

Creating a New Park Typology for Urban Natureways in Los Angeles County

Los Angeles County is home to a diverse and expansive park system that includes renowned arboretums and botanical gardens, offering exceptional biodiversity, educational opportunities, and immersive natural experiences. While the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) operates and maintains parks across the County, in both local and regional contexts, our premier arboreta and botanical gardens are primarily located in affluent communities, limiting routine access for the millions of County residents who live in underserved communities.

While the County is at the forefront of expanding access to these spaces, there is a compelling opportunity to transform underutilized, single-use infrastructure, especially flood control channels and utility corridors, into vibrant, multi-benefit greenway corridors. These “Urban Natureways” would be a new parkland classification in the County’s General Plan that would be defined as regional linear parks that repurpose existing public infrastructure, such as flood control channels and utility corridors, into multifunctional greenways. Urban Natureways offer a chance to re-envision these spaces that are already

MOTION

Solis	_____
Mitchell	_____
Horvath	_____
Hahn	_____
Barger	_____

publicly owned as inclusive public assets, opening access to nature, fostering economic opportunities, and beginning to heal the physical and social divides imposed by past infrastructure decisions. They also provide recreation, active transportation, and habitat restoration while strengthening ecological connectivity, climate resilience, and social equity.

By linking communities across jurisdictions, Urban Natureways function as regional public assets that transform single-use infrastructure into vibrant spaces of environmental, cultural, and economic significance and can bring the benefits of arboretums, botanical gardens, and nature-forward infrastructure directly into the communities that have been most impacted by environmental injustice and disinvestment. This work also presents a pathway to expand green jobs and workforce training through partnerships with local Conservation Corps, helping to build career pipelines for young people and residents from historically underserved communities. To unlock this potential, the County must establish a visionary, coordinated framework that streamlines permitting, aligns interagency roles, enables community-led greening, and accelerates the conversion of aging infrastructure into inclusive, resilient public spaces for generations to come.

For decades, community-based and nonprofit organizations across Los Angeles County have led efforts to reimagine rivers, flood control channels, and utility corridors as public greenways—investing significant grant funding, volunteer time, and expertise to restore habitat, improve access, and advocate for a more just, connected system of publicly owned infrastructure. Despite their tireless work amid regulatory barriers and fragmented planning, many communities still await the transformative change promised by numerous ambitious plans along corridors like the Compton Creek, Emerald Necklace, Lower LA River, and Pacoima Wash. While planning has often outpaced implementation,

a new generation of community-based organizations, such as ActiveSGV, local Conservation Corps, Nature for All, Pacoima Beautiful, and Willowbrook Inclusion Network, are advancing this work with strong community ties and innovative stewardship, yet they face many of the same institutional challenges as their predecessors.

A nationally recognized example of this approach is the Atlanta BeltLine, a 22-mile repurposed rail corridor that serves nearly 2 million trail users annually and links 45 neighborhoods through parks, trails, transit, and ecological restoration. A key feature of the BeltLine is the Atlanta BeltLine Arboretum, managed by Trees Atlanta, which includes 85 acres of cultivated and natural landscapes. The arboretum serves as a component of Atlanta's urban forest, acts as an ecological corridor, a place for education, community science, scientific research, and a learning landscape. The trees and plants in the arboretum enhance the trail experience with beauty and health benefits of nature in the city and demonstrate how urban ecology can reconnect fragmented communities.

The BeltLine is not only notable for its environmental transformation, but it also serves as a platform for inclusive economic activation. Small business kiosks, mobile vendors, pop-up markets, public art, and community events animate the corridor and provide opportunities for workforce development, social enterprise, and local entrepreneurship.

The County is uniquely poised to seize a transformative opportunity to reimagine its flood control and utility corridors as dynamic Urban Natureways that serve both people and the environment. The LA County Flood Control District includes 483 miles of open channels distributed across 86 incorporated cities and unincorporated communities. While their primary function is to reduce the risk to life and property, in certain cases, these underutilized spaces can also become living infrastructure, linking neighborhoods,

restoring ecosystems, and delivering environmental, health, and mobility benefits where they are needed most. By creating protected walking and cycling connections, Urban Natureways also support the County's Vision Zero goals, particularly in communities with high rates of traffic-related injuries and fatalities. This work also presents a pathway to expand green jobs and workforce training through partnerships with local community-based organizations, helping to build career pipelines for young people and residents from historically underserved communities. To unlock this potential, the County must establish a visionary, coordinated framework that streamlines permitting, aligns interagency roles, enables community-led greening, and accelerates the conversion of aging infrastructure into inclusive, resilient public spaces for generations to come.

Currently, governance over community-serving infrastructure is often multi-jurisdictional, making a comprehensive approach challenging and lacks a regional vision. The Los Angeles region is at a critical juncture as it continues to grapple with the overlapping challenges of climate change and social inequality. The Los Angeles County Park Needs Assessment Plus (PNA+) and Climate Vulnerability Assessment have made it clear: access to nature, safe public spaces, and ecological infrastructure must be prioritized, especially in neighborhoods most vulnerable to negative outcomes due to a combination of social, economic, and environmental factors.

By embedding biodiversity into the urban fabric and creating new spaces for ecological restoration, the County can restore natural systems and improve quality of life in the communities that need it most. Furthermore, California Proposition 4, approved by voters in 2024, was enacted in recognition of these urgent needs and presents a critical funding opportunity to help the County deliver equitable, climate-resilient public spaces in underserved communities.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors Direct the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), in coordination with the Department of Regional Planning (DRP), Department of Public Works (DPW), Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), Chief Sustainability Office (CSO) and other relevant agencies, to:

1. Amend the General Plan to establish a new Urban Natureways parkland classification within the Parks and Recreation Element that defines these spaces as corridor-based parks of regional significance focused on ecological restoration, biodiversity, climate resilience, connectivity to nearby parks and key community destinations, and equitable access to open space; recognizes their role in advancing regional ecological linkages and inclusive economic opportunity; and aligns with the goals and implementation framework of the Parks Needs Assessment and PNA+, as well as guidelines outlined by DPW in documents such as the LA River Master Plan and San Gabriel Valley Greenway Network Strategic Implementation Plan.

2. Adopt the Compton Creek, Emerald Necklace, Lower LA River, and Pacoima Wash as part of the County's Regional Trail Network in the General Plan and update associated figures as appropriate.

3. Designate DPR as the County lead, in coordination with DPW and others as necessary, to streamline the planning, permitting, implementation, and maintenance of Urban Natureways.

4. Direct DPW to create a streamlined permitting process that includes a list of pre-approved improvements for Urban Natureways.

5. Direct DEO, in coordination with DPR and other relevant agencies, to explore the creation of a Countywide Urban Natureway Marketplace initiative to advance place-based economic and workforce development along Urban Natureways, including marketplace

opportunities for small businesses and vendors within Urban Natureways and job creation and career pathway opportunities associated with Urban Natureway development and maintenance, while also assessing opportunities to generate resources for long-term maintenance, operations, and community stewardship.

6. Establish an interagency working group—including County departments, Metro, local jurisdictions, and community-based organizations—to advance Urban Natureways by strengthening connectivity to existing trails and bikeways, and by collaboratively planning, designing, and stewarding projects through inclusive partnerships, including with Conservation Corps, workforce development programs, and local stakeholders — while also exploring long-term, community-centered models for stewardship, governance, programming, and maintenance, and coordinating with housing agencies to assess and mitigate potential displacement pressures.

~~7. Instruct CEO LAIR, in coordination with relevant departments, to develop a Countywide legislative strategy to secure funding for Urban Natureways, including targeted engagement efforts such as site tours, briefings, and meetings with State Legislators to build support and demonstrate impact. This strategy should identify and pursue local, state, and federal funding opportunities, public-private partnerships and philanthropic investment to support both project implementation and long-term operations and maintenance.~~

8.7. Direct the Director of DPR to convene a briefing within 90 days with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and the Baldwin Hills and Urban Watersheds Conservancy on the Urban Natureways initiative and engage them as possible funders.

9- 8. Report back in 180 days with a comprehensive status update on implementation progress, including completed General Plan amendments, preliminary recommendations, interagency coordination efforts, and proposed next steps for piloting the LA County Urban Natureway Marketplace and accelerating the development of Urban Natureways.

I, FURTHER, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relation branch (LAIR), in coordination with relevant departments, to develop a Countywide legislative strategy to identify and advocate for State and federal funding for Urban Natureways, including targeted engagement efforts such as site tours, briefings, and meetings with State and federal delegation members to build support and demonstrate impact, and report back to the Board in 180 days with a status update on the progress of these initiatives.

#

LH:rf