



## City of Arts &amp; Innovation

**TO: MOBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE      DATE: MARCH 14, 2024**

**FROM: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT      WARDS: 3, 4, 5**

**SUBJECT: PROPOSED 5-YEAR PLAN TO ENHANCE AND BEAUTIFY RIVERSIDE CULTURAL HERITAGE LANDMARK #8 AND NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, VICTORIA AVENUE**

**ISSUE:**

Receive a report on the history of Victoria Avenue, Riverside Cultural Heritage Landmark #8 and National Park Service's Register of Historic Places, and the role of Victoria Avenue Forever as a partner in the protection and preservation of Victoria Avenue and provide feedback on a proposed 5-year plan to enhance and beautify Victoria Avenue.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Mobility & Infrastructure Committee:

1. Receive a report on the history of Victoria Avenue, Riverside Cultural Heritage Landmark #8 and National Park Service's Register of Historic Places, and the role of Victoria Avenue Forever as a partner in the protection and preservation of Victoria Avenue;
2. Provide feedback on the proposed 5-year plan to enhance and beautify Victoria Avenue; and
3. Recommend that City Council approve the proposed 5-year plan to enhance and beautify Victoria Avenue.

**BACKGROUND:**

## History of Victoria Avenue

Victoria Avenue owes its existence to Matthew Gage, a jeweler who moved to Riverside in 1881. He engineered and developed the Gage Canal which brought irrigation water from artesian wells in San Bernardino County to the citrus groves in Arlington Heights. He imagined a main boulevard in Arlington Heights with different types of trees and named it Victoria Avenue after the Queen of

England. His vision introduced the many varieties of trees and plants along Victoria Avenue.

Grading of Victoria Avenue began in the spring of 1892 and the first trees were planted. Franz Hosp, the pioneering landscape designer of Riverside, crafted a road plan that proved to be almost as appropriate for automobiles as it was for a horse and buggy.

The Avenue was planted with pepper trees from Peru and eucalyptus trees from Australia and many flowering, deciduous trees which provided year-round color and elegance. Shortly after, palms were added as street trees and are now the signature skyline silhouette for the Avenue.

In June 1902, Victoria Avenue was deeded to the City of Riverside with the stipulation that the trees were to be maintained and protected. The landscaping of Victoria Avenue continues to remain under the care of the City of Riverside.

Originally, the landscaped medians on Victoria Avenue ran from Myrtle Avenue to Boundary Lane; in 2006 the City extended the medians to La Sierra Avenue. The new medians were landscaped with miniature roses at the bull noses and 'Ragged Robin' roses in between. Flowering trees were planted in the center medians.

Victoria Avenue is now a linear drive that begins at Myrtle Avenue and ends at La Sierra Avenue and features over 6,000 trees, including more than 1,000 orange trees, tens of thousands of 'Ragged Robin' roses, nine miles of walking trails, the Rosanna Scott Memorial Bicycle Trail, and various shrubs and ground covers along its length. It is a year-round attraction for bicyclists, joggers and Sunday afternoon driving enthusiasts.

Victoria Avenue has several other notable features:

- **Giant eucalypts.** Eucalypts are among the largest and oldest trees on Victoria Avenue. Some are nearly 10 feet in diameter and 200 feet tall. There are more than 300 eucalypts on the Avenue, representing 14 different species.
- **Helen Hays Yeager Memorial Grove.** In 2011, the City of Riverside accepted this Memorial Grove as an addition to the heritage of Victoria Avenue. It is a 0.76-acre orange grove located near Rumsey Drive, with a plaque and sitting area at its entrance.
- **Lorraine Small Rose Garden.** Modern roses of many colors were planted by Victoria Avenue Forever at Myrtle Street in 1993 to honor Lorraine Small, a local garden writer and long-time advocate for the preservation of Victoria Avenue.
- **Dr. Peter M. Lewis Garden.** This garden at Jane Street was the first water-wise garden established by Victoria Avenue Forever (VAF) in 1993.
- **Dammers Butterfly Garden.** This garden at Mary Street is filled with plants that attract butterflies. It was established in 2014 by the Parks, Recreation & Community Services Department at the corner near Washington Park to honor a historic citrus grower and scientist who previously lived at the site.
- **Hal Snyder Garden.** VAF established this garden in 2009 as a second water-wise garden. It honors Harold Snyder, a founding member and long-time spokesperson for VAF.
- **The Roosevelt Palm.** Dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, this Mexican Fan Palm at Victoria Avenue and Myrtle Street is City Cultural Heritage Landmark #64.
- **Information Kiosks.** Three information kiosks, each with 10 panels, present historical information about Riverside that is significant to the history of Victoria Avenue. These kiosks were installed by Victoria Avenue Forever with donations from the public.

In 1969, Victoria Avenue became Riverside Cultural Heritage Landmark #8 and in October of 2000 it was added to the National Park Service's Register of Historic Places.

### Victoria Avenue Forever

In 1990, several large Eucalyptus trees were slated for removal along Victoria Avenue and a group of concerned residents, including Hal Snyder, Rosanna Scott, Mary Humbolt, Pati Weir, and Earl Shade, were fearful that the trees would not be replanted. These residents thus founded Victoria Avenue Forever (VAF), a public benefit, non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation whose Mission Statement is "To Preserve, Restore, and Beautify Historic Victoria Avenue through Community Volunteer Efforts, Education, and Advocacy."

The City and Victoria Avenue Forever have partnered on several occasions to obtain grant funding for tree plantings and identification, and for irrigation repairs. VAF also raises funds for additional planting of trees and other ornamentals, organizes workdays devoted to tree planting, tree care, roses plantings, garden creation and maintenance, and educates the public about the history and value of the plantings on Victoria Avenue through newsletters, brochures, educational panels in kiosks, and special events. VAF volunteers also care for Victoria Avenue through maintenance of existing plantings, weed and pest control, irrigation, signage, policy for development and traffic, and garden development and upkeep.

In its first 20 years, VAF volunteers planted an estimated 1,200 trees, many of them commemorative trees sponsored by donors. VAF volunteers have also planted thousands of "Ragged Robin" roses in the medians. The funds that the community has shared with VAF have supported these projects along the Avenue. Through the efforts of VAF, the surrounding landscape has been preserved and donors and volunteers alike have acquired a sense of "ownership" of Victoria Avenue and a vested interest in its preservation.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### Care of Victoria Avenue

On November 19, 2019, City Council approved the revised Victoria Avenue Policy for Preservation, Design, and Development as an amendment to the 2003 Victoria Avenue Ad Hoc Committee Policy related to tree species selection, landscaping, irrigation, trails, roadway maintenance, development standards, right of way dedications, and other improvements in conjunction with new development.

On January 25, 2022, City Council approved the Public Service Agreement with Victoria Avenue Forever, for volunteer services along Victoria Avenue, between La Sierra and Myrtle Avenues, to include planting trees, roses, and other ornamental plants, community cleanup and additional special events and to provide garden care.

The Public Works Department, in partnership with Victoria Avenue Forever, is responsible for the maintenance of Victoria Avenue. It is the objective of the City of Riverside to continue to preserve the cultural heritage of Victoria Avenue with the unwavering support of VAF. To do so, the Public Works Department currently has an annual budget of approximately \$650,000 that funds monthly landscape maintenance, citrus tree maintenance, propagation of "Ragged Robin" roses (as this variety is no longer available commercially), and water. This budget does not include the

maintenance of the approximately 8,000 trees and palm trees along the Avenue. In recent years, City Council has added additional funding from Measure Z in the amount of \$1 million annually to increase the trimming care of our canopy trees helping to reduce the citywide grid trimming cycle from an eight- to ten-year cycle to a four- to five-year grid trimming cycle. Additionally, from Measure Z City Council has added \$2 million annually to increase citywide palm trimming to a biennial cycle. This enhanced schedule has positively impacted the Avenue by decreasing debris that impacts walking trails and bike lanes.

Victoria Avenue is a popular area for walkers, bicyclists, and runners. This important historic site is subject to very heavy use and is affected by changing daily environmental conditions such as longer hotter summers. Years of drought, thefts and irrigation system vandalism have taken a toll on Victoria Avenue and improvements are needed above and beyond routine maintenance in order to begin restoring Victoria Avenue to its former glory. Recommended improvements include, but are not limited to:

- Irrigation system repairs and upgrades
- 3-inch layer of mulch in all medians
- Increase propagation of Ragged Robin roses
- Repair of chain link fence
- Artwork on utility cabinets (similar to recent Riverwalk pilot project)
- Repair of the asphalt walking path
- Additional drinking fountains
- Benches
- Educational kiosks

In working and meeting with VAF, a vision that has been brought forward is to add a layer of bark mulch throughout all the medians on the Avenue. This will help to decrease weed growth, resulting in reduced use of chemicals, and increasing the moisture held within the soil helping to decrease water usage. With the City's current partnership with Athens Services for Solid Waste services, Athens Services will provide free quality bark mulch and the current landscape contractor for the Avenue will install the bark mulch throughout all the medians at no additional cost. This will help the City meet SB 1383 procurement requirements. Additionally, this will result in savings to the City of approximately \$2 million to purchase mulch.

#### 5-Year Plan to Restore the Glory of Victoria Avenue

Due to the large scale of Victoria Avenue, enhancing the entire Avenue is a lengthy and costly endeavor. Staff is proposing the following 5-Year Victoria Avenue Funding Plan (Table 1) to provide a road map and spending plan.

Year 1 focuses on infrastructure by repairing an irrigation system that is old and has suffered significant vandalism over the years. Consistent and reliable watering will improve the overall health of Victoria Avenue's landscaping and trees. Applying bark mulch to the center medians will help to retain moisture and reduce irrigation in the long-term.

Work in Years 2-5 is contingent upon funding availability, and funds will be requested through the budget process. Public Works staff will also seek grant opportunities.

Below are estimated costs for the 5-Year Plan.

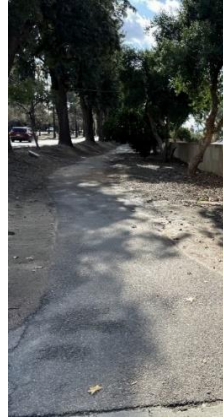
**Table 1 – 5-Year Victoria Avenue Funding Plan**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                             | <b>Estimated Cost</b> |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1           | Repairs/Upgrades to 38,509 linear feet of irrigation                                                                           | \$775,000             |
|             | Installation of bark mulch over 1,024,425 square feet of center medians                                                        | \$0                   |
|             | <b>Year 1 Total</b>                                                                                                            | <b>\$775,000</b>      |
| 2           | Increase propagation and planting of 15,000 Ragged Robin roses (3-feet on center)                                              | \$180,000             |
|             | Work with local artist(s) to design artwork for select utility cabinets (similar to recent pilot project in Riverwalk)         | \$25,000              |
|             | Repair chain link fence along City-maintained orange grove between Mary St. and Washington St.                                 | \$30,000              |
|             | Plant trees in vacant locations                                                                                                | \$25,000              |
|             | Add educational kiosk, bench, drinking fountain to establish trailhead near walking path entry at Victoria Presbyterian Church | \$20,000              |
|             | <b>Year 2 Total</b>                                                                                                            | <b>\$280,000</b>      |
| 3           | ADA and Pet accessible drinking fountains placed along walkway                                                                 | \$50,000              |
|             | Additional benches with concrete pads                                                                                          | \$6,000               |
|             | Additional education kiosks                                                                                                    | \$20,000              |
|             | <b>Year 3 Total</b>                                                                                                            | <b>\$76,000</b>       |
| 4           | Phase 1 walking trail renovations                                                                                              | \$812,000             |
|             | <b>Year 4 Total</b>                                                                                                            | <b>\$812,000</b>      |
| 5           | Phase 2 walking trail renovations                                                                                              | \$840,000             |
|             | <b>Year 5 Total</b>                                                                                                            | <b>\$840,000</b>      |

Building upon a successful and long-standing collaborative partnership, VAF and City staff have focused on the continued enhancement of Victoria Avenue through the years. As an example of a recent endeavor, a member of VAF and licensed landscape contractor, graciously donated and installed an irrigation controller on the Avenue between Central and Arlington Avenues for the purpose of conducting a one-year pilot program to test a new controller. The controller is a weather-based system with cellular capabilities that allows for real-time alerts and programming to be controlled from a smart phone. If the pilot program is successful, all 18 controllers along Victoria Avenue could be upgraded.

Additionally, the City and VAF work together to propagate Ragged Robin roses. Together the two partners work with a local nursery for rose propagation with an annual investment from the City of \$10,000 and funds raised by VAF. Recently, VAF raised \$20,000 to invest in this work. The proposed Year 2 investment in rose propagation will increase the volume of roses grown by the nursery and reduce the amount of time needed to replace 15,000 missing roses.

The 5-year plan proposes to establish a trailhead at the walking trail entry near Victoria Presbyterian Church, with a bench, drinking fountain, and informational kiosk. This is a popular trail access point with nearby on-street parking. The following are photos of the current condition of the Victoria Avenue orange grove fence and the proposed trailhead area.



### Next Steps

Following the Committee meeting and with the Committee's support, staff will advance this item to City Council for consideration of the 5-Year Plan.

Should City Council approve the Plan, staff will prepare bid documents for irrigation upgrades and work with Purchasing to solicit bids. A request for bid award/contract approval for irrigation upgrades will be presented to City Council for consideration, together with a request for a supplemental appropriation from undesignated General Fund Infrastructure Reserves to Public Works Landscape Maintenance accounts.

Public Works Department and Finance Department staff will research funding for future years of this plan including grant opportunities.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This item contributes to **Strategic Priority 4 – Environmental Stewardship** and **Goal 4.5 –** Maintain and conserve 30% of Riverside's natural lands in green space including, but not limited to, agricultural lands and urban forests to protect and restore Riverside's rich biodiversity and accelerate the natural removal of carbon, furthering our community's climate resilience.

This item aligns with each of the five Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. **Community Trust** – Management of Victoria Avenue and working with Victoria Avenue Forever, benefits all city residents, businesses, and visitors by helping to provide a story of the City's rich and unique history along with a relaxing environment for all the public to enjoy by driving, walking, jogging, or bicycling.
2. **Equity** – Approval of this action benefits all who live near or travel through the Avenue.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – Maintaining City owned historical sites and their infrastructure supports Public Works' efforts to minimize inefficiencies and maximize reliability.
4. **Innovation** – By maintaining the Avenue and looking for additional methods of funding, such as grants to improve the appearance and maintain the rich and unique history of the Avenue, the Public Works Department is committed to using the best possible resources

available in today's ever-changing markets.

5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – The Avenue is full of trees and green spaces that will be available and preserved for future generations to enjoy. By working with VAF and researching and identifying funding sources that will improve methods in the industry that will better enhance the long-term care of our historic Avenue, provides proof that the City of Riverside and the Public Works Department, are committed to sustainability and resiliency by maintaining and supporting our valuable historic Avenue on a continuous basis, helping to improve the environment and the quality of life for our community.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

The total fiscal impact of Year 1 of the 5-Year Victoria Avenue Funding Plan as displayed in Table 1 is \$775,000. Upon Council approval, a supplemental appropriation of \$775,000 will be recorded from undesignated General Fund Infrastructure Reserves to Public Works Landscape Maintenance account 4110110-421203.

Public Works Department and Finance Department staff will research funding for future years of this plan including grant opportunities.

|                        |                                                                    |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Prepared by:           | Robert Filiar, Urban Forestry Manager                              |
| Approved by:           | Gilbert Hernandez, Public Works Director                           |
| Certified as to        |                                                                    |
| availability of funds: | Kristie Thomas, Finance Director/Assistant Chief Financial Officer |
| Approved by:           | Kris Martinez, Assistant City Manager                              |
| Approved as to form:   | Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney                                   |

### **Attachments:**

1. Victoria Avenue Policy for Preservation, Design, and Development
2. Victoria Avenue Forever Public Service Agreement
3. Presentation