

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN AND
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Next Steps in Returning Bruce’s Beach to its Rightful Owners

On April 20, 2021, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) voted to formulate a plan to return the land commonly referred to as “Bruce’s Beach” to its rightful owners - the descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce. Peck’s Manhattan Beach Tract Block 5, otherwise known as “Bruce’s Beach,” is currently owned by Los Angeles County (County) and is the site of the County Lifeguard Administration Building. But in the early 1900s, two of the parcels in Block 5 were owned by Willa and Charles Bruce who operated a successful seaside resort that welcomed Black beachgoers from all over Los Angeles. In 1924, the Manhattan Beach City Council voted to condemn Bruce’s Beach and the surrounding land through eminent domain under the ostensible purpose of building a park, but it is well-documented that this move was a racially motivated attempt to drive out the successful Black business and its patrons. The land was condemned in 1929, the resort was demolished, and the Bruces left Manhattan Beach.

Through a series of land transfers between the City, the State, and the County, Bruce’s Beach came under County ownership in 1995. This puts Los Angeles County in the unique position to right this historic wrong by returning the land to the living

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descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce, from whom it never should have been taken. Since this is the first time that a government is attempting to return land that was unjustly taken from African Americans, there are a lot of details that need to be worked out. Therefore, on April 20th, the Board affirmed their intention to return the land and asked for a detailed plan with the next steps.

On June 30th, the Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Director of Racial Equity released a report (“Report Back on Returning Bruce’s Beach to its Rightful Owners”) with a plan to return the land to the Bruce family. The report affirms that returning the land is in the public interest and outlines a clear pathway forward. It details the next steps needed for land assessment, property tax evaluation, continued County occupancy of the site and/or relocation, mitigating the tax burden on the Bruce family, and appropriate safeguards to ensure that the property is transferred to the legal heirs. It is time to move forward with the next steps outlined in the report while we wait for the State to pass SB 796, which will remove the restrictions placed on the land and allow the County to return Bruce’s Beach to its rightful owners.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE direct the Chief Executive Office’s Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative, in collaboration with County Counsel, the Tax Collector/Public Administrator, Fire Department, and all other relevant departments to implement the plan set forth in the “Report Back on Returning Bruce’s Beach to its Rightful Owners” in order to prepare to return Bruce’s Beach to the legal heirs of Willa and Charles Bruce. These steps should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Work with relevant County departments to conduct any necessary land assessments, appraisals, and analyses needed for transfer of the property;
2. Evaluate and propose options, including the impact upon the legal heirs, to address property tax issues associated with the transfer of the property; and

3. Work with the Fire Department to complete a full operational assessment and identify strategies to mitigate operational impacts upon the County and Fire resulting from the transfer of property.

WE, FURTHER MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS direct County Counsel, in collaboration with the ARDI Initiative and relevant departments, to retain a third-party law firm to conduct a thorough and transparent legal heir determination process.

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