



Caring for Our Coast

♦ ♦ ♦  
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November 18, 2021

TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair  
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell  
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl  
Supervisor Janice Hahn  
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: Gary Jones, Director

**REPORT BACK ON FRIENDLY AMENDMENT TO MOTION: RETURNING WATER PROGRAM PERSONNEL TO THE DEPARTMENT OF BEACHES AND HARBORS AND EXPANDING THE PROGRAM TO SERVE YOUTH WITHIN THE SYSTEMS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES AND THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT (ITEM NO. 20, AGENDA OF FEBRUARY 23, 2021)**

On February 23, 2021, the Board of Supervisors (Board) approved a motion authorizing the Department of Beaches and Harbors (DBH) to employ lifeguard personnel for the sole purpose of operation and management of the Water Awareness, Training, Education and Recreation (WATER) Program. The WATER Program, which was developed by DBH in 1986, introduces youth throughout Los Angeles County to the ocean environment by teaching ocean safety skills through recreational water activities like kayaking, ocean/marina paddling, and sailing. After DBH's Lifeguard Division was transferred to the Fire Department in 1994, DBH operated the program by hiring Fire Department Ocean Lifeguard personnel to serve as the program administrator and as youth instructors, while reimbursing the Fire Department for these program staffing hours through a departmental service order. With returned WATER lifeguard positions back in-house, DBH will be better positioned to manage and operate an expanded WATER Program, increasing the current number and type of programs and adding participant capacity to include youth involved in the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department (Probation) systems.

A friendly amendment to the motion by the Board Chair, Supervisor Solis, directed DBH, in collaboration with the Chief Executive Office (CEO) and the Departments of Parks and

Recreation (DPR), Human Resources (DHR), Public Works (DPW), and Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS), to convene in a working group and report back in 270 days on developing educational curriculum and job-training programs connected to the ocean and other sources and uses of water and their management, including:

- A. Building off of existing material, including DBH's *Can the Trash!* activities guide and video, develop an educational curriculum geared toward youth of all ages that promotes a greater understanding of and exposure to watershed education, including water quality and quantity, green infrastructure, and stormwater connections to the rivers and the ocean, as well as the types of skills necessary for career opportunities connected to water;
- B. Developing a job training program for jobs connected to water and identifying potential job placement opportunities;
- C. Exploring potential partnerships and collaborations with youth development programs, such as the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, the San Gabriel Valley Corps, the Long Beach Job Corps, and the like, as well as with non-profit organizations and educational institutions working and researching in the field of water;
- D. Creating opportunities for Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation youth to participate in WATER programming;
- E. Identifying pipelines into County career pathways;
- F. Identifying potential funding opportunities, including through Measures W, H, A, and M (WHAM) and Measure J, to develop the educational material, job training programs and expanded WATER programming; and
- G. Targeting in the above initiatives particularly urban core areas and low-income and youth of color.

As instructed by the Board Chair, DBH convened a working group that consisted of representatives from the aforementioned departments and non-profit organizations with programs in youth development and water education. The attachment reports on the process for collaborating with the working group, the nature of collaborative opportunities, potential outcomes and next steps in achieving the broad scope of objectives set forth in the friendly amendment.

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Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (424) 526-7771 or [GJones@bh.lacounty.gov](mailto:GJones@bh.lacounty.gov). Alternatively, your staff should feel free to reach out to Deputy Director Carol Baker at (424) 526-7774 or [CBaker@bh.lacounty.gov](mailto:CBaker@bh.lacounty.gov).

GJ:CB:se

Attachment

c: Marina Board Deputies  
Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
Chief Executive Officer  
Parks and Recreation  
Human Resources  
Public Works  
Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services

REPORT BACK ON FRIENDLY AMENDMENT TO MOTION  
ITEM NO. 20, AGENDA OF FEBRUARY 23, 2021

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## **BACKGROUND ON WATER PROGRAM**

The Water Awareness, Training, Education and Recreation (WATER) Program introduces youth throughout Los Angeles County to the ocean environment by teaching ocean safety skills through recreational water activities like kayaking, ocean/marina paddling, and sailing. WATER was created in 1986 within the Department of Beaches and Harbors (DBH) by the late Assistant Chief Lifeguard Russell Walker in an effort to introduce diverse populations to the ocean environment, with the ultimate goal of creating a more diverse pool of candidates for the Ocean Lifeguard position. Following the transfer of the Lifeguard Division to the Fire Department, DBH focused the program on developing ocean safety skills in youth ages 5-17 across Los Angeles County, with an intentional outreach to youth with special needs such as blindness, mobility issues and learning disabilities, as well as youth in underserved communities experiencing the beach for the first time. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the program served up to 6,000 youth per year, mostly through Ocean Safety Days with classroom groups on field trips during the school year. In the past three years, WATER has added offerings to include sailing camps for individual youth ages 11-17 and District Days in the Marina (District Days), a weekend Ocean Safety Day program for youth-serving organizations designated by each Board Office.

While Ocean Safety Days were suspended for most of 2020 due to the pandemic, sailing camps continued, with health protocols, during all school breaks and throughout the virtual school year in the form of afternoon sessions. These afternoon sailing sessions offered youth an opportunity for outdoor recreation after their online learning. Ocean Safety Day school field trips have resumed this academic school year. Sailing camps have returned to normal operations with a successful 2021 summer season. Participant groups remain limited as a precaution.

The renamed “Russell Walker WATER Program” is a high priority for DBH as part of its mission to promote quality of life by offering ocean safety education and recreation to a variety of youth living throughout the region. DBH’s long-term aspirations for the program include doubling the size of the program to operate at two different beach locations per day, increasing the number of District Days offered, and expanding instruction to system-involved youth from DCFS and Probation. Recognizing that expanding the program to reach underserved youth populations would require a greater level of lifeguard and administrative support, the Board authorized DBH to bring lifeguard personnel back in-house with increased staff resources and, with Chair Solis’ amendment, directed DBH to report back on additional potential options to enhance educational and job-related opportunities related to water and the ocean as part of the program.

## **WORKING GROUP PROCESS**

As directed by the Board on February 23, 2021, DBH convened the working group in an initial meeting attended by assigned representatives from the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), Chief Executive Office (CEO), Department of Human Resources

(DHR), Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services Department (WDACS). This first meeting focused on familiarizing the working group with the WATER Program and having a round table briefing from each department on relevant functions and any existing programs related to the objectives of Chair Solis' amendment. Working group members were asked to complete a questionnaire about their existing youth educational programs, job-training and job-placement opportunities, existing partnerships with youth development organizations, potential funding sources, and other available resources that may be useful in accomplishing the prescribed objectives. The responses served as a starting point for identifying possible areas of collaboration and potential opportunities for the development of new programs.

Following additional discussions and information sharing, the working group assessed opportunities within existing programs, access paths to youth groups that could participate in WATER, and work already underway that aligned with the amendment's objectives. More targeted meetings were conducted with individual staff members from the working group's departments and teams across various sections and facilities with related programming and functions. Other organizations focused on youth and in areas of conservation were also engaged.

The working group aimed to identify potential intersection points in the areas of water education, WATER programming, youth workforce development, and available resources that could be leveraged by forming partnerships to expand WATER program offerings. DBH then led a series of smaller discussions exploring and assessing those connections with specific departments and organizations, as described below. The summaries of each meeting session relay potential opportunities and collaborative efforts that could advance the objectives of the friendly amendment.

- **DPR's East Agency Regional Director and Assistant Regional Director, Regional Aquatics Pool Supervisors in the East and North Agencies, and on-site visits with the Sustainability Planning team at Obregon Park and Superintendents of the Whittier Narrows and Stoneview Nature Centers.** DPR serves a wide range of youth groups from across the County, potentially providing various engagement opportunities in WATER programming and a bridge to career exposure and job training opportunities. For example, teens in the Our SPOT Program, as well as junior lake and pool lifeguard participants, may benefit from the personal development, skill building and job-exposure opportunities offered through WATER programming. For youth enrolled in ESTEAM Camps, an Ocean Safety Day could boost their Oceans Week curriculum. Additionally, parks and nature centers could be ideal learning hubs for use in educating other young people about their community's connection to the ocean, particularly Obregon Park for its green park model; Whittier Narrows Nature Center where the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel rivers converge; and Stoneview Nature Center with its proximity to the ocean and easily accessible Park to Playa Trail.

- **WDACS team administering the Youth@Work and Countywide Youth Bridges (CYBP) Programs.** Youth participants of the WATER Program are typically too young to enter the full-time workforce and limited in qualifications for most County positions. WDACS' Youth@Work program targets participants as young as 14, preparing school-aged youth to enter the workforce. Through Youth@Work, youth ages 14-24 are provided personal enrichment training and paid work experience, creating opportunity for temporary and seasonal employment suitable for youth served through WATER in areas such as: nature centers and at lakes, pools, parks, and beaches, as well as at non-profit community-based organizations and the private sector. For example, one prospective opportunity in the private sector is with the Marina del Rey WaterBus, a summer water taxi service that needs to fill ticketing and dock attendant positions each season; this could lead to youth choosing to become vessel captains. Through WATER, youth can be recruited and enrolled into Youth@Work to provide support for County programs and facilities by leading educational and recreational activities, serving as ambassadors, assisting in grounds maintenance using new water conservation techniques, conducting outreach, or other potential activities while earning \$15 an hour in subsidized wages. DBH may provide a number of these opportunities when operations return to pre-pandemic levels.

For transitional aged youth, the CYBP is the next steppingstone for County employment. More progress is needed in identifying or creating County positions with water-related functions that older youth can participate in. For example, the Department of Public Health conducts ocean water sampling related to water quality, but that work is performed by specialized staff with college degrees, and there are no current Youth Worker positions in the water testing unit that might provide for exposure to this type of work experience. Similarly, most of DPW's functions in the various areas of water management exist within engineering positions with internships geared towards junior- and senior-level college students.

Young adults ages 18-24 will also have additional opportunities to connect with employer partners in relevant sectors for training, hiring, job readiness, and career exploration intel to support WATER curricula enhancement, where appropriate.

- **Chief Sustainability Office members on the WHAM committee.** WHAM refers to the following voter-approved funding measures:
  - “Measure W” to support safe, clean water;
  - “Measure H” to combat homelessness;
  - “Measure A” to support safe parks and beaches; and
  - “Measure M” to support transit infrastructure.

The WHAM Committee is looking into areas of collaboration within the independent funding measures with a focus on workforce development targeting priority populations, which are yet to be determined. While most of the potential target populations are of adult age, transitional-aged youth may be included within the priority populations. The workforce effort is in its early stages, which may allow for flexibility to work with DBH and other interested partners on program design.

Currently, the WHAM workforce effort is focused on groundskeeping operations and maintenance jobs, positions common in a number of County departments. Groundskeeping work may include sustainable stormwater management and water conservation measures, a potential water nexus that could align with the objectives of a further expansion of the WATER program.

- **DPW's Environmental Outreach Section and representatives from the Safe Clean Water Program.** DPW administers educational offerings that parallel DBH's environmental and educational outreach efforts to connect youth to the ocean through WATER programming and its *Can the Trash!* environmental messaging campaign and Clean Beach Poster Contest. DPW's Environmental Defenders program, which is geared towards students in grades K-5, provides schools with customized presentations that engage students with contemporary songs conveying environmental messages. The *Can the Trash!* campaign teaches elementary school students how ocean pollution begins at home through a colorful activity guide and animated video with a catchy song, then invites 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders to enter the Clean Beach Poster Contest by drawing a picture with an environmental message.

DPW and DBH currently partner to support their respective elementary-school educational programs by cross promoting the Environmental Defenders and *Can the Trash!* on their respective platforms. The Environmental Defenders program promotes the *Can the Trash!* Clean Beach Poster Contest through email blasts sent to teachers and school administrators and provides a link about the poster contest through its Environmental Defenders website, while the *Can the Trash!* website features a link to the Environmental Defenders website under the resource section for parents and teachers. This partnership can be built upon by combining outreach efforts to schools in high-need areas. Outreach can focus on highlighting for schools the complementary nature of these programs to enhance the curriculum with diverse components, as well as engaging those schools in WATER's Ocean Safety Days.

For older students in grades 6-12, DPW's Generation Earth program emphasizes environmental service learning via teacher workshops. This program is transitioning to an environmental youth summit format where schools have the opportunity to present their environmental service projects to students from other schools. DBH and DPW will continue to explore how to possibly coordinate a WATER Program offering to participating schools.

DPW's Safe Clean Water Program (Measure W, which is part of WHAM) is in the early planning stages of its three educational programs: public education and engagement; local workforce job training; and school education and curriculum development. A strategic consultant is being secured to advance program-specific workforce needs, while Watershed Coordinators will support the efforts of developing educational programs. DPW will share with these teams the WATER friendly amendment objectives to enable the development of potentially similar



educational material(s) to proceed with this broader context in mind for future planning and expansion.

- **Heal the Bay’s Operations Director, Aquarium Education Manager, Water Quality Scientist, and Coastal and Marine Scientist.** Heal the Bay is a leading environmental non-profit organization that uses science, education, community action and advocacy to promote clean coastal waters and watersheds in the Greater Los Angeles region. Heal the Bay may offer several opportunities to connect youth with water education and job training, including:

- Volunteer and internship opportunities at its aquarium for youth as young as 14 years of age;
- School field trips and classroom speaker programs;
- Youth angler outreach, community science, and beach and river report card monitoring programs; and
- Job shadowing opportunities.

Heal the Bay was a key partner in the curriculum development of DBH’s *Can the Trash!* program. With the appropriate level of funding, Heal the Bay can serve as an expert resource and partner for the development of water-related curriculum for older youth.

- **CEO’s Economic Development Division.** Similar to the CYBP, the CEO’s Economic Development Division manages the Preparing Los Angeles for County Employment (PLACE) Program, which provides paths into County employment. Focused on individuals with barriers to employment, PLACE can help train and place transitional-aged youth into entry-level County positions, including young people who’ve participated in the expanded WATER Program. A benefit of PLACE is its existing partnership with the California Conservation Corps (Conservation Corps), an organization with a focus on job training and conservation serving youth ages 14-24. PLACE has recruited participants from the Conservation Corps to begin County careers at various departments, including as Grounds Maintenance Workers at DPR. During the busy summer months, DBH has also employed a number of as-needed beach maintenance personnel through PLACE, but hasn’t focused on youth. In partnership with local chapters of the Conservation Corps, the PLACE Program may provide a channel of recruitment for those temporary beach maintenance positions, which have the potential to transition into permanent placement.

- **Administrators from all the local chapters of Conservation Corps (San Gabriel Valley, Los Angeles and Long Beach).** As mentioned above, the Conservation Corps creates development opportunities for disadvantaged youth by offering job skills training through conservation work and educational enrichment. Its San Gabriel Valley chapter operates two YouthBuild Charter School sites in El Monte and Pomona. Coordinating an Ocean Safety Day into the school curriculum may provide an enhanced educational experience for students in these conservation project-based learning sites. The Los Angeles and Long Beach chapters conduct afterschool programs at 21 LAUSD school sites. The *Can*

*the Trash!* curriculum is a fun and easy educational activity ideal for program leaders at those sites to teach about watershed and stormwater connections while providing students an opportunity to enter the Clean Beach Poster Contest.

- **Department of Human Resources.** DHR manages several countywide pipeline programs including Countywide Youth Bridges, Student Worker and Career Development Intern Programs that assist youth with obtaining access to County training and employment opportunities. Another such classification that has been reviewed and considered by DBH and DHR includes the Recreation Services Leader (RSL) position that may be updated to include selection requirements pertaining to the completion of the WATER Program. DBH and DHR will review these programs and explore other possible pathways to determine whether selection requirements can be updated to specifically target the WATER program requirements. Through expanded programming, WATER anticipates reaching a sizeable number of transitional-aged youth set to enter the workforce. The examinations would aim to extend employment opportunities within DBH operations to previous WATER Program participants. These positions may be placed within the Recreation and Boating Sections, including the department-managed Anchorage 47, and within the WATER Program. An example of a selection requirement could be the completion of an intermediate or advanced sailing camp session, which would provide the basic boating knowledge helpful for a Student Worker or RSL within the Boating Section to know.
- **Academia Avance Charter School.** Although not formally part of the working group, Academia Avance Charter School (Academia Avance), located in Highland Park, has a proposed program that parallels the objectives of Chair Solis' amendment. DBH recently began collaborating with Academia Avance on potential sailing instruction and other WATER activities for its students as part of a semester-long academic course in the history, geography, and economy of the LA County coast and Marina del Rey Harbor.

## **POTENTIAL OUTCOMES**

As outlined above, the working group identified a range of possible actions and potential collaborations that support the broad scope of objectives set forth in the friendly amendment. Potential undertakings with varying levels of feasibility for implementation are listed below. These include immediate and future collaborations, program enhancements, and other potential opportunities identified through the process. Given that the working group focused on high-need populations, all the potential opportunities listed below would target youth in greatest need, including system-involved youth, youth in low-income and urban core areas, and youth of color. The notations in parentheses refer to the applicable objective(s) of the friendly amendment each listed opportunity aims to achieve.

*Ready to implement with minimal resources:*

- Extending WATER Program lifeguards to serve as guest speakers and provide ocean safety demonstrations at DPR's annual Our SPOT Teen Program summit. (B,D,G)
- On an initial pilot basis, engaging teens from the First Supervisorial District in San Angelo Park's Our SPOT Teen Program with an Ocean Safety Day as part of the program's conservation curriculum or with a water-related service project. The pilot phase would continue to engage one program location in each of the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Supervisorial Districts. (A,D,G)
- Collaboration with the local Conservation Corps to adopt the *Can the Trash!* curriculum and activity in their after-school programs at 21 LAUSD school sites. (A,C,G)
- Partnership with DPW to cross promote and link the WATER and Generation Earth educational programs, and to further cross promote *Can the Trash!* and Environmental Defenders, to schools currently served by both departments' programs. DBH and DPW will continue to coordinate and build strategy to focus outreach efforts of all programs to additional schools located in urban core and low-income areas. (A,G)

*Potential with further development:*

- Student Worker and recurrent RSL exams targeted toward former WATER participants to fill DBH positions within its Recreation and Boating Sections, including the department-managed Anchorage 47, and within the WATER Program. (B,D,E,G)
- Recruitment of teen-aged youth for training and employment through WDACS' Youth@Work program to fill seasonal WaterBus ticketing and dock attendant positions in Marina del Rey. (B,G)
- Recruitment of Conservation Corps members to fill temporary beach maintenance positions as needed during the summer season through the PLACE program. (B,E,G)
- Connecting youth with educational and employment opportunities available through Heal the Bay's various water-monitoring, outreach, and aquarium programs. (B,C,G)
- Coordination of WATER curriculum in a semester-long academic course for Academia Avance Charter School.

*Potential with further development and funding:*

- WATER programming for Our SPOT Program participants in other program locations that include youth populations targeted in this motion. Additional funding would be required to sustain consistent and long-term engagement of teens in this program.
- Development of a service project with the San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps Youthbuild Charter School that integrates an Ocean Safety Day program with engagement from science teachers for curriculum planning. This partnership may require additional funding depending on the desired number of programs per school year. (A,C,G)
- Development of water education programming similar in curriculum to the former Water Squad Investigators Program. In this now-discontinued program, youth learned about ground water with visits to the Whittier Narrows Nature Center, Whittier Narrows Water Reclamation Plant, and Santa Fe Dam. Funding for staffing, programming components, and transportation would allow the program to return with the enhanced experience of an Ocean Safety Day, providing for a comprehensive curriculum on the water-cycle and watershed connections to rivers and to the ocean. (B,D,G)
- Partnership with Heal the Bay for development of educational materials focused on watersheds, stormwater, and connections to the ocean that are geared toward students in middle and high school. (A,C,)

In addition, DBH intends to continue to seek collaborations with other relevant organizations and agencies to enrich extended WATER programming. In particular with the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and the U.S. Coast Guard. UCLA's Zodiac vessel which is part of its Marine Operations Program is docked in Marina del Rey. UCLA could potentially conduct in-depth demonstrations of instruments onboard the Zodiac and provide exposure of educational paths for youth interested in ocean studies. Also located in Marina del Rey, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary station may provide opportunities for youth to learn about volunteer and paid job prospects in this military branch.

**NEXT STEPS**

Engagement of the work group assembled to respond to the friendly amendment helped identify a network of potential resources that could be leveraged to advance the motion's objectives as well as improve current youth-oriented services. Next steps will focus on the readily implementable activities, followed by further exploration of opportunities requiring more planning and additional resources, largely related to transportation and funding.

As with many initiatives geared toward youth, especially those from under-served urban communities, providing transportation is a significant challenge to offering Ocean Safety Days, water-related educational and employment opportunities along the coast, and other potential offerings in an expanded WATER Program. Connecting youth to water-related activities and the ocean often requires that they travel far outside their neighborhoods, whether individually or in groups, and frequently in significant traffic that contributes to long drive times. As such, viable transportation options will greatly determine the feasibility and success of expanded WATER Program components, as much as or possibly even more than funding. While no immediate funding was identified for the potential opportunities described above, DBH intends to continue to collaborate with working group participants to pursue funding from entities, such as the Dodgers and Kellogg Foundations, and from state agencies, such as the California Coastal Commission, which provides Whale Tail grants.

The Board's support for an expanded WATER Program will greatly increase opportunities for young people to access the water and ocean environment, which in and of itself can create awareness in youth about other water-related opportunities. DBH looks forward to continued collaboration with working group members to further advance the motion's objectives.