount Rubidoux with 281,600.
- ◆ Ryan Bonaminio Park stands out for its loyal visitors—each person visits an average of 2.35 times annually. Saturdays are the busiest days at most parks, though Carlson Park sees its highest visitation on Sundays.
- ◆ Fairmount Park also leads in visitor engagement, with an average stay lasting 89 minutes. Visitors to Ryan Bonaminio Park stay about 61 minutes on average. Except for Martha McLean Park, the majority of parkgoers begin their visits from home, underscoring the importance of these parks as local neighborhood assets.



Exhibit 1. River District Park Visit Data, Apr 1, 2023 through Mar 31, 2024

	FAIRMOUNT PARK	MOUNT RUBIDOUX	RYAN BONAMINIO	MARTHA MCLEAN PARK	CARLSON PARK
Number of Visits	764,100	281,600	429,100	23,800	77,800
Number of Visitors	370,800	174,900	182,400	12,300	39,000
Visit Frequency	2.06	1.34	2.35	1.93	1.99
Most Frequented Day & Percent of Visits	Saturday (27%)	Saturday (22%)	Saturday (19%)	Saturday (27%)	Sunday (20%)
Average Visit Length	89 minutes	40 minutes	61 minutes	26 minutes	22 minutes
Trips originating from home	54%	62%	66%	32%	50%

Source: Placer.Ai

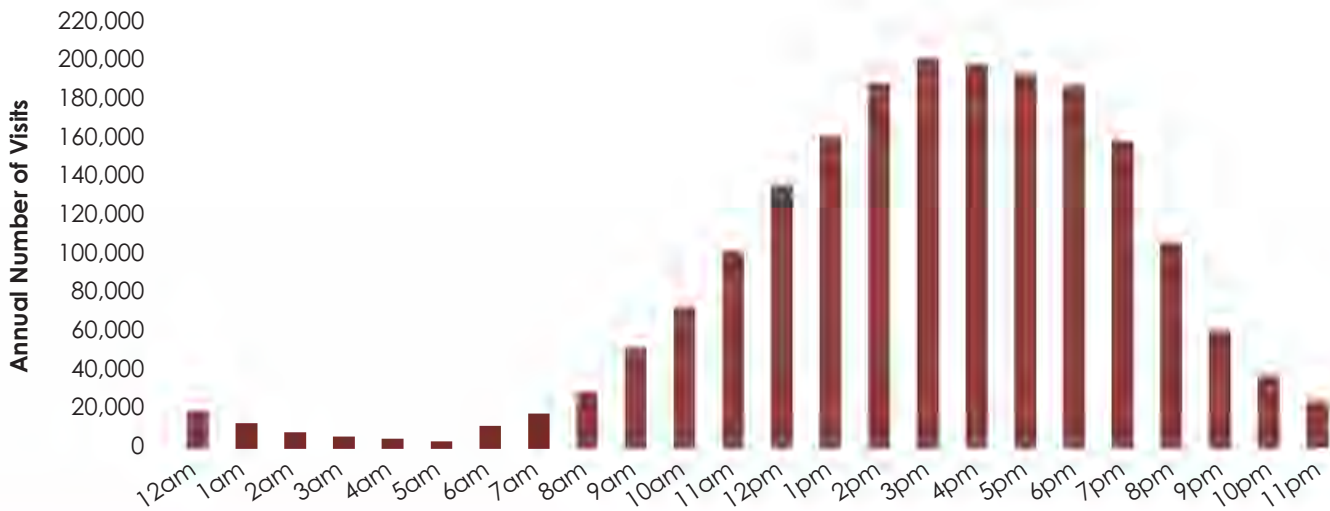
Fairmount Park

Centrally located, Fairmount Park will be the hub of the River District. At over 280 acres, the park offers a host of amenities that include a 9-hole golf course, bandshell, playgrounds, Lake Evans, and the rose garden. Given its importance to the River District, we highlight trends and conditions at Fairmount Park as a representative sample of Park usage trends in Riverside.

HOURLY USAGE

Over the past year, Fairmount Park welcomed approximately 764,100 visits from 370,800 unique visitors—a 51% increase over the past three years. Saturdays are the busiest days, followed by Sundays, with 26.8% and 22% of weekly visits occurring on those days, respectively. Weekday visits are more evenly distributed, each accounting for 9% to 11% of the total. The park is most active in the late afternoon, with peak visitation occurring between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m.

Exhibit 2: Fairmount Park Hourly Usage Rates (2023-2024)

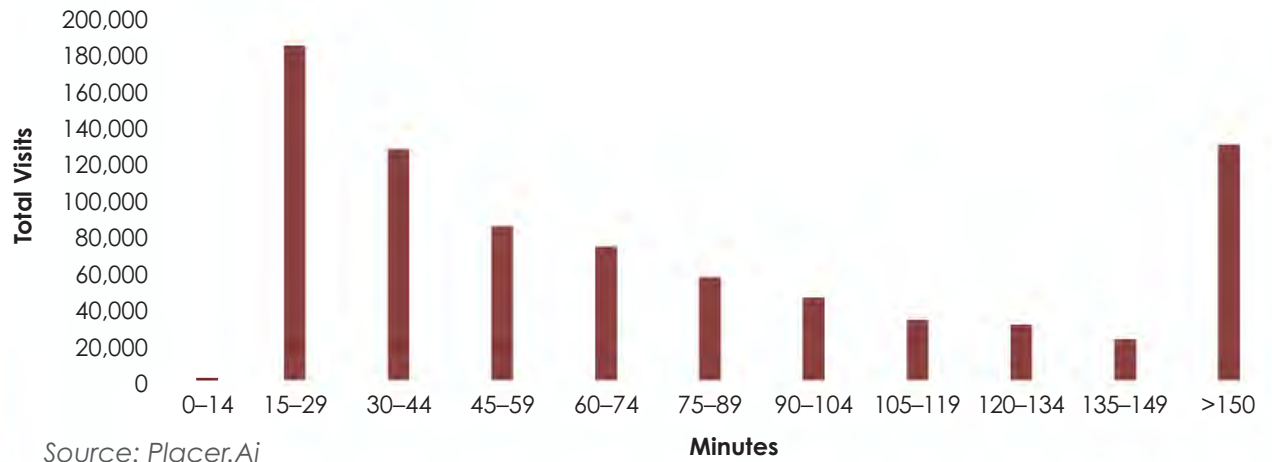


Source: Placer.Ai

LENGTH OF STAY

The average non-event visit to Fairmount Park is just under 90 minutes. However, visit lengths vary significantly. The largest share of visits to the park are between 15 and 29 minutes, indicating that many users make short drop-in trips. Many trips are for 150 minutes or longer, suggesting the park also attracts a sizable group of users who stay for extended periods, likely for leisure, family outings, or recreational activities.

Exhibit 3: Length of Stay Trends at Fairmount Park (2023-2024)

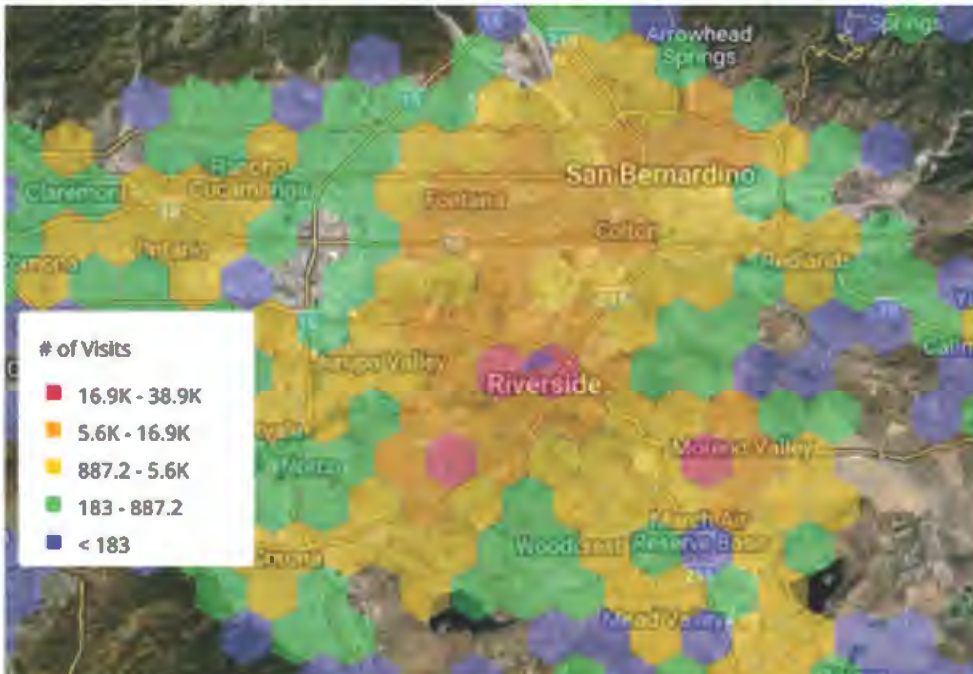


The average visit is just under 90 minutes at the park, while the majority of visits are between 15 and 29 minutes (Exhibit 3).

VISITOR ORIENTATION

Most visitors—about 52%—begin and end their trip at home, underscoring the park’s role as a neighborhood destination. Within the region, most visitors live in Riverside or Moreno Valley, however Fairmount Park does draw visitors from across San Bernardino County.

Exhibit 4: Fairmount Park Visitor Place of Residence (2023-2024)



The majority of visitors to Fairmount Park live in Riverside or Moreno Valley; however, Fairmount Park does draw visitors from across San Bernardino County as well (Exhibit 4).

Source: Placer.Ai

EXAMPLE IMPACT OF PARKS PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS

SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

The City of Riverside hosts numerous events in the park every year that drive visitation to the park. Among the most well-attended include the Summer Concert Series. During the summertime, the Parks and Recreation Department hosts Summer Concerts in Fairmount Park on Wednesday evenings in June and July. One observation from the opening concert in 2024 shows a draw over 3,000 visitors. This is a significant increase in the number of visitors to the park on a Wednesday evening, as compared to the week before the Summer Concert series began. The typical Wednesday evening draw to the park is negligible.

BRYANT PARK BOXING SHOW

On Saturday, August 24, 2024, the Bryant Park Boxing Show was held at the Armory in Fairmount Park. During this event, the park saw a notable spike in activity, with approximately 2,000 visitors—most staying just over two hours. Nearly half of attendees came directly from home, and a similar share returned home afterward. The event drew a significant number of visitors from outside the immediate area, including several hundred from as far as San Bernardino, highlighting the event's regional draw.

OTHER PARK PROGRAMMING

- Fairmount Park Walk with the Animals Day
- Ryan Bonaminio Park Annual Spring Eggstravaganza
- Mt. Rubidoux Sunrise Easter Service
- Martha McClean Park World Rivers Day

These examples demonstrate how resources for special events and programming can boost park visitation and tourism activity. These events not only draw large crowds but also attract visitors from beyond the immediate neighborhood and often have spillover effects on the local economy as visitors patronize local businesses.

Ongoing Projects and Park Improvements

Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District - Santa Ana River Trail Wayfinding Project

The signage will be placed along the Santa Ana River Trail segment within Riverside County. **This \$1,000,000 project includes the following types of signs:**

- ◆ Gateway Monuments
- ◆ Kiosks
- ◆ Pavement Markers (the zero "0" mile starts at the Pacific Ocean and ends at the base of the San Bernardino Mountains)
- ◆ Turn signs
- ◆ Confirmation Signs
- ◆ Decision Signs



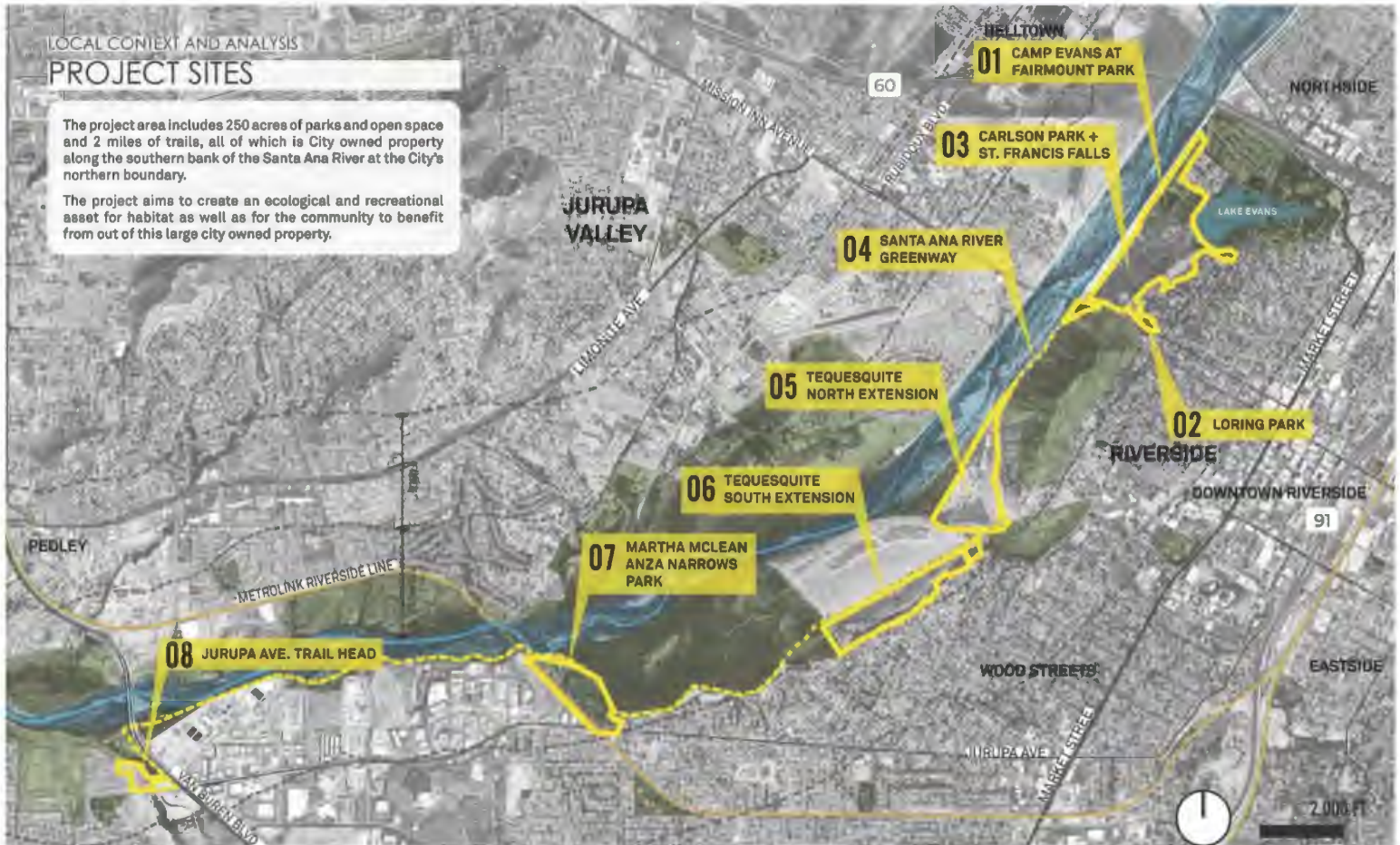
Riverside Gateway Parks Plan

This Park Master Planning project is funded by the Santa Ana River Conservancy, under the umbrella of the California State Coastal Conservancy. The project goal is to strengthen the connection between the community and the Santa Ana River by creating safe, walkable, and welcoming access points, recreational amenities and public open spaces that serve as iconic gateways to the river. The plan spans approximately 250 acres at 8 sites and proposes developing considerable public amenities that include around 50 acres of features such as pickleball courts, a skatepark,



skating rink, new bandshell, playgrounds, and water play areas—while preserving the remaining 230 acres as open space or native landscaping. Construction funds are not yet secured. Future construction funding could come from 2024 California Climate Bond Funding (Proposition 4), which includes about \$700 Million for park creation and outdoor access programs. Proposition 4 also allocated \$948 million to the Coastal Conservancy, with \$45 million of that allocation reserved for the Santa Ana River Conservancy to distribute through competitive grants. The City is applying for these funds and is recommended for funding of the Martha McClain Park improvements.

Exhibit 5. Riverside Gateway Project Sites

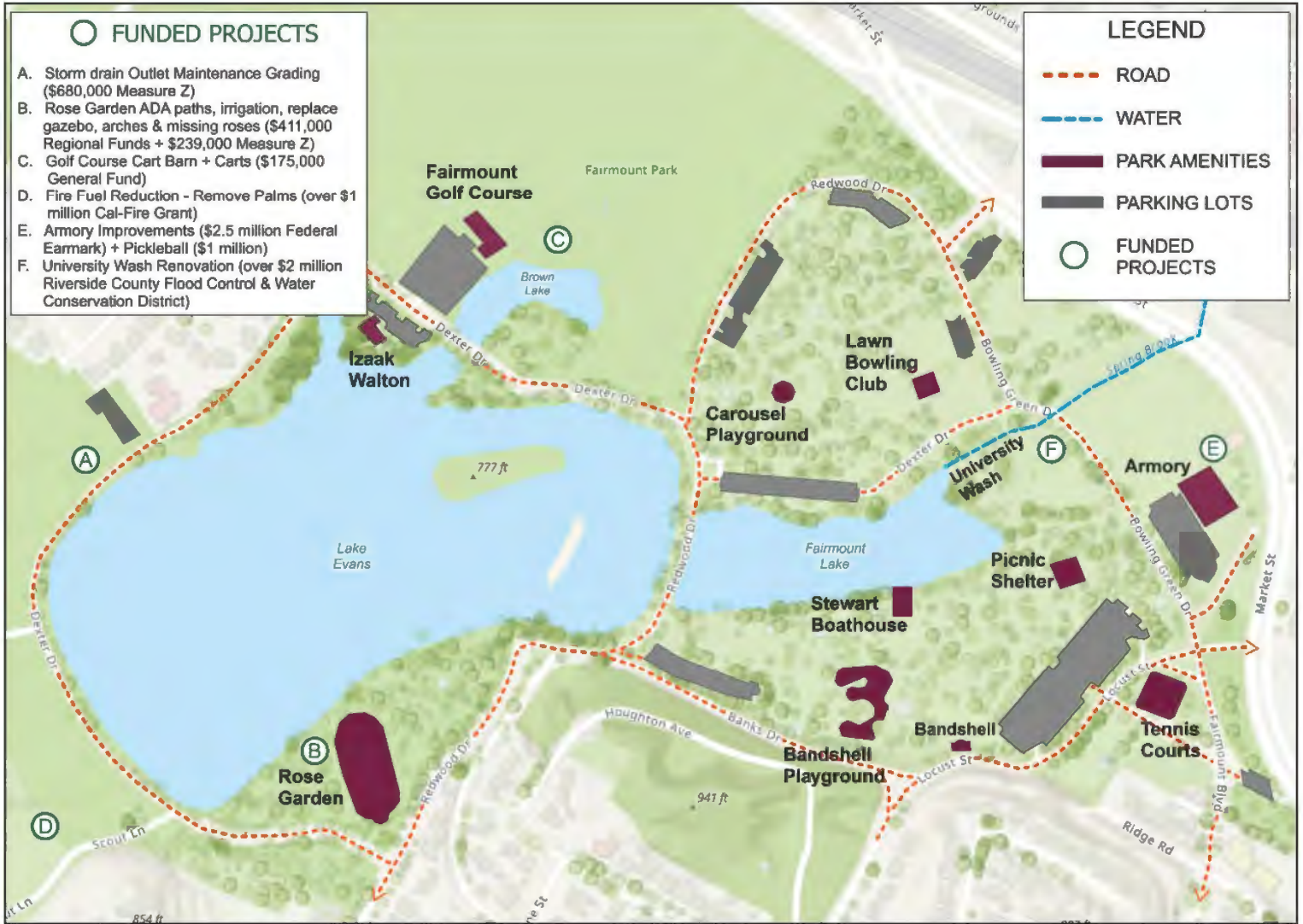


Source: City of Riverside

Riverside Levees Rehabilitation Project

The Riverside Levees Rehabilitation Project will repair damaged sections of the federally constructed Riverside Levee 1 (West Levee) and Riverside Levee 2 (East Levee), both part of the larger Santa Ana River levee system. The project will rehabilitate approximately 9,000 feet of the West Levee, stretching from Market Street downstream to just past Capary Road. On the East Levee, about 4,000 feet will also be repaired, running from the County line to around Columbia Avenue. An additional segment between Market Street and State Route 60 will also be included. Rehabilitation efforts will involve replacing and grouting the existing rock slope protection and extending that protection where needed.

Exhibit 6. Fairmount Park Improvement Plan



FAIRMOUNT PARK IMPROVEMENT PLAN
January 2026



Source: City of Riverside

The Armory | The city is entering into a public/private partnership and long-term lease in support of the successful adaptive reuse of the Riverside Armory (Armory) to reactivate this historic site and enhance the vibrancy of the Fairmount Park and Santa Ana River Area.

Fairmount Park Wayfinding Signage |

Maps and wayfinding signs are being installed to help drivers, cyclists and pedestrians better find their way to the many recreational resources in Fairmount Park.

Dredging of Fairmount Lake | The lake system at Fairmount Park receives sediment from University Wash and must be dredged periodically to maintain water quality and recreational use of the lake for fishing, pedal boats, passive wildlife viewing, and similar.

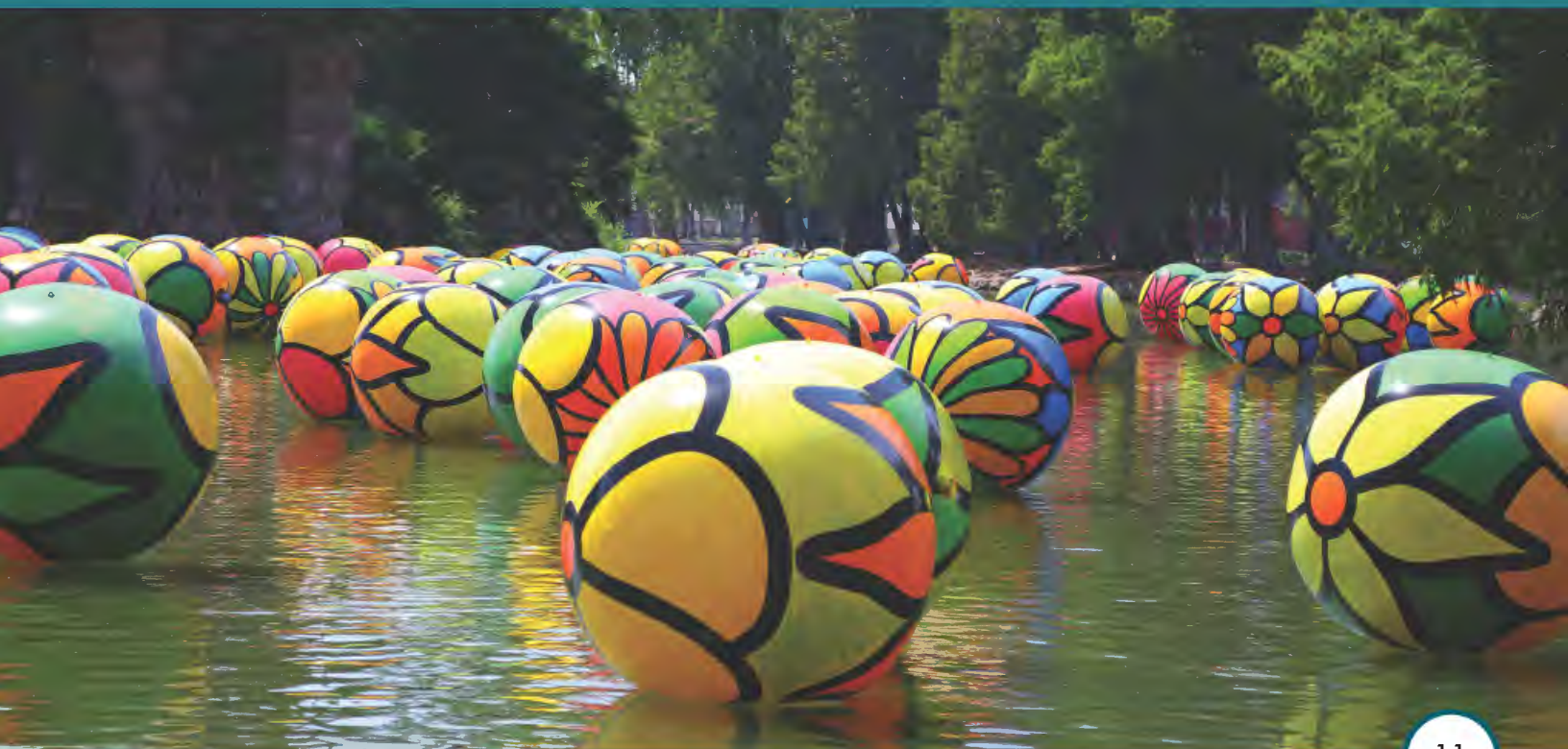
Recreational Amenities | Reintroduction of kayaks, pedal boats, bicycle rentals and tours at Fairmount Park.

Rose Garden improvements | ADA accessible walkways, irrigation, gazebo and arch replacement, horticulture improvements

University Wash Stormwater Conveyance Repairs and Improvements |

In partnership with the Riverside County Flood Control and Open Space and Water Conservation District, the City will be restoring channel capacity of University Wash to better convey stormwater, reduce flooding from the Wash, and restore the beauty and hydrologic function of the wash.

Together, these park improvements and planning efforts lay the foundation for a vibrant and cohesive River District—one that connects people to the Santa Ana River through enhanced access, revitalized open spaces, restored natural systems, and reactivated historic landmarks. By integrating recreation, resilience, and cultural heritage, Riverside is transforming its riverfront into a dynamic community asset and regional destination.





RIVER DISTRICT VISION

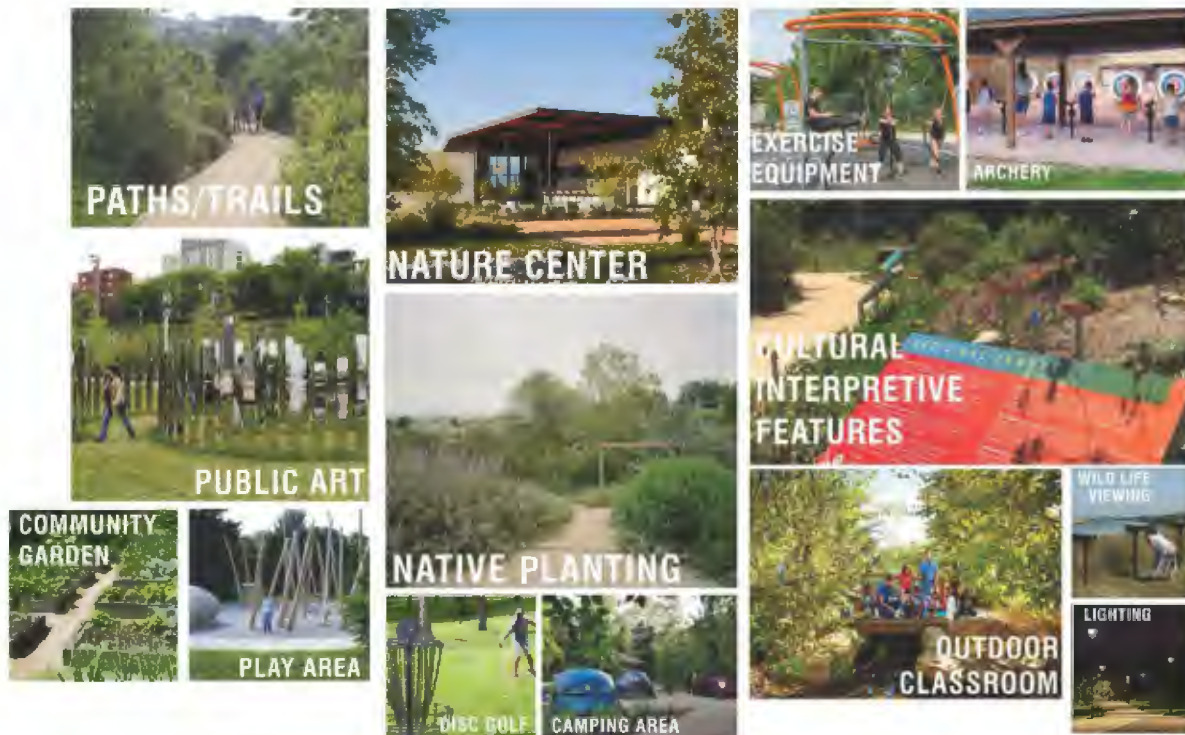
The goal of the River District is to “put the river back in Riverside” by developing a public realm that is environmentally and fiscally sustainable and that connects the community to the river through recreation, culture, and economic growth.

With over 800 acres of parkland adjacent to the river, the River District will connect parks and neighborhoods to the river corridor. Utilizing the tributaries across the city will also help to pull the river into the city. A targeted branding campaign will ‘put the river back’ in the minds of Riversiders.

The River District reimagines the Santa Ana River as a thriving destination for memorable family experiences that enhance physical, emotional, and mental wellness. Central to this effort is the “Crest-to-Coast Trail”, a pathway for both recreation and active transportation, connecting the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. This trail, running through Riverside, supports biking, hiking, nature viewing, horseback riding, and other outdoor activities, promoting wellness while fostering access to the river and its natural beauty.

Vision:

The River District will transform Riverside’s riverfront into a connected, inclusive, and vibrant destination for nature, culture, and community life.



Core Elements of a Vibrant River District in Riverside

Connectivity and Active Transportation |

Active and multimodal transportation is essential to the success of the River District, linking it seamlessly to key destinations such as Downtown Riverside and the city's four universities. By enhancing trails, creating welcoming gateways, and incorporating district branding into medians, parkways, and rights-of-way, the River District can become a citywide presence that supports walking, biking, and transit use while encouraging recreation and healthy lifestyles. Design will encourage hiking, running, equestrian, and recreational and commuter biking.

Wayfinding | Wayfinding and Interpretation will help people explore the River District, learn about the river's past and present, and know when they are in the River District.

Sensitive Habitat Areas | Protecting sensitive habitat is essential to prolonged sustainability. There will be places in the River District where access will be restricted to preserve sensitive habitats and wildlife. There may be locations that allow access with a docent. There is endangered wildlife, including the Santa Ana sucker, that will be protected. As part of these areas, there may be mitigation land, to maintain habitat and species, and public conservation land where public recreational access is managed by guided tours.

Western Riverside County Conservation Authority

The Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA) was created in 2004 to achieve one of America's most ambitious environmental efforts, the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP).

From the Burrowing Owl to the Western Pond Turtle, the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan managed by the RCA protects 146 animal and plant species, including 34 that are threatened or endangered, making it the one of the largest habitat conservation plans in the United States.

The MSHCP includes 38 specially designed habitat linkages that allow animals to safely move from one preserve area to another, providing a critical lifeline between habitats that serve as escape routes from danger and pathways to food supplies.

PROPOSED SIGNAGE

- » Gateway Monuments
- » Kiosks
- » Pavement Markers
- » Turn Signs
- » Confirmation Signage
- » Decision Signs



Public Art | Arts and culture will support a variety of goals in the River District; in addition to bringing beauty and culture to the River District, it can also support safety, educate the community and serve as an economic driver and fundraising tool to raise money for the River District.

People will know when they are in the River District because of the distinct art and interpretation. Entry points to the River District can be highlighted with surface art pieces that are easy to maintain.

Public Art in the River District

Our efforts should be:

- Inclusionary
- Nature focused
- Playful
- Community engaged

Potential Public Art Examples

- Permanent Installations
- Temporary Installations
- Mosaics
- Maker's Spaces
Performative Art
- First Nation Inspirations

Potential Locations:

- Entry and Exit Points
- Parks along the River
- Pathways/
Bikeways
- Underpasses

INNOVATIVE EXAMPLES

» Illuminated Bikeways

New technology is being developed for surfaces that glow in the dark that might enhance the nighttime experiences in the River District



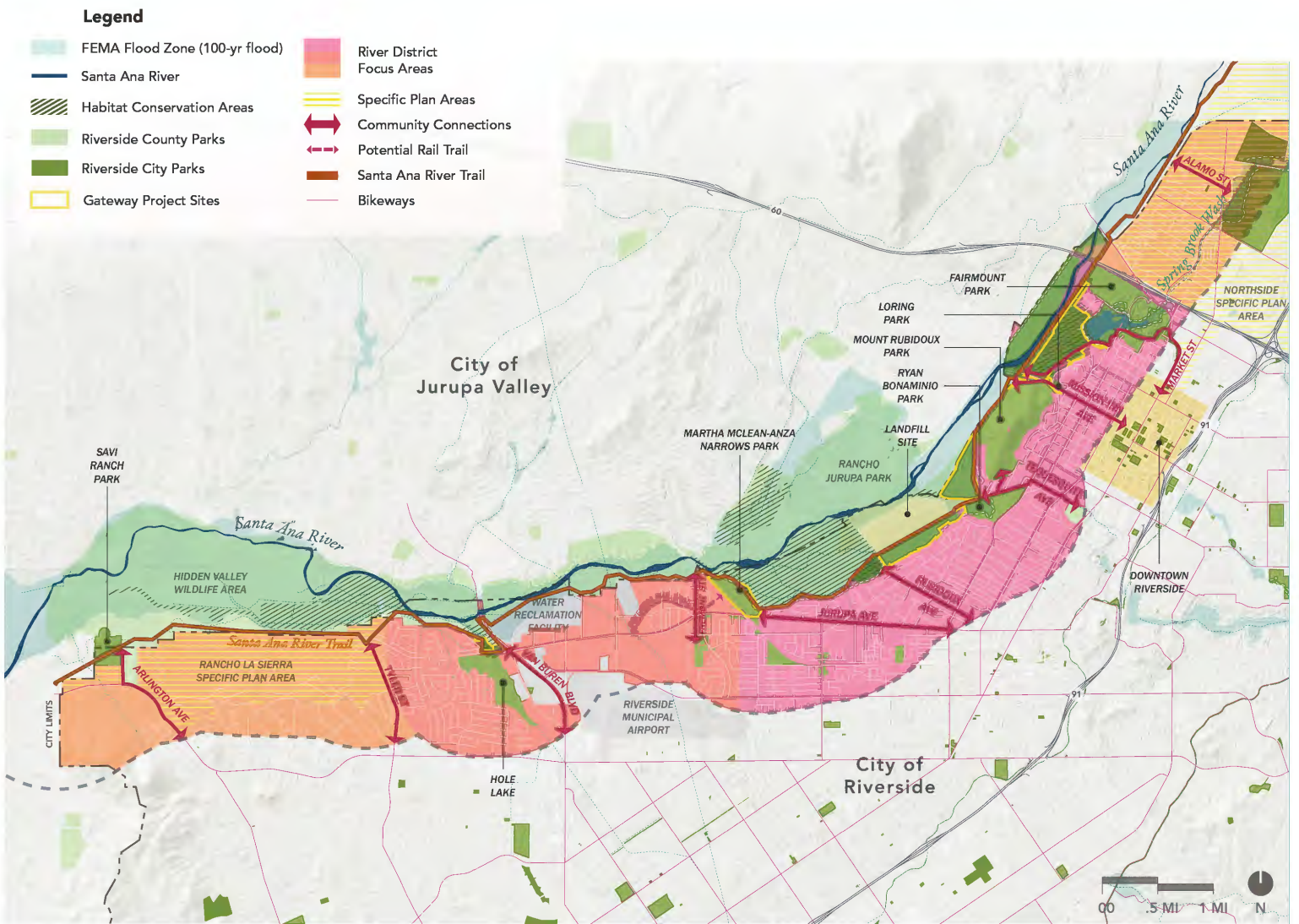
River District Concepts

The River District project included a process to define potential River District Boundary alternatives, define circulation and access, and develop high-level illustrative inspirations. These concepts were informed by work sessions with City staff and elected officials and community outreach and input (detailed in Section X).

RIVER DISTRICT BOUNDARY

The River District boundary is delineated to include both a core River District area and a broader sphere of influence that includes city-owned park spaces to the east and west of the core downtown area.

Exhibit 7: Proposed River District Boundary

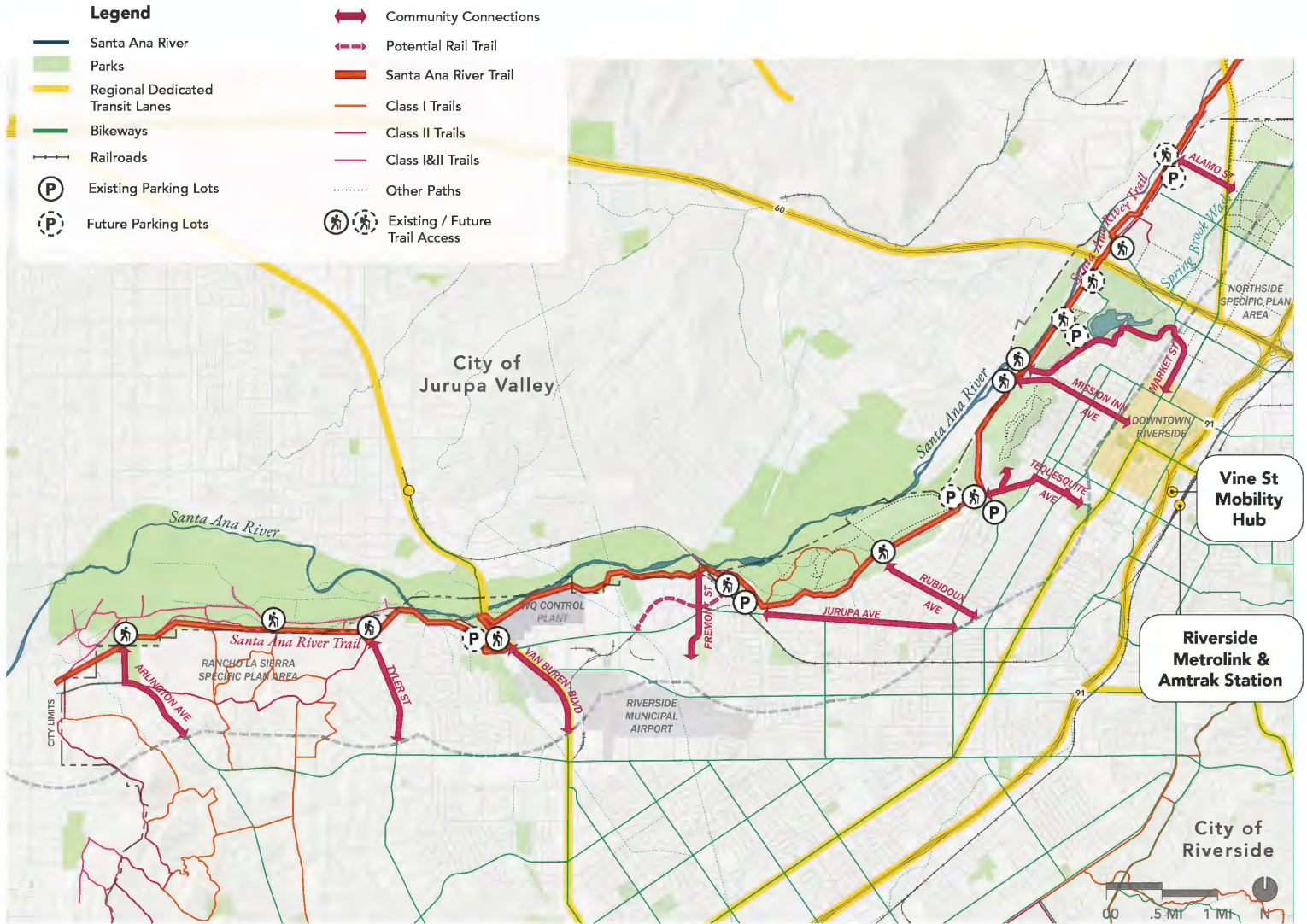


Source: Walker | Macy, ECONorthwest, City of Riverside

CIRCULATION AND ACCESS

The River District boundary is delineated to include both a core River District area and a broader sphere of influence that includes city-owned park spaces to the east and west of the core downtown area.

Exhibit 8: Circulation and Access



Source: Walker | Macy, EConorthwest, City of Riverside

DESIGN INSPIRATIONS

The images that follow characterize design inspirations that consider signage, river accessibility, programming, native trees/plants, and potential capital improvements.

Exhibit 9: Design Inspiration 1—Community Life

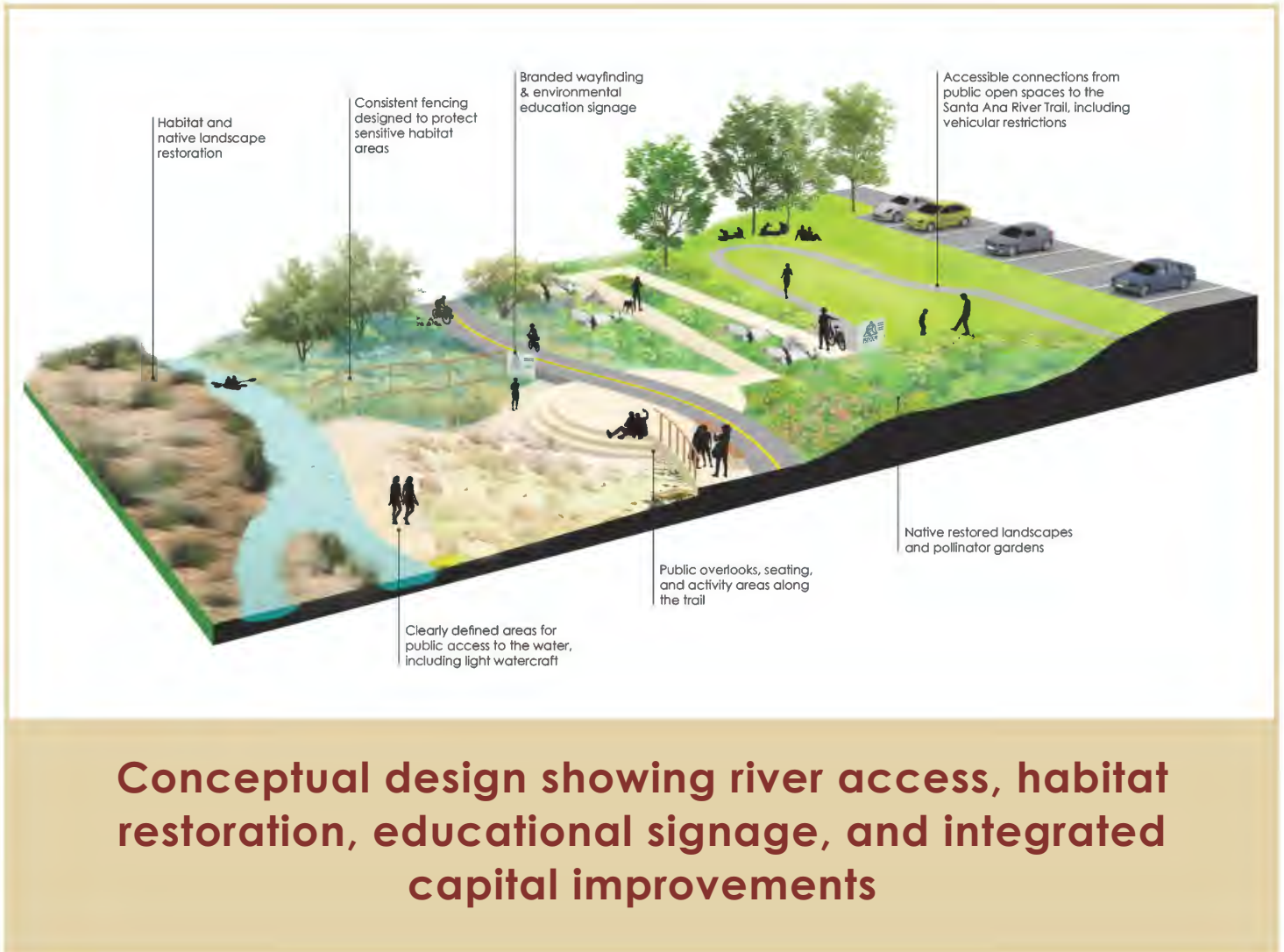


Active public spaces with seating, food trucks, and multi-use paths that bring programming and community life to the riverfront

DESIGN INSPIRATIONS

The images that follow characterize design inspirations that consider signage, river accessibility, programming, native trees/plants, and potential capital improvements.

Exhibit 9: Design Inspiration 2—Conceptual Design



DESIGN INSPIRATIONS

The images that follow characterize design inspirations that consider signage, river accessibility, programming, native trees/plants, and potential capital improvements.

Exhibit 9: Design Inspiration 3—Trails



Trails connecting cultural landmarks with native landscaping, creating opportunities for recreation and heritage interpretation

DESIGN INSPIRATIONS

The images that follow characterize design inspirations that consider signage, river accessibility, programming, native trees/plants, and potential capital improvements.

Exhibit 9: Design Inspiration 4—Multi-use Pathways



Multi-use pathways shaded by native trees that enhance connectivity, ecological value, and everyday enjoyment of the river corridor

Focus Area Opportunities

The River District Focus Area is ripe with public, private, and joint venture opportunities to enhance the public realm, improve recreational assets, and encourage development. A sample of these opportunities identified in this analysis include:

Fairmount Park | Improve accessibility from downtown and enhance activation of The Armory and Golf Course.

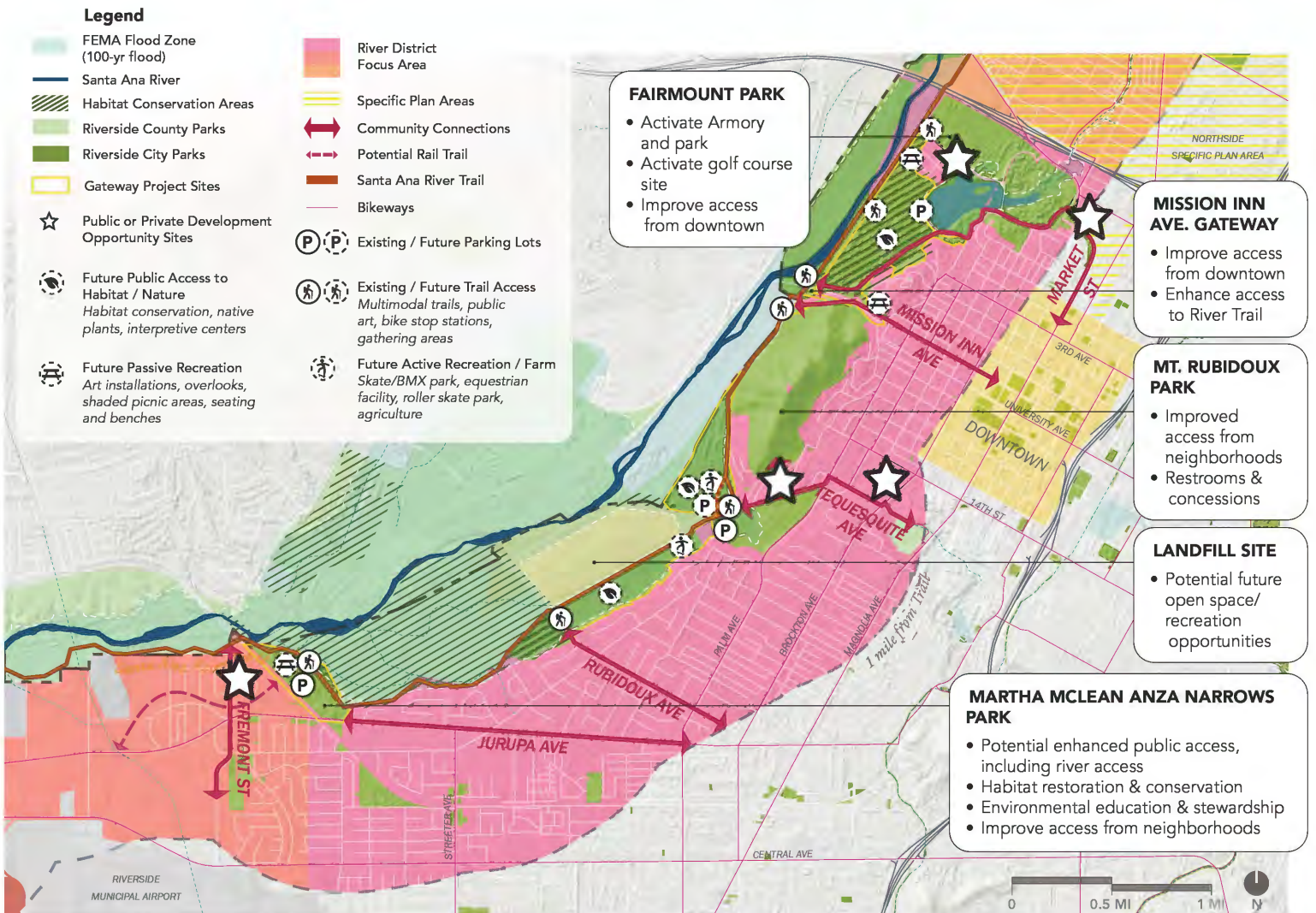
Mission Inn Avenue Gateway | Improve accessibility from downtown through to the river trail.

Mt. Rubidoux Park | Improve accessibility from neighborhoods and capitalize on opportunities for restrooms and/or concession.

Tequesquite Landfill Site | Presents opportunities for future open space and recreation

Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park | Opportunities for enhanced accessibility and public access and educational programming and signage.

Exhibit 11: Focus Area Opportunity Sites and Projects (Part 1)

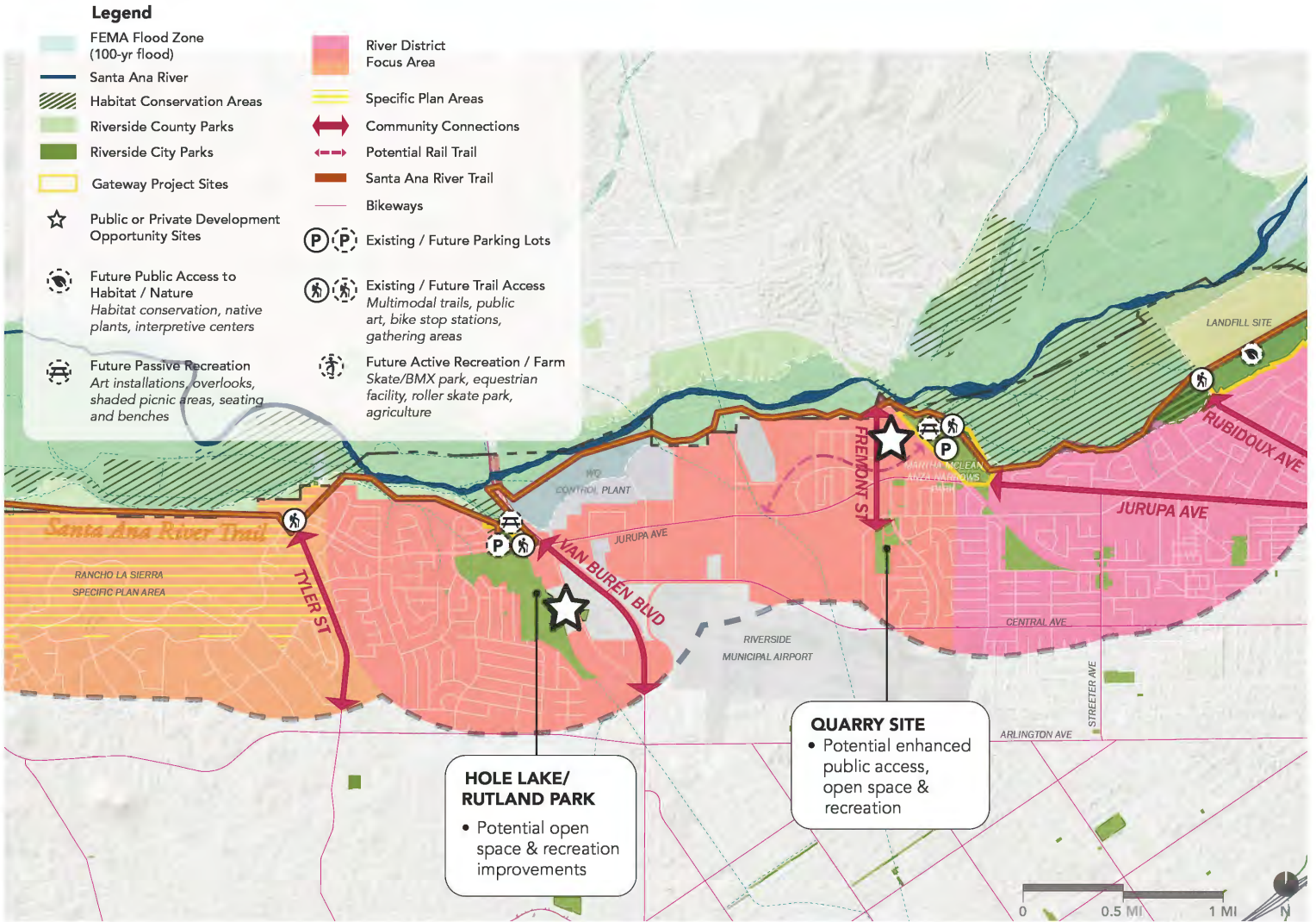


Source: Walker | Macy, EONorthwest, City of Riverside

Hole Lake/Rutland Park | Strong potential for open space and enhanced recreational opportunities and programming.

Quarry Site | Strong potential to improve public accessibility, open space, and recreational opportunities.

Exhibit 12: Focus Area Opportunity Sites and Projects (Part 2)

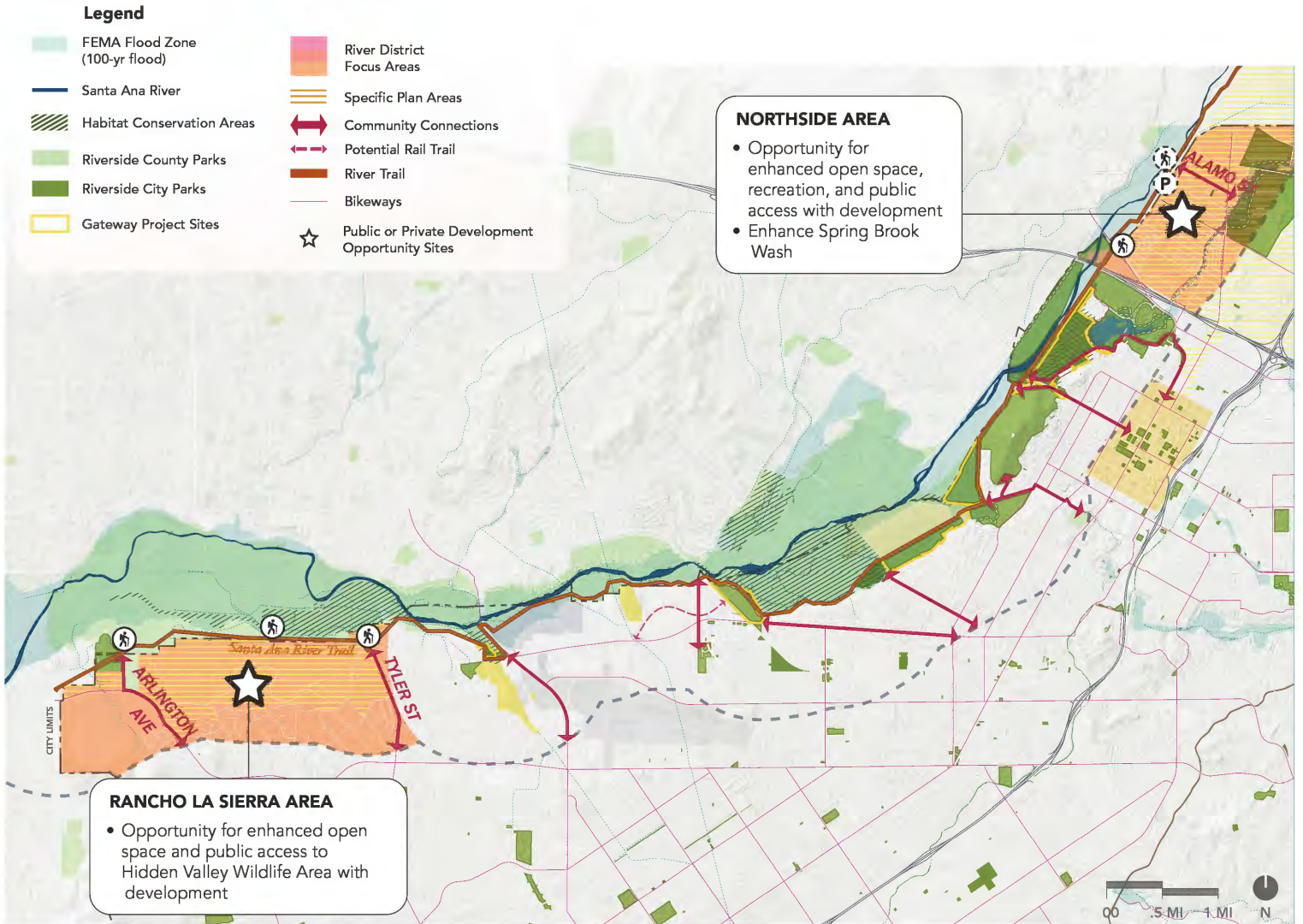


Source: Walker | Macy, EConorthwest, City of Riverside

Northside Area | Potential opportunities include enhancement of the Spring Brook Wash and increased public access, private development, and recreational opportunities leveraging existing open space.

Rancho La Sierra Area | Private development opportunities through enhanced open space and public access. Leverage Hidden Valley Wildlife Area.

Exhibit 13: Focus Area Opportunity Sites and Projects (Part 3)



Source: Walker | Macy, ECONorthwest, City of Riverside

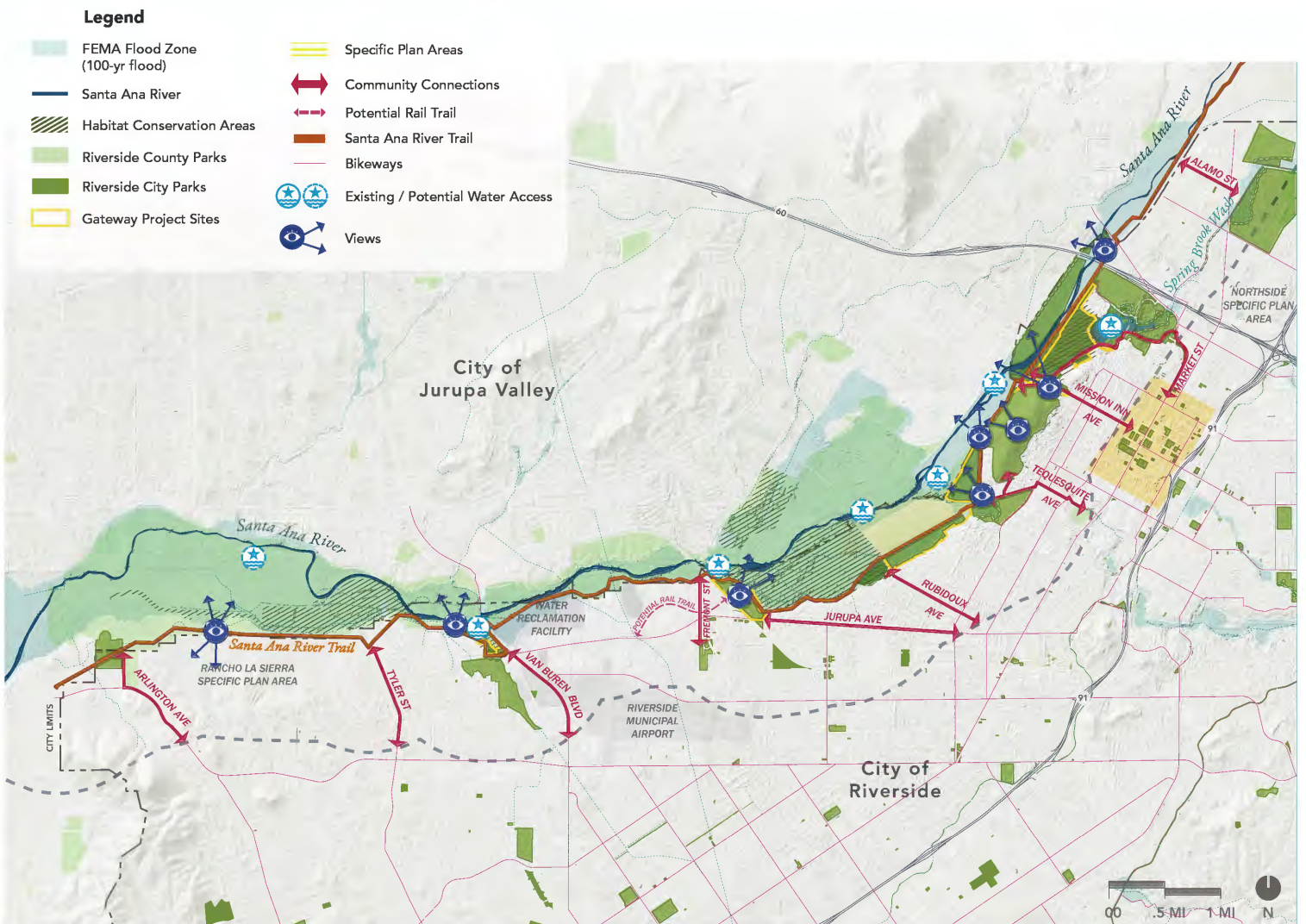
Trailheads | Provide access to the public realm from streets or neighborhoods. Enhance access through wayfinding and interpretive signage, seating areas, and public art.

Water Access and Views

Bringing the river back into the psyche and daily lives of Riversiders is a core goal of the River District. People don't know that there is a river because they cannot see the river. The district will leverage opportunities to enhance access to the river as well as viewpoints throughout the district. Many opportunities exist in the core district area and to the southwest. To enhance access to the river we must:

- ◆ Build safe access to the river, including ADA access in suitable areas
- ◆ Monitor water quality
- ◆ Ensure public safety and weather notification systems during flooding events
- ◆ Provide amenities including restrooms, commercial services, and waste management
- ◆ Explore water safety staff at designated access points
- ◆ Public safety and security

Exhibit 14: Water Access Trail and View Opportunities



Source: Walker | Macy, EConorthwest, City of Riverside

Tributaries

Riverside's many tributaries offer a powerful way to reconnect the city with the Santa Ana River by extending bike paths and green infrastructure into neighborhoods. Most of the city lies within the Santa Ana River watershed, and its tributaries can be transformed into pedestrian and bicycle corridors that also improve water quality and deter illegal dumping through increased visibility and community use.

These improvements should align with the Riverside PACT, a Pedestrian Target Safeguarding Plan (PTS), an Active Transportation Plan (AT Plan), a Complete Streets Ordinance (CSO), and a Trails Master Plan (TMP) and aim to connect directly—or indirectly via the trail network—to the Santa Ana River Trail. Wayfinding, public art, and interpretive signage can reinforce the river theme and educate residents on the importance of stormwater stewardship, helping residents see the river as a valuable natural and recreational asset worth protecting.

TRIBUTARY CONFIGURATIONS

Options for Tributary Enhancement

Covered Channel | Covered channels can serve as active transportation corridors that reduce stormwater contamination and litter while enhancing community connectivity, provided they include safe crossings, lighting, and essential amenities like seating, waste stations, and trail maps.

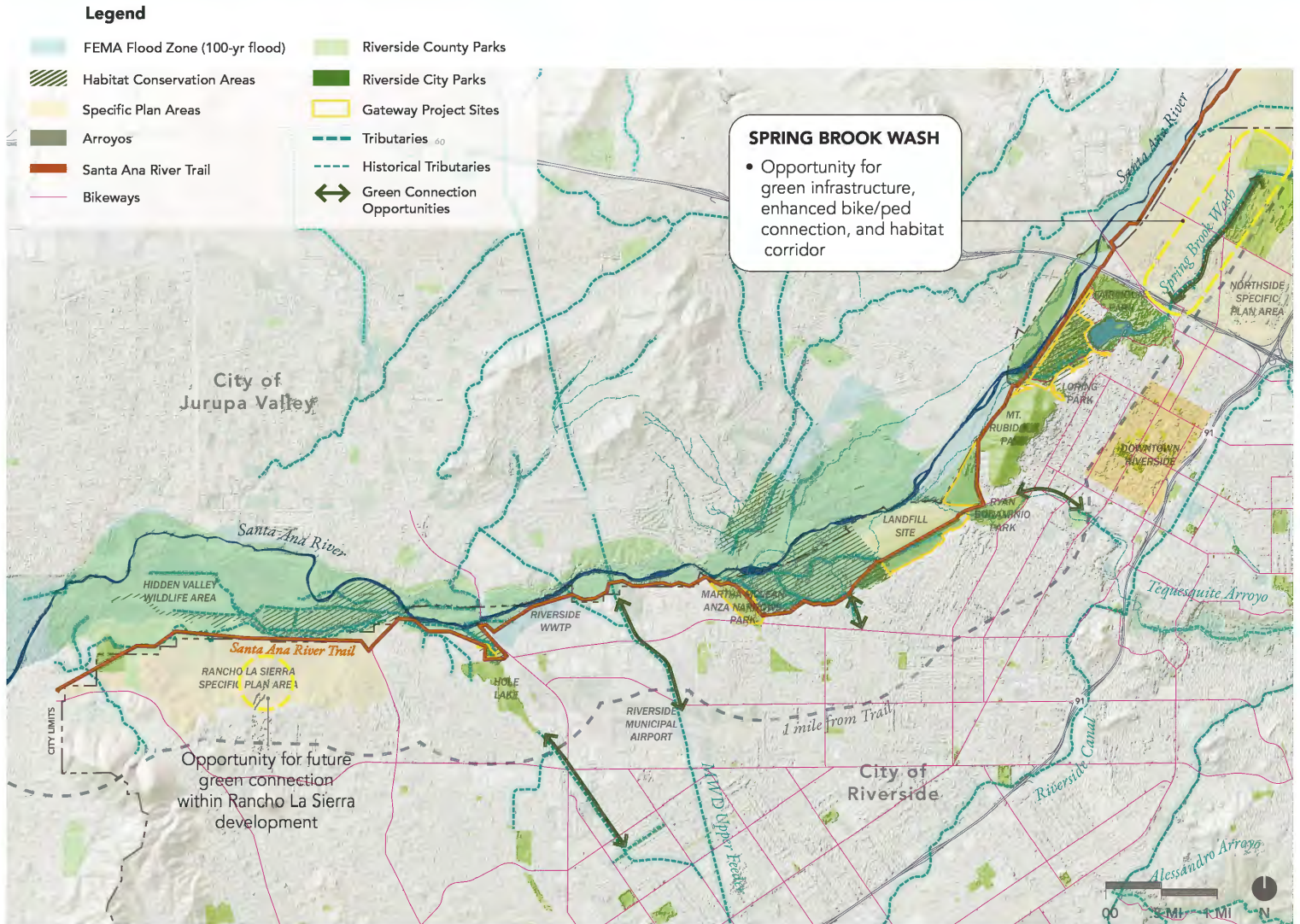
Sidepath Trail | Stormwater channel maintenance access roadways can be converted to sidepath trails where a covered facility is not feasible.

Natural Arroyo Sidepath | This configuration features a semi-improved pedestrian trail running alongside a natural arroyo, as envisioned in the Northside specific plan.

Private Sites

The River District supports the City's General Plan goals by identifying privately owned parcels that could be upzoned to attract new residential and commercial development. This private investment, drawn by the riverfront's enhanced amenities, boosts economic activity, increases public safety through greater foot traffic, and strengthens the vibrancy of surrounding neighborhoods. Further, the River District will influence planned private developments, for example, the Rancho La Sierra site which is currently planned under a specific plan.

Exhibit 15: Tributary Opportunities



Source: Walker | Macy, ECONorthwest, City of Riverside



COMMUNITY INPUT AND PARTNERSHIPS

The River District planning process included community and stakeholder engagement designed to ensure the project reflects local values, preferences, and leverages the expertise of stakeholders.

Input Process

The city convened a series of topic-specific stakeholder meetings that brought together experts from key sectors, including public safety, Indigenous communities, environmental advocacy, finance, and urban planning. The process began with a day-long site tour involving the full project team and stakeholders, fostering a shared understanding of the River District's opportunities and challenges. From this larger group, a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) was established to provide ongoing input and strategic guidance, meeting regularly throughout the planning process.

Community input was also included. On March 14, 2024, the city hosted a public workshop at the historic Armory at Fairmount Park. This event featured a facilitated visioning session, allowing residents to articulate aspirations for the River District, followed by focused breakout groups that gathered input on district boundaries, amenities, and community concerns.

RIVER DISTRICT COMMUNITY MEETING

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2024 • 4:30 P.M.
 FAIRMOUNT PARK • 2601 FAIRMOUNT BLVD.
Meet at Armory Behind Train

- Walk Around Fairmount Park (Meet at the Armory) 4:30 p.m.
- Meet & Greet 5:30 p.m.
- Visioning and Breakout Sessions for the River District, Fairmount Park & Armory 6 - 8 p.m.

RSVP at Parks@RiversideCA.gov

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT
Parks@RiversideCA.gov | (951) 826-2000

@RivParks #ILoveRiversideParks



Exhibit 16: Community Workshop Preferences

COMMUNITY INPUT

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



- Boats
- Pedal Boats
- Kayaks
- Electric Boats

COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES



- Bike shop (Rentals & Repairs)
- Coffee Shop
- Expanded golf
- Restaurant

SAFETY



- Clear pathways
- Lighting
- Sidewalks / circulation
- Crosswalks / access from neighborhoods

ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMMING



- Exercise Stations
- Pickleball Courts
- Fishing Dock
- Expand Event Programming
- Youth Development Activities

ENVIRONMENTAL



- Sustainable Gardens
- Preservation of wildlife

OTHER



- Signage and Wayfinding
- Interactive Art
- Gateway/Entry Enhancement
- Social media interactions



The Quarterly River Summit is a collaboration between the agencies, conservancies, and non-profits that support the river.

River District Partnerships

The River District will not be successful without a broad range of dedicated partners. Future and ongoing partners will have to include environmental stakeholders, non-profit/volunteer partners, indigenous groups, and private partners.

ENVIRONMENTAL STAKEHOLDERS

PURPOSE

To ensure collaborative stewardship, informed decision-making, and community ownership of the River District by drawing on regional expertise, fostering shared values, and aligning revitalization efforts with environmental and public access priorities.

EXAMPLE STAKEHOLDERS

- ◆ California State Parks Conservancy
- ◆ IE Waterkeepers
- ◆ Inland Empire Resource Conservation District
- ◆ Love Riverside
- ◆ Rivers and Lands Conservancy
- ◆ Riverside County Park and Open-Space District
- ◆ Riverside-Corona Resource Cons. District
- ◆ San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District
- ◆ Santa Ana River Conservancy
- ◆ Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority
- ◆ Tree People
- ◆ Western Riverside County Conservation Authority

ROLE

- ◆ Provide regulatory guidance, technical expertise, and regional coordination to ensure the River District aligns with broader environmental goals, jurisdictional requirements, and sustainable access to the Santa Ana River.
- ◆ Support community engagement and stewardship through hands-on activities like cleanups and tree planting, fostering local pride, social cohesion, and grassroots ownership of the River District.





NON-PROFIT & VOLUNTEER PARTNERS

PURPOSE

To strengthen the development and long-term success of the River District by engaging community members—especially youth and early-career adults—in conservation, education, and stewardship programs that build local capacity and foster a culture of care for the River District.

EXAMPLE STAKEHOLDERS

- ◆ Cal Volunteers
- ◆ Campfire USA
- ◆ Love Riverside
- ◆ San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District
- ◆ Scouts of America
- ◆ Tree People
- ◆ Urban Conservation Corps

ROLE

- ◆ Provide on-the-ground support through activities such as habitat restoration, pollinator garden creation, tree planting, and educational programming.

INDIGENOUS GROUPS

PURPOSE

To honor the cultural heritage, ancestral lands, and lived histories of Indigenous peoples by integrating their voices, stories, and traditions into the design, programming, and stewardship of the River District.

EXAMPLE STAKEHOLDERS

- ◆ Advocacy groups
- ◆ Tribal nations

ROLE

- ◆ Provide knowledge and expertise to integrate local Indigenous voices, stories and traditions into the design, programming and stewardship of the River District.

PRIVATE PARTNERS

PURPOSE

There are opportunities to partner with private businesses to enhance the River District and attract more visitors. Initiatives like the reintroduction of pedal boats at Fairmount Park and the adaptive reuse of the former National Guard Armory have the potential to draw thousands of people annually. Additional amenities—such as kayaking and bike rentals—could further enrich the visitor experience. These businesses would contribute financially through business licenses and ground leases, helping to support and sustain the River District.



IMPLEMENTATION

A successful River District depends on the coordinated integration of four core elements: building, maintaining, programming, and securing its public spaces. These factors work together to transform underutilized parkland into vibrant, accessible, and sustainable places.

Building the River District means activating the land with thoughtful design and habitat restoration; maintaining it ensures those investments endure for generations and have fiscal sustainability. Programming brings the space to life with events and activities that draw the community in, and securing the district protects its natural resources and guarantees a safe experience.

To implement a successful River District with these core elements, the city and its partners will need to have resolve in their commitment to resources and funding for capital improvements, operations and maintenance, and community programming.

BUILD IT



Improve parkland and restore habitat

MAINTAIN IT



Ensure consistent, high-quality upkeep

PROGRAM IT



Provide activities and events for all

SECURE IT



Protect people and the environment

BUILD IT



Improve parkland and restore habitat

The City of Riverside owns 800 acres of parkland near the river. Much of this land is undeveloped and is a burden to complete fire reduction and maintenance each year with little benefit to the community. As stewards of the land, it is our obligation to improve these lands for recreational use and restore the habitat for the enjoyment of wildlife and people. **Core projects may include:**



Riverside Gateway Parks Improvements



Diversification and Expansion of Amenities and Features



Wayfinding and Branding



Parking Expansion/Structure



Trail Head Design and Development



Tributary Bike Paths

COSTS

Initial upfront capital improvements will be necessary to deliver on the vision of the River District. Future phases of the planning process will detail concept level costs as those concepts are developed. Rough order of magnitude capital costs may include:

DEVELOPMENT	COST	UNIT
Parkland Development	\$1,000,000	per acre
Parking Spaces (Structured)	\$38,000	per stall
Bike paths and Pedestrian Trails	\$1,000,000	per mile
Open space	\$500,000	per acre

MAINTAIN IT



Ensure consistent, high-quality upkeep

Maintaining parks isn't just about aesthetics—it's a critical investment that supports public health, safety, economic strength, and environmental resilience. For the River District, consistent, high-quality maintenance will be essential to realizing these benefits. Reliable care ensures that walking trails, waterways, amenities, and public art remain safe, functional, and welcoming—supporting recreation, tourism, and property values along the corridor. In turn, this builds public trust and strengthens the district's brand.



COSTS

Ongoing operations and maintenance costs are often undercalculated impacts when considering capital investments. Typical order of magnitude capital maintenance costs include:

MAINTENANCE COST	ANNUAL COSTS	UNIT
Ornamental Landscape	\$1,700	per acre
Natural Habitat	\$1,300	per acre
Sports Park	\$5,000	per acre
Seasonal Employees	\$500,000	per team of 4
Contract Work (spray and weed abatement)	\$450,000	per acre

PROGRAM IT



Provide activities
and events
for all

Deliberate programming alongside capital investment will enhance the experience of park goers and increase the frequency and quality of activities in the River District including marathons, bike rides, trash pickups, cultural and art festivals, music, recreational sports leagues and birdwatching. Individuals, families, and friends will want to spend their time at the River District, whether that is for an evening run or a family picnic.

River access could be offered at several locations including near Martha McClean and Carlson Parks. Providing river access at key nodes along the river can bring people directly to the water's edge and present additional programming and recreational activities. Infrastructure improvements along the water access points should include safe access to the water and amenities such as trashcans, drinking fountains, and lifeguard stations. Water access would only be available after water quality and safety from flash floods are assured.



Nature Walks



Art Walks/Events



River Cleanup Events



Water Safety



Music Events and Concerts



Movies/Theater in the Park



Food and Beverage Festival



Educational Programming



Photography Workshops



Cycling Clubs



Armory Programming



Yoga Classes



Car Shows



Indigenous Tribes Programs

COSTS

Programming costs will be highly variable and certainly scale up over time as investments in the River District are made and usage matures. Many programming costs may also be attributed to the non-profit or private sector. Attendance fees can be charged for programs such as concerts.

SECURE IT



Protect people and the environment

Securing the River District ensures a safe, welcoming space for families and visitors while protecting natural resources, improving water quality, and enabling emergency access. Effective security helps prevent illegal dumping, off-road vehicle use, fires, and other activities that threaten public safety and environmental health.

To ensure the long-term safety and resilience of the River District, a coordinated strategy focused on security, weather preparedness, and fire mitigation is essential. Preventing unauthorized access is critical to reducing illegal dumping, off-road vehicle use, and encampments that damage natural habitats and increase fire risk. Strategic use of barriers—such as bollards, gates, and fencing—must balance access for emergency responders with public safety and usability. In response to extreme weather events, the city has implemented proactive measures such as opening access points during red flag warnings and developing emergency alerts for flooding and thunderstorms. Finally, regular fire mitigation efforts, including multi-agency enforcement events targeting off-road vehicle trespassing, have been successful in protecting sensitive habitats and deterring illegal activity.

TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

- » Activation with Programs and Events
- » Cameras
- » Safety Thorough Environmental Design
- » Security Personnel



Lighting



Enforcement



Barriers



Fencing



Boulders

SECURE IT

Recreational off-road vehicles cause serious environmental damage by destroying native plants and their habitat and disturbing endangered wildlife with the noise. Also, remote off-roading activities that take place in secluded areas of the river are accompanied by unlawful activities that deter naturalists and families from enjoying the river.

Since 2023, Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District have participated in five illegal off-highway vehicle (OHV) and Trespass Enforcement Events in collaboration with law enforcement agencies from San Bernardino County, Riverside County, CA Fish and Wildlife, Colton PD, Rialto PD, San Bernardino PD, and California Highway Patrol. These events occur on the busiest days of the year like Labor Day, Presidents' Day, and Memorial Day. The primary goal is to deter off-roaders from unlawfully entering restricted flood control channels that serve as habitats for federally protected species. Enforcement spans areas from the Lytle Creek Basin in San Bernardino to the Santa Ana River Bottom in Riverside County.



During these events, citations are issued, arrests are made, and stolen equipment is recovered. These efforts have not only curbed illegal activity but also created a safer environment for the sensitive species in the Santa Ana River Bottom.

Coordinating these operation events is a significant task, requiring collaboration across multiple agencies. This includes attending pre-meetings, scheduling enforcement staff, organizing staging areas, holding debrief meetings, and collecting all the data for the event. The combined efforts of agencies from both San Bernardino and Riverside Counties have played a crucial role in protecting the river.

COSTS

Initial upfront capital improvements will be necessary to deliver on the vision of the River District. Future phases of the planning process will detail concept level costs as those concepts are developed. **Rough order of magnitude capital costs may include:**

MAINTENANCE COST	ANNUAL COSTS	UNIT
PANS Officer	\$52,523 - \$66,983	per officer
PANS team of 14 specialists	\$1 million	River District
Park Ranger 1	\$42,853 - \$58,313	per officer
Park Ranger 2	\$46,315 - \$63,980	per officer
Park Ranger Supervisor	\$56,270 - \$75,726	per officer
Police Officer	TBD	per officer
Private Security Officer	TBD	per officer
Vandalism and Theft	Up to \$500,000	River District

ALTERNATIVES FOR SECURING THE RIVER DISTRICT

For on-the-ground security of the parks and assets within the River District, there are a range of alternative enforcement and safety alternatives:

PARKS AND NEIGHBORHOOD SPECIALISTS | PANS Specialists are unsworn officers who report to the Riverside Police Department. They are unarmed and do not make arrests. Ideally, the River District should have 3 shifts; morning, evening, and weekend comprised of two teams of two specialists for a total of 12 specialists. This team would require 2 supervisors for a total team of 14 individuals along with uniforms, vehicles, and supplies. This expense could be funded through Measure Z.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY PARK RANGER | The County Park Rangers are PC 832 Arrest and Firearms Training Specifications trained. They are unarmed and do not make arrests.

RIVERSIDE POLICE OFFICER | Sworn Officers who are armed and have the authority to make arrests. However, 70 percent of the Riverbed is on county land and requires Sheriff coordination.

COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE SHERIFF'S OFFICE | Sworn Sheriff's Officers. However, the Department is capacity constrained and there are only five officers covering Western Riverside County.

PRIVATE SECURITY OFFICER | Offerings for private services include both armed and unarmed officers. Officers will typically conduct risk assessments to determine the level of need.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND ENGAGEMENT TEAM (PSET) PROGRAM

In early 2019, the Riverside City Council allocated \$3.45 million in Measure Z funds to launch the Public Safety and Engagement Team (PSET), a multi-department program aimed at maintaining public order while connecting homeless individuals with support services. The team addresses issues such as unlawful camping, panhandling, and abandoned belongings, while staff receive training in mental health and public health engagement. In May 2022, the City Council expanded the program to include a PSET Urban Team focused on right-of-way encampments and a PSET Wildland Team to enforce camping restrictions in sensitive areas. Once fully staffed, PSET will include sworn 24 officers.



Sustainability

Creating a River District that endures for future generations means embedding sustainability and resilience into every aspect of its design and management. These strategies protect the environment and reduce long-term costs, and ensure the district remains a thriving space for all species.



Trash



Invasive plants and animals



Water quality



Heat



Flood



Fire



Drought



Vandalism



Erosion

Restoration

In addition to habitat restoration, long-term monitoring of native species and their habitats is underway. Monitoring will track changes in species populations and distribution, the quality of habitat conditions, and the effectiveness of habitat restoration actions. Examples of monitoring include native fish surveys, riparian bird surveys, surveys for amphibians and reptiles, water quality monitoring, native and nonnative plant mapping, and groundwater monitoring. Conservation and habitat management actions to improve conditions for native wildlife and plant species that depend on the Santa Ana River will continue to be developed and implemented into the future.

SUSTAINABILITY TOOLBOX

People will know that they are in the River District because of it will be anchored with sustainable and native landscape. It will be a place where not only people, but wildlife, will thrive. This will require tools and strategies to ensure the River District is built to and preserved with a goal toward environmental sustainability.

STRATEGIES AND FEATURES OF AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT RIVER DISTRICT:

- » Materials that reduce fire fuel
- » Use of local materials and native plants with low maintenance costs
- » Use of native or climate adapted plant material
- » Restore habitat, especially for endangered species
- » Longevity of materials to reduce capital maintenance
- » Onsite water capture
- » Energy efficient facilities installations
- » Design for resiliency to future conditions like fire and floods
- » Minimizing or even restoring habitat impacts
- » Community education and building a culture of stewardship
- » Stormwater runoff filtering



Pay For It

The River District is envisioned to be a **financially sustainable district** that supports the construction, operation, and maintenance of community safety and public amenities, with financial sustainability achieved through strong partnerships with the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies, as well as the use of a diverse toolbox of financial strategies.

FUNDING ALTERNATIVES

Numerous financing and governance tools are available that could help achieve a financially sustainable River District. The funding and maintenance strategies for the River District will likely include a combination of numerous tools to provide sufficient resources for the River District for decades to come. However, many tools come with limitations on what they can fund, which should be considered in future planning.

Exhibit 17. Summary of Financial Tools

ENDOWMENTS

Endowments are investment funds that are intended to last forever as the principal remains intact, and the proceeds (earnings from the investment) are used to help fund priority projects. The endowment fund can be managed by the City or the Community Services Foundation.

DONATIONS AND FUNDING

Private or public entities can donate one time funding, ongoing contributions, or a charitable bequest at time of death.

PARK GENERATED REVENUE

Ongoing maintenance, security, and deferred maintenance of the River District can potentially be paid for by new revenue generated in Fairmount Park and other River District parks such as:

- ◆ Lease Revenue on facilities such as the Armory, Golf Course, and Stewarts Boat House
- ◆ Concessionaire income from items such as kayak, bikes, or paddle boarding
- ◆ Paid Parking: metered parking for special events or parking in new parking structure through a Parking Access and Revenue Control System
- ◆ Income from special events such as concerts, sports leagues, and festivals
- ◆ EV charging stations

A fund may need to be established in the city budget and River District income will need to offset operating expenditures.

Exhibit 17. Summary of Financial Tools (continued)

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Developers with mitigation requirements can establish a conservation easement on city owned natural lands. This will ensure that the land is restored and maintained into perpetuity at the expense of the developer, usually through an endowment that will guarantee that the land is maintained into perpetuity. The developer can purchase conservation easement or fee title of the land, at the city's discretion. One issue to consider is that the land will be considered sensitive habitat and may not be available for public recreational use.

MITIGATION BANKS

In the future, mitigation banks could be set up through Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) with approval of applicable natural resource regulatory agencies including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

ART DEVELOPMENT IMPACT FEE

A fee charged on new development is being explored to potentially fund art projects in the River District.

LANDSCAPE AND MAINTENANCE ASSESSMENT DISTRICT

A Maintenance Assessment District (LMD) is a legal mechanism by which property owners within specified boundaries vote to establish an assessment on their property tax bill to improve their community. LMDs provide services over and above what the city normally provides, often called a "special benefit." These special benefits are determined by an assessment engineer who completes a study and engineering report, and can include litter and graffiti abatement, trash collection and bulky item removal, as well as a variety of maintenance and economic development services.

The district requires a 51 percent approval rate of impacted property owners (with each parcel/property in the proposed district receiving one vote), preparation of an annual engineer's report, and annual City Council approval. Because a portion of the benefits are a general benefit to the public, the city would have to contribute also through the general fund based on benefit assessment.

Exhibit 17. Summary of Financial Tools (continued)

COMMUNITY FACILITIES DISTRICT (CFD)

Community Facilities Districts (CFDs) are a special tax district formed when property owners within a defined geographic area agree to levy a special tax on their properties to fund public infrastructure, services or safety – such as streets, sewer drainage, electric and water infrastructure, schools, parks and public safety. CFD's do not typically rely on General Fund contributions and are generally more flexible and easier to manage than other district types. Unlike Landscape Maintenance Districts (LMDs), CFDs require two-thirds approval from property owners subject to the special tax.

Key characteristics include:

- ◆ No General Fund contribution or general benefit requirement
- ◆ Precedent for O&M CFDs in Riverside
- ◆ Can apply to existing developments, not just new ones.
- ◆ Harder to form but more flexible post formation
- ◆ Revenues are considered a special property tax, not a fee

BONDS

The city can explore issuance of bonds for one-time expenditures secured by assets. This influx of funds can be used to improve and invest in the River District. This funding strategy would require the River District to generate income in excess of ongoing operations and maintenance costs, sufficient to cover annual debt payments.

GRANTS

Grants are especially useful for one-time capital improvements. There are some grants available for short-term programing. There are one time and annual state and federal grants for capital improvements that could greatly improve the River District. Some grants may include a matching requirement, which would require the city to identify supplemental one-time funding sources.

Acknowledgments

ECONorthwest prepared this report with the vision and leadership of several partners, including members, staff, and leadership of the City of Riverside. We are especially grateful to Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson, whose commitment and direction were a driving force in shaping this work. Many agencies and departments provided expertise that informed our analysis, including the Coastal Conservancy, Riverside Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Planning, Finance, Police, and Fire. We also acknowledge the guidance of Riverside City Council members Steven Robillard, Steve Hemenway, Philip Falcone, and former Council Member Erin Edwards. This work was made possible through funding and vision provided by the Santa Ana River Conservancy.

That assistance notwithstanding, ECONorthwest is responsible for the content of this report. The staff at ECONorthwest prepared this report based on their general knowledge of the economics of recreation, amenities, and regional economies. ECONorthwest staff contributing to this study included Chris Blakney, Katherine Buck, and Natalie Walker. Teaming partners Walker Macy and Idea Hall contributed to landscape architecture and branding strategy, respectively. ECONorthwest also relied on information derived from government agencies, private statistical services, the reports of others, interviews of individuals, or other sources believed to be reliable. ECONorthwest has not independently verified the accuracy of all such information and makes no representation regarding its accuracy or completeness. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute the authors' current opinions, which may change as more information becomes available.

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