

Establishing Green Economy Workforce Development at the Environmental Justice Center on the Site of the Former Puente Hills Landfill

The Environmental Justice Center (EJC) is currently under construction on property that was previously the site of largest operating landfill in the nation, rising 500 feet high and covering 700 acres. From 1957 to 2013, over 150 million tons of garbage were compacted to form what is seen as a large hillside in the San Gabriel Valley. Over the years, the facility has employed numerous innovative, environmental approaches including generating electricity from landfill gas, managing materials recovery and recycling programs, dedicating the landfill property to a regional park after closure, and acquiring and maintaining local native habitat as open space. In addition, the state-of-the-art facility included extensive practices to manage odors, dust, birds, and provide landscaping to blend with the local native habitat.

However, during its decades of operation, the surrounding immigrant and working-class families living in the vicinity of the Puente Hills Landfill dealt with the consequences of the landfill’s operations. Residents for decades lived with a smell

MOTION

Solis	_____
Mitchell	_____
Horvath	_____
Hahn	_____
Barger	_____

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emanating from a high-volume of garbage trucks heading to the landfill. A Los Angeles Times article from 1993 highlights the strong opposition by community to an application for landfill expansion. At the time the community expressed concerns about more loss to natural habitat and local ecosystem, impact on property values, and impact on the quality of life of residents in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Having grown up in a community near the landfill, First District Supervisor Hilda L. Solis has first-hand knowledge of the impact the landfill had on the wellness of residents in the surrounding area. In 1994, then Assemblymember Hilda L. Solis authored California state bill AB 2632 that led to the closure of the Puente Hills Landfill and the eventual conversion into a park.

Pursuant to AB2632, a series of conditional use permits approved by the Board of Supervisors required closure of the landfill and supported the development of the area as open space and a public park, in perpetuity. In 2016, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the Park Master Plan following an 18-month planning process led by the LA County Department of Parks and Recreation (LA County Parks). Over the course of the past two years, LA County Parks has led a community outreach and engagement process for Puente Hills Regional Park that ensured community voices informed the conceptual design. With more than 20 in-person events and over 1,300 direct participants, the process brought people onto the landfill site through hikes, pop-ups, and all-abilities tours, while also convening large workshops and roundtables with agencies and experts. Throughout this extensive outreach process, LA County Parks partnered with community-based organizations and environmental justice organizations

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across the County to amplify the process through grassroots organizing, culturally rooted outreach, and cross-lingual engagement.

Supervisor Solis spent over 30 years advocating and identifying funds to ensure the community could one day acquire the green space they deserve. That one day has arrived with the 142 acres of parkland being developed into the first County regional park in more than 35 years.

The Park is currently underway to transform a formerly degraded landscape into a vibrant public green space, restoring critical habitats and creating a vital gateway to nature with panoramic views of the Los Angeles County basin. At full completion, the Park will include 142 acres of recreation and open space, and include a children's nature play area, community amphitheater, arts plaza, dog park, picnic area, a ceremonial space which can be used to acknowledge the history and culture of the San Gabriel Valley, interpretive gardens, open space grasslands designated for community gathering spaces, recreational trails and walking paths, parking, and restrooms.

The EJC is part of the master plan transforming the former Puente Hills Landfill into a regional park. Having already won a prestigious California Green Building Award for its Net Zero operational design, the EJC is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified building that will be the first County facility of its kind. From its building design to its landscaping and the programming it will provide, every aspect of this center is focused on fostering opportunity and empowering advocacy for equity, sustainability, and climate resilience. The EJC will serve as a museum honoring local environmental justice accomplishments; a learning center inspiring people of all ages to protect our planet in their own way; and a gateway to

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career development in the green economy.

With over 30 years in the making, from advocacy to construction, the EJC will serve as a guiding light offering insight into the beauty of our natural landscape and empowering visitors from the surrounding San Gabriel Valley communities, and beyond, to protect our planet. Several classrooms, a lecture hall, a maker's space and birds of prey exhibit area, will provide communal gathering spaces and engaging, interactive experiences to jumpstart a career in the green economy and inspire patrons of all ages to be good stewards of the environment.

The EJC provides the opportunity for a hub focused on science-based learning experiences for young children, and career exposure experiences and workforce development opportunities for youth, Transitional Aged Youth (TAY), and anyone who is interested in securing a good paying job that simultaneously helps improve the health of our environment. Weather whiplash and more frequent severe natural disasters are examples of the increasing threats to public health from climate change. Capitalizing on an environmental hub to enhance access to jobs in the green economy will help grow a critical workforce that can help our County and regional infrastructure and policies adapt to the dynamic impacts of climate change.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct:

1) Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity, in partnership with Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, and in collaboration with ~~to establish a~~ ~~working group that at minimum includes~~ the Chief Executive Office, CEO-Legislative Affairs & Intergovernmental Relations Branch, Los Angeles County Department of

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Public Health, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, Los Angeles County

Chief Sustainability Office, Los Angeles County Office of Education, and Los Angeles

County Internal Services Department, and with any other relevant County

department, to report back in writing within 120 days with an economic opportunity

plan for the EJC that catalogues existing environmental justice-related programming

within the County and providing recommendations for place-based delivery of green

economy programming, including career exposure, paid work experiences, and

apprenticeship and career pathways to County and cross-sector jobs in clean energy,

environmental justice, water conservation, public health, and arts and culture. The

report should also include at least the following:

a. Plans to access funding opportunities that are available and funds that can also be accessible, such as Measure W, and

b. Opportunity analysis that will evaluate County opportunities and opportunities with external partners.

~~2) Direct Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation to establish a working group that will at minimum include the Natural History Museum, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, and other relevant County departments to assess input and plans already collected to inform the content and programming of permanent and visiting exhibits at the Environmental Justice Center, and report back in writing within 120 days with exhibit programming plans and include additional feedback from external, community-based environmental organizations.~~

~~3-2) Direct Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation to partner with form a working~~

AGN. NO. _____

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group, to include the Chief Executive Office, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, and County Counsel, to that will discuss the provisions of the Joint Powers Agreement/Management Lease Agreement; the new facility requests, including those resulting from directives 1 and 2 ~~through 3~~; and the impact on operations, management and security of the Puente Hills Regional Landfill Park.

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HLS:at;gdm;wr