

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN AND
HOLLY MITCHELL

October 5, 2021

Initiate Process to Return Bruce’s Beach to the Bruce Family

On September 30, Governor Gavin Newsom signed SB 796 into law at the site that was once known as “Bruce’s Beach,” paving the way for Los Angeles County (County) to move forward with returning the land that was taken in an act of racism from Willa and Charles Bruce in the 1920s and deprived the public of equal access to the beach.

Senator Steven Bradford introduced SB 796, “Returning Bruce’s Beach to its Rightful Owners,” to eliminate the statutory restrictions previously placed on the land that prohibited the County from transferring the land back to the legal heirs of Willa and Charles Bruce. SB 796 passed through the California State legislature with unanimous bipartisan support, reaching the Governor’s desk on September 17, 2021. As an urgency bill, SB 796 takes effect immediately upon being signed by the Governor, giving the State Department of Parks and Recreation until December 31st to amend the property deed and remove the restrictions placed on Bruce’s Beach. Once the deed is amended, the County will have the authority to transfer the land.

Now that Governor Newsom has signed SB 796 and thus directed the State to

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remove the statutory restrictions prohibiting transfer, it is time for the County to formally proceed with plans to return the land. The transfer must be done in a way that takes into consideration the various needs, concerns, and capacity of the Bruce family and the County. Formal steps need to begin to make sure that the transfer is done in an equitable and just manner and does not unintentionally place undue burdens on the Bruce family. Further, the July motion called for appropriate safeguards to ensure that the property is transferred to the legal heirs of the Bruce family.

Los Angeles County has the unique opportunity to rectify the historic injustice that was done to the Bruce family by returning the land to the legal heirs of Charles and Willa Bruce, from whom it was taken in an act motivated by racism and a desire to drive out a successful Black business and its patrons. Now that SB 796 has passed and removed barriers to returning the land, it is time for the County to move forward with this process.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office's Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative and County Counsel to:

1. Coordinate with the State Department of Parks and Recreation to receive the executed amendment to the deed that transferred the property from the State to the County to remove Bruce's Beach from the restrictions previously imposed by the State, consistent with SB 796;
2. Prepare and present to the Board of Supervisors the resolution of acceptance for the amended deed, approved as to form by County Counsel, upon receipt of the amended deed executed by the State; and
3. Pursue an expeditious process in determining legal heirship, in cooperation with the Treasurer and Tax Collector's Public Administrator, in order to identify and vet potential claimants and to report back when the vetting process is concluded.

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