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Connecting the Parks to the Community and the Community to the Parks

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CONNECTING the Parks to the Community and the Community to the Parks

A Community, Economic and Environmental Benefit Assessment of the Los Angeles State Historic Park (Cornfield) and Río de Los Angeles State Park (Taylor Yard)

A Report to California State Parks and the California Coastal Conservancy

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CONNECTING THE PARKS TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE COMMUNITY TO THE PARKS

A Community, Economic and Environmental Benefit Assessment of the Los Angeles State Historic Park (Cornfield) and Río de Los Angeles State Park (Taylor Yard)

Dedicated to Chi Mui

A Report by the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College, to the California State Parks Department and California Coastal Conservancy

October 2006

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DEDICATION

This Report is dedicated to the late Chi Mui, whose deep abiding passion for park development and community engagement played a critical role in helping establish the Los Angeles Historical State Park (the Cornfield).

Chi Mui talks with Occidental College students about the Los Angeles River
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two new California State Park developments near downtown Los Angeles - Los Angeles State Historic Park (formerly known as the Cornfield) and Río de Los Angeles State Park (formerly a portion of Taylor Yard) - hold great promise. In a city marked by unequal and inadequate access to parkland and open space, these parks provide a rare opportunity for private, industrial land to be reclaimed and transformed into a public benefit for adjacent communities and for all residents of Los Angeles and California. Inclusive planning, thoughtful design, and adequate maintenance of these parks are required for the parks to yield a wide variety of benefits. This report presents a synthesis of published literature on the benefits of parks and an evaluation of community perspectives from a series of interviews with key community residents and stakeholders. In addition, demographic information about the parks is paired with the other sources for an analysis of the issues and a series of recommendations for maximizing community benefits associated with the two new parks.

In the published literature, parks have been shown to increase property values and increase access to open space for physical activity, an important benefit in helping address the current obesity epidemic. Parks can contribute to a neighborhood’s sense of place, environmental amenities and habitat, and psychological well-being. Despite the evidence about these benefits associated with parks, there are also negative factors that must be considered and mitigated to maximize benefits and minimize negative impacts. Gentrification, crime, and over-use of facilities have the potential to lessen the quality of life for people that currently reside near parks.

Through literature reviews on the impacts and benefits of parks, open-ended interviews and participant observation of meetings, several major themes emerged as critical to a community and public benefits perspective on the two parks. These include: the need for access to the parks; safety and security; education and interpretation; connectivity of the parks to neighborhoods; transportation and other major linkages, notably the Los Angeles River; connecting the parks to the community; park usage; and community participation and input.

Based on the analysis and the evaluation of the key themes, several recommendations for enhancing a public benefits approach have been identified. These include:

Community and Regional Links

A community liaison position should be created to identify funding sources, help establish and/or link to community groups focused on park issues, develop a planning and community input process for community programs, help arrange cultural and educational programs, develop oral history programs that link to both the histories of the sites, neighborhoods, and the L.A. River, and establish community docent positions to help maintain the park and implement programs. In addition, efforts should be made through this position to work with the City of Los Angeles and other public entities, private foundations, and community-based organizations to establish and strengthen linkages to neighborhoods and help establish a regional identity for the parks as central locations at the heart of the city and the region.
Improve Access and Connectivity
To enhance the parks’ identities and provide opportunities for diverse populations to connect to the parks, a focus on access needs to be a park priority. This can be accomplished through new pedestrian and bike pathways, better street connectivity and access points to the parks from surrounding neighborhoods and transit lines, and creation of landscaped streets surrounding the park sites.

Develop the Parks as Community Resources
The role of urban core parks in enhancing community and regional identities can be accomplished through programmatic and park use initiatives that establish the parks as community resources. These can include educational, interpretative, and cultural activities and events; a “power of place” association that helps reveal the hidden histories and community identities associated with the parks; and the development of food themes and physical activity opportunities that provide community health benefits.

Strengthen Existing Neighborhoods
The development of the park sites should be highlighted as resources for area residents, not as beachheads for gentrification and displacement, even as the parks provide multiple benefits and a strong regional identity. Park advocates and supporters need to work with policymakers to develop tools, such as affordable housing programs and support for local public schools, that can strengthen neighborhoods and underline the role of the parks as connected to the communities as the communities connect to the parks.

Significant barriers exist for these kinds of park developments. These barriers include limited financial resources, organizational and bureaucratic cultures, competing public interests and jurisdictions, and limited neighborhood and regional planning traditions within city and regional planning. However, there is a base of support to engage and overcome these barriers as evidenced by the community and environmental advocacy efforts that were key to the acquisition of park land and early park planning. The Los Angeles State Historic Park and Río de Los Angeles State Park are positioned to become important symbols of how Los Angeles can truly become greener, more livable, and community-engaged.
BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

Beginning in January 2006, the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College undertook a community, economic, and environmental assessment of the Los Angeles State Historic Park and Río de Los Angeles State Park, also known as the Cornfield and Taylor Yard, respectively. The purpose of this report is threefold: to review the literature that evaluates the benefits of urban parks; to profile the areas surrounding the parks and survey community members and institutional representatives from schools, community-based organizations, and government agencies, as to the potential uses and benefits associated with the development and use of the two parks; and to provide a series of recommendations, based on the community needs assessment and literature review, regarding policies and programs that could enhance community benefits for California State Parks (CSP) and the California Coastal Conservancy.

A Brief History of the Los Angeles State Historic Park (Cornfield Site)

Although Euro-American contact had occurred two centuries before, Spanish Colonial settlers first arrived in Alta California in 1769. The noted Portolá Expedition of that year traveled across the current park property and camped along the nearby river. They named it for the jubilee day of Nuestra Señora de los Angeles de Porciúncula—also noting that the location would provide a good site for a civilian agricultural settlement. As typical of the Spanish Colonial frontier, the soldiers, missionaries, and settlers of the time represented a mixture of European, African, and Indian lineage. It is no surprise that in 1781, when the Spanish Colonial government established El Pueblo de la Reina de los Angeles along the Río de Porciúncula, many of its initial settlers reflected this diversity.

One of the first improvements made was an irrigation ditch, the *zanja madre*. This first Los Angeles “public works project” provided a direct connection that directed the river’s water to the pueblo and its agricultural lands. The *zanja madre* crossed along the bluffs that served as the northwestern boundary of the current park’s property and traveled at various points through the park parcel. The ditch reflected the initial and essential relationship of water to Los Angeles’ development and its prosperity. Typical of the pueblo’s lands north and east of the plaza, the authorities established the property as common planting lots. The pueblo’s system of providing common lands and water to individuals proved successful and, by 1817, the pueblo reportedly had over 53,000 grape vines under cultivation.

The City of Los Angeles long ago recognized the historical significance of the property by designating the location of the “River Station” as Historic-Cultural Monument #82. The Southern Pacific Railroad built the River Station in 1875, after the connection to the north and the transcontinental railway was completed. By 1885, the area was surrounded by railroad tracks, freight, and service facilities replacing the once fertile agricultural lands. Through this timeline, the neighborhoods reflected diverse ethnic/racial enclaves populated by African,
Mexican, Italian, German, Irish, Japanese, and Chinese Americans. Housing choices were few at the time because of racist and anti-Semitic restrictive housing covenants. Many residents who lived in the area also worked at the railroad yard.

Several bitter and protracted struggles took place during the past century that affected the quality of life for the ethnically, racially, culturally diverse neighborhoods surrounding the site. One such event, starting in 1933, was the forced relocation of Chinese Americans (old Chinatown) to Sonoratown (present day Chinatown) along North Broadway to make way for the building of Union Station. The Sonoratown area at the time was predominately Mexican American. The severing of Solano Canyon (Mexican American communities) and Elysian Park to build the Arroyo Seco Parkway (later renamed the Pasadena Freeway) in 1940, and the relocation of the Chavez Ravine neighborhood in the 1950s for proposed public housing projects and later Dodger Stadium, all had direct impacts on the physical landscape, continuity, and sense of place for the residents of the neighborhoods surrounding the River Station freight yards. When the Southern Pacific Railroad, and its new owners, the Union Pacific Railroad, sought in the late 1980s to sell the property as part of a deal to build warehouses and other light industrial facilities at the River Station property, a coalition of community groups, environmentalists, and neighborhood activists came together to stop the proposed development for the site.

One of the key groups involved in this coalition was the Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR), which was established in 1985 to advocate for the development of projects and policies focused on the concept of river renewal. During the next decade FoLAR was joined by a wide number of other environmental and community organizations, state agencies such as the Coastal Conservancy and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and policymakers such as Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, to bring new attention to the river, its potential as a community resource, and possible related developments such as parks and bike paths in neighborhoods adjacent to the river. The City of Los Angeles established a L.A. River Task Force in 1990 as public attention to the river, distinct from its role as flood control channel, increased through the 1990s. In 1998, a series of gatherings and charrettes, called “The River Through Downtown,” took place at four different sites including Chinatown and Boyle Heights. The Chinatown segment of “The River Through Downtown” was facilitated in part by Chi Mui, a Chinatown community leader who was then State Senator Richard Polanco’s Chinatown field deputy and later served as mayor of the City of San Gabriel until his death in 2006. A key focus of the Chinatown event was the development of the new parkland on the undeveloped land owned by Union Pacific located near Chinatown and predominantly Latino Lincoln Heights neighborhoods, both of which had a shortage of park space. Through discussions with community members and the design and envisioning process from “The River Through Downtown” gathering and its aftermath, the participants developed a set of plans for schools, housing, bike paths, recreational facilities, and parks. They also built consensus around the concept of a development along the riverfront that could be linked to a broader vision of river renewal (Friends of the Los Angeles River 1998).

Around the same time that “The River Through Downtown” charrettes were being organized, Mayor Richard Riordan established the “Genesis L.A.” initiative for economic redevelopment that included the concept of turning brownfield sites into economic development projects. One of the potential sites for a Genesis L.A. project included a multifaceted light industrial and warehouse development on 32 acres of the River Station site, also known as the Cornfield, based on a
partnership between Majestic Realty, a major developer in the region, and the Union Pacific, which held title to the land at the Cornfield and Taylor Yard sites. The Majestic Realty team began to pursue its various environmental review processes and was on a fast track to complete the reviews and capture various public subsidies that had been established to facilitate the project (Kibel 2004).

During 1999 and 2000 a major debate took place pitting the Majestic partners against a coalition of park, community and environmental groups called the Chinatown Yard Alliance. The Alliance posed a number of arguments about the historical, cultural and environmental significance of the site and its connection to the L.A. River. In the course of these debates, the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College, in conjunction with several of the participants in the Chinatown Yard Alliance, sponsored a year long series of programs, research activities, and public events with the theme “Re-Envisioning the L.A. River: A Program of Community and Environmental Revitalization.” The series included a focus on what would become the Los Angeles State Historic Park and Río de Los Angeles State Park sites. As part of the program, the UCLA Department of Urban Planning undertook a year-long evaluation of historical and planning issues associated with the various plans for the Los Angeles State Historic Park site as well as the needs of the surrounding Chinatown and Lincoln Heights neighborhoods. The UCLA study was completed in late Spring 2000 and its findings were presented at a forum at Castelar Elementary School in Chinatown. In addition, the Re-Envisioning program included a September 2000 debate among Los Angeles mayoral candidates at Occidental College. The issue of the future of the site figured prominently in the debate (Kibel 2004).

The Alliance ultimately prevailed when Majestic Realty agreed to sell the parcel to California State Parks (CSP), with funding from the Park Bond Act of 2000, through a transaction that involved a pass-through sale to the nonprofit Trust for Public Land (TPL). TPL then transferred title to CSP. To ensure continued community participation, Governor Gray Davis signed legislation authored by State Senator Richard Polanco (Senate Bill 1177) establishing the Cornfield Advisory Committee. The Committee was charged with assisting CSP in planning for interim and permanent land uses and facilities for the newly acquired property. The Committee met numerous times over a three-year period, working together with CSP staff to develop a park vision, reviewing Interim Public Use plans, making recommendations on a park name and classification, participating in public meetings, and providing input for the site’s General Plan. A published recommendation report was submitted by the Committee in February 2003 (http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=22272), to the Director of California State Parks based upon four concepts: connectivity; cultural/historical; recreation; and, transportation. The thematic concepts were incorporated into the general plan for the site.

On June 10, 2005, the California State Parks and Recreation Commission approved the general plan, naming and classifying the property as Los Angeles State Historic Park (http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=22272). The general plan codified a vision and purpose, identifying Los Angeles State Historic Park’s unique opportunity to complement existing regional state historic parks and giving direction for partnerships with other institutions and organizations to interpret a more comprehensive history of the greater Los Angeles area. In 2006, California State Parks and the California State Parks Foundation, with funding from the Annenberg Foundation, hosted a design competition. Over thirty-three firms submitted qualifications for the competition. A Selection Committee made up of community members, businesspeople, architects
and legislators chose three teams to develop conceptual proposals to be judged by the Selection Committee. After the presentation of the proposals by the teams and public input, the Selection Committee submitted a final recommendation to the CSP Director. The Director then awarded the final contract to Hargreaves Associates to complete a fully realized design for Los Angeles State Historic Park.

In 2001 a parallel land acquisition took place involving the sale of the Taylor Yard site to CSP. A similar controversy had emerged around the disposition and use of the Taylor Yard site. A diverse alliance of community organizations comprised of several predominantly Latino neighborhood groups, including soccer clubs and community groups, had mobilized to voice their concerns about the future of the Taylor Yard site. They emphasized the lack of public space and parks available for recreation in the surrounding neighborhoods (Kibel 2004).

A Brief History of Río de Los Angeles State Park
Similar to the recent history of the Los Angeles State Historic Park property, the establishment of a state park at Taylor Yard was the result of a community struggle for land and open space fought by the residents of northeast Los Angeles, environmentalists, soccer players and their families, and other supporters. An in-depth history of the area is described in the Río de Los Angeles Park General Plan and Environmental Impact Report. Recent highlights are included in this report.

Taylor Yard was once an important site for railcars coming in and out of downtown Los Angeles. Between the time of Southern Pacific’s new railroad construction in 1876 and up until its closing in 1985, Taylor Yard served as an important area of rail activity in Los Angeles and throughout California. Storage tracks were established on the eastern side of the L.A. River in 1888, and the area was expanded to increase the capacity of track storage and to accommodate Pacific Fruit Express, a joint operation of Southern Pacific and Union Pacific. In 1925 the yard was further expanded as it took over operations at the nearby River Station (Mullaly and Petty 2002). The site became heavily utilized for rail traffic into Los Angeles until a new facility was built in West Colton, diverting traffic from Taylor Yard. Southern Pacific closed its Taylor Yard facility in 1985, but after it merged with Union Pacific in the late 1990s it reactivated some of the land for maintenance and divided other portions of it for sale (Río de Los Angeles General Plan and Draft EIR 2005).

Taylor Yard was named for J. Hartley Taylor, a businessperson who moved his family from Ohio to Los Angeles and rose from running a small farm to owning a major grain and feed company, as well as other agricultural-related businesses. Taylor was active in civic life, including service on the boards of directors of a bank and a college, and participation in the Masonic Lodge (Río de Los Angeles General Plan EIR 2005).

After Union Pacific closed rail operations at Taylor Yard in the 1980s, the land sat vacant until the late 1990s when Mayor Richard Riordan and City Council member Mike Hernandez prioritized development of the site to attract business development. Lincoln Property Company announced that it would build 600,000 square feet of industrial development for multimedia and post-production businesses (McNary 1998). Federal Express also opened a distribution center on 12 acres in 1999 (O’Donoghue 1998). Plans for development of the land were slowed in February of 1998 when State
Senators Tom Hayden and Richard Polanco called for a moratorium on development on the site and advocated its use for recreation and habitat restoration, pending passage of a bond measure. Meanwhile, in 1999, officials broke ground on the Los Angeles Media Technology Center at the site. To ensure the adequate environmental features of the development, FoLAR worked with the developers, Legacy Partners, and civil engineers to implement innovative storm water management features which could increase infiltration and decrease runoff (Napolitano 2000).

California voters approved Water and Park Bonds on the March 2000 ballot for the acquisition of land and development of parks and open space. In June 2000, Governor Gray Davis announced $45 million from the state’s budget for purchasing Taylor Yard (City News Service June 30, 2000). Despite passage of the bonds and support of California voters, the Los Angeles City Council moved ahead with development plans at Taylor Yard, approving a retail development on the last available parcel in December 2000. Opposition from environmentalists cited insufficient environmental review of the impacts of development, but the Council nevertheless approved the development (City News Service December 15, 2000). With bond money set aside and development moving ahead at Taylor Yard, 40 environmental, social justice, faith-based, and recreation groups banded together to form the Coalition for a State Park at Taylor Yard to organize against the development and in favor of open space. In early 2001, the Coalition filed suit against the developers, the City of Los Angeles, and Union Pacific Railroad for violating the California Environmental Quality Act. A judge ruled in favor of the Coalition in July of 2001, requiring that the developer prepare a full environmental review.

After the ruling, CSP moved forward and purchased parcels “D and G-1” in 2001 and 2003. The two parcels are not physically connected, and pedestrian access between the sites is currently not provided due to an active railway line that runs along the western boundary of Parcel D and private property between the railroad line and Parcel G-1. With vocal support from community residents who advocated in favor of sports fields on the site, special legislation (Public Resources Code Section 5003.18) was passed to allow CSP to lease 20 acres of the park for active recreational usage to the City of Los Angeles for 25 years. CSP also awarded the City of Los Angeles 7 million dollars in Proposition 12 grant money to assist in the development of a new city park. During 2003, joint public meetings and design charrettes were conducted to determine a hybrid design for the entire 40 acres, which includes active sports fields on the City of Los Angeles’ 20 acres and passive activities on CSP’s acres that feature a re-created wetland area, trails and interpretive programming.
SECTION ONE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON URBAN PARKS AND THEIR COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

There is a broad and diverse body of literature on urban parks, including their historical evolution, their economic, community, and environmental attributes, and their role in the community and society. This review of the literature is organized in three parts: a short historical section; a focused discussion on two key aspects of park impacts, property values and public health issues; and an overview of the different values associated with urban parks.

Historical Background on Urban Parks

The understanding that urban parks provide crucial community, environmental, and economic benefits is rooted in the historical evolution of the development and design of parks to serve a wide range of constituencies and goals. In the 19th and early 20th century, designers, planners, and enlightened civic leaders sought to construct urban parks as “large landscape parks” or “pleasure grounds” (Tuason 1997). Central Park in New York City and Griffith Park in Los Angeles are two examples of such parks. These parks were set aside to provide residents with their first or only exposure to nature by simulating a rural or country-like setting and thereby offering a place to escape the hardscape of the city. Such parks, often several hundred acres in size, were developed in nearly every major metropolitan area. Early parklands set aside in the 1850s included New York, New Orleans, Cincinnati and Hartford, Connecticut. Designed to serve as a kind of nature-in-the-city oasis (anticipating what would come to be defined as the “passive uses” of the urban park), these large urban parks were initially situated at the periphery of the built-up area of the city. However, over time, new developments sprung up around the parks, reinforcing their strong urban association. Furthermore, many of the sites, such as Chicago’s South Park and San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park, were selected because they were deemed “unsuitable for other purposes” (Cranz 1982).

From the 1910s through World War II, during the Progressive Era and into the New Deal period, a second type of urban park emerged. The “reform park” was focused on providing public places for recreation and outdoor use, particularly for the congested, low-income, and immigrant neighborhoods in cities like Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York (Cranz 1978). This included a “park as playground” concept (anticipating the park’s “active uses” definition) where the parks were small in size (often just one to ten acres), had some paved areas for sports activities, and tended to
deemphasize the connection to “nature.” These reform parks provided physical activity opportunities, places for seniors to gather and recreate, and a “children’s right to play” (Cranz 1982; Loukaitou-Sideris and Stieglitz, 2002).

Innovations in park use, such as pageants and community-wide events during the Depression or the vegetable gardens planted in park grounds during World War II, kept the reform park concept alive during the 1930s and 1940s. But from the post World War II period through the 1950s and 1960s, planners and park designers primarily emphasized the recreational uses of parks, while establishing a less costly, more standardized design (Cranz 1982).

The 1960s witnessed a revival of urban parks as public spaces that hosted largely spontaneous events and also included community efforts to turn vacant land, or land proposed to be paved over, into green space, public space, or community gardens. Urban parks, in turn, became new places to congregate, creating a renewed interest in parks as public and open space (Cranz 1978).

During the 1970s, there were some new initiatives to expand urban park acquisitions as part of a broader concern about the urban environment. While much of the environmental movement continued to focus its efforts on protection of non-urban natural environments, a burgeoning urban environmental movement emerged. Led by such groups as the Urban Environment Conference, advocates pushed for more urban parks and open spaces, particularly in inner city communities. These ideas were pursued during the administration of California Governor Jerry Brown, although efforts to significantly expand park acquisitions, particularly in urban core areas, were stymied with the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 (Gottlieb 2006; Pincetl 2003).

By the 1980s and 1990s, a growing concern about environmental justice catalyzed a renewed interest in urban parks, including a demand for green space in areas with contaminated land (“brownfields”), freeways that crisscrossed neighborhoods, and trash-strewn streets (Gottlieb 2005). Los Angeles became an important focus for environmental justice advocates regarding the issue of urban parks, in large measure because the city compared poorly with other cities in relation to park acreage per 1,000 residents, park space as a percentage of land in the city, and park expenditure per resident (Pincetl 2003; Wolch et al 2002). Resources for parks in the low-income districts compared unfavorably with less wealthy districts within Los Angeles due in part to Proposition 13. By limiting property taxes, which had been a key source of funding for park development and maintenance by local governments, the passage of Proposition 13 compounded the problem of the inequities in park development. While wealthier areas could access additional funds by establishing user fees or through linkage or impact fees tying the supply of new parks to fees on development, these mechanisms were less available or not utilized in inner city communities. Thus, areas that had the greatest need for open space -- given the constraints on street life due to crime concerns, the absence of backyard spaces to play, and schools that had eliminated recreational periods and/or had no or little green space -- had fewer resources to purchase land for new parks or even to maintain existing parks (Harnik 2001; Loukaitou-Sideris 1995).

A new generation of urban park advocates during the 1990s and into the 21st century also began to argue that community life could be enhanced through access to parks and green space. In addition, environmental justice advocates embraced green space, including parks, as a means to strengthen community identity and civic engagement, particularly when a park or green space replaced
a brownfield or toxic waste site (Gottlieb 2005). At the national level, the National Park Service, responding to the new demands for urban parks, began to discuss broadening its mission from a more exclusive focus on preservation of undeveloped land outside urban areas to making available public use of land within urban areas, a shift in mission most dramatically identified with the development of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco (Rothman 2004). This growing interest in urban parks by diverse constituencies was reflected in the efforts to establish parks on the Cornfield and Taylor Yard sites and provide a connection to the L.A. River. Beyond the issue of community renewal, the park advocates at the Cornfield and the Taylor Yard sites also shared the concerns of other urban park advocates such as connecting to nature and the ability of the park to provide a sense of place in the city and an “outdoor experience” for city residents. These advocates also viewed urban parks as providing opportunities for contemplation, recreation, biking, jogging, walking, or gardening (Kibel 2004).

Two Examples of Urban Park Impacts: Property Values and Public Health

The impact of park development can be divided into two broad categories: private impacts and public impacts (Lutzenhiser and Netusil 2001). Although these categories overlap, for analytic purposes it is useful to look at them separately. For example, private impacts include property values of adjacent parcels/structures. While an increase or decrease in property value may result from park development, this is primarily a positive or negative outcome for private landholders. However, a secondary impact is experienced in any resulting changes in property tax receipts – a public impact. Likewise, public benefits include access to open space, which may have personal impacts on an individual’s ability to exercise or recreate but are generally recognized as a public or community benefit.

To better situate the arguments regarding private and public benefits, a short discussion will follow of the private impact of urban parks on adjacent property values and the public impacts of parks related to public health and access to open space. The purpose of this section is to draw upon published research to answer the question: What public and private impacts result from park development, using private property value and public health impacts as the examples?

Private Impact: Property Values

While the relationship between property value and park development is an active area of research and inquiry today among academics, park advocates, and city planners, early park planners were also interested in the topic. The great landscape architect and park designer Frederick Law Olmstead, for example, used the argument that property value would increase to lobby for funding for New York’s Central Park. After the completion of the park, he worked with the New York Parks Commission to collect and analyze data that demonstrated that the park’s development had a positive impact on property value and tax revenue for the city (Crompton 2001).

More recently, the development of Millennium Park in Chicago has been cited as another example of how a park can transform a neighborhood. Described in the NY Times as a “$475 million modernist playground” (Sharoff 2006), the park, along with other neighborhood improvements, has been credited with boosting residential development, retail spending, and tourist spending in the
area. A study commissioned by the City of Chicago’s Department of Planning and Development estimates the total value of residential development attributable to the park at $1.4 billion (Goodman Williams Group 2005).

Olmstead’s argument in 1856 has been given contemporary currency by economists and planners through the concept of proximate principle, based upon the economic method of hedonic pricing. Hedonic pricing is used to estimate economic values associated with particular environmental amenities, such as proximity to a park, recreational site, or aesthetic views that in turn may directly affect market prices such as property values in a particular neighborhood. Crompton (2001) describes the proximate principle as the change in property values experienced by properties adjacent to or in the vicinity of parks and open space. This proximate principle involves a number of underlying assumptions. The logic of this argument is as follows: Bond monies are often the source of funds for parkland acquisition, and voters and taxpayers may not be supportive of municipalities assuming long-term debt obligations. However, given certain assumptions about properties near the park being assessed at a higher rate, the aggregate of the property taxes increases can result in sufficient revenue to cover the debt incurred from the bond. A detailed description of this model is found in Crompton (2001). Thus, what initially may appear to voters and the general public as public “subsidy” becomes, in reality, an “investment” with a positive pay-off.

In a comprehensive review of published research testing the proximate principle, Crompton found that of 25 peer-reviewed studies, 20 found that property values increased in properties near park developments (2001). Other work published since 2001 using data from Austin, Texas (Nicholls and Crompton 2005) and Portland, Oregon (Lutzenhiser and Netusil 2001) finds further evidence of the increased property values. The study in Austin focused specifically on the impact of greenways on property values. They defined a greenway as open space in a linear configuration along some fixed feature such as a river, canal, or abandoned railway right of way. The authors studied three neighborhoods along one greenbelt using sales prices of homes sold within a two-year period. In two of the three neighborhoods, location directly adjacent to the greenway was associated with a statistically significant increase in property price. In the third neighborhood, there was no significant effect on home price from proximity to the greenbelt (Nicholls and Crompton 2005).

A similar study was conducted in 2001 in Portland, Oregon, but instead of examining the effect of greenways, Lutzenhiser and Netusil categorized open space into urban parks (with more than 50% developed for organized active recreation), natural area parks (with more than 50% of land for natural vegetation), specialty parks (for primarily one purpose, such as boating), golf courses, and cemeteries. The authors found that the type of open space and distance from open space influenced housing prices. Natural areas had the largest positive effect on property sales, while golf courses, specialty parks, and urban parks all had a statistically significant positive effect. Cemeteries didn’t have a statistically significant effect on price (Lutzenhiser and Netusil 2001).

While the magnitude of the effect may vary based upon type of open space, proximity to property, and usage of the park, Crompton summarizes that property abutting or fronting a passive park may increase property values by 20 percent. An additional factor that influences the proximity principle is the shape of the park. The “edge principal” is used in the design of residential golf course developments to maximize the number of properties abutting a golf course. It is based upon the hypothesis that the more circumference,
perimeter, or edge of a park, the more properties that will abut the park and benefit from park-front property, and thus a greater increase in property values and property tax receipts to municipalities (Little 1990 in Crompton 2001).

All parks are not created equal, and despite the compelling evidence that indicates that parks can increase the values of surrounding properties, many factors can have a negative impact on residents and the neighborhood as well. Negative impacts from parks may include additional traffic, noise, lights (especially from sports fields), and illegal or illicit behavior that takes place in parks. Parks that have a reputation for being a nuisance to a neighborhood may come to represent a burden to neighbors, including property owners. Park design, maintenance, and security are important factors to enhance park benefits and mitigate potential negative impacts.

Beyond immediate increases in property values, there are regional economic benefits associated with the development of urban parks. Cranz (1982) shows that new urban park development can help stem, and even reverse the decline of neighborhoods, particularly low income areas, by stabilizing property values. That type of revitalization can, in turn, provide benefits for the City and the region as a whole, since it helps maintain existing sources of capital and may also attract new sources of investment as well as new residents who are able to inject new resources within a community. Those aspects of neighborhood and regional value have already begun to resonate with the new interest in the adjacent communities related to the development of the two state parks. The key to such a revitalization process, however, is the stabilization of the neighborhood rather than displacement (e.g., gentrification) of the existing residents and related rapid escalation of property values that may force out the existing local residents. Strategies such as linkages to affordable housing development, reduced crime, and improved public transit can complement neighborhood stabilization and revitalization through increased green space.

In summary, there is strong evidence – from both the research literature and anecdotal evidence from examples like New York’s Central Park and Chicago’s Millennium Park -- that open space and park development yield increases in property values. These benefits, however, may require parallel strategies such as affordable housing development and improved transit that stabilize neighborhoods rather than displace long-time residents. Inadequate maintenance, problems with crime, and traffic flows are factors that can negatively impact property values surrounding parks and need to be considered and/or mitigated.

Public Impact: Public Health

While property values are characterized as a private impact for purposes of this report, parks and open space, by their design and features of the built environment, have the potential to enhance public health outcomes and establish other related public values.

Over the past three decades, obesity has grown in epidemic proportions among all segments of the United States’ population, with the prevalence of overweight among children more than doubling, and among adolescents nearly tripling (Ogden et al 2002). Data from the 1999-2002 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) show that 31.2 percent of children ages 6 to 11, and 30.9 percent of adolescents ages 12-19 were either overweight or at risk for being overweight. Among adults, the data is no less discouraging. Those with extreme obesity (BMI>40), which is associated with the most severe health complications, nearly tripled between 1990 and 2000 (Ogden et al 2002).
Increased rates of obesity and its related consequences have increased health care expenditures in the United States. According to Colditz, the direct health care costs attributed to obesity and its related diseases account for $70 billion or 7 percent of total annual health care costs (1999). Colditz also calculated that lack of physical activity and its associated morbidities account for $24.3 billion or 2.4 percent of direct annual health care costs. Together, the health care costs attributed to obesity and physical inactivity account for as much as $94 billion per year or 9.4% of annual health costs in the United States. Neither of these estimates include the indirect health care costs that may be attributed to obesity and/or inactivity (such as loss of work time or disability insurance). An economic burden is also associated with the pediatric obesity epidemic. Over the last two decades, annual hospital costs for pediatric obesity-related illnesses have more than tripled from 35 million during 1979-1981 to 127 million during 1997-1999 (Wang and Dietz 2002). With increasing rates of overweight and obesity, the total medical costs associated with these conditions are likely to rise in the future.

According to the NHANES data, Mexican Americans are disproportionately affected by this epidemic, with 39.9 percent of 6-19 year old children classified as overweight or at risk compared to 28.2 percent of non-Latino White and 35.4 percent of non-Latino Black 6-19 year old children. This trend translates to Latinos as a whole, and, particularly in urban areas, may be even more acute. In Los Angeles, the rate of overweight among Latinos is higher than among any other ethnic group, and doubles that of white children, according to the 2003 Los Angeles County Health Survey. A recent report by an expert panel has identified obesity and its related comorbidities as one of the most urgent priorities in addressing the health of Latino children (Flores et al 2002).

Weight and health are influenced by genetic factors and individual behaviors, including diet and physical activity. The US Department of Agriculture released its revised Dietary Guidelines for Americans in 2005, providing nutrition and physical activity recommendations for optimal health, and for the first time included physical activity recommendations along with a revised food pyramid. The USDA advises moderate or vigorous activity for at least 30 minutes a day. Despite best intentions, individual healthy behaviors can be supported or challenged by environmental factors such as access to health and nutritious foods and safe places to exercise.

Several epidemiological studies have linked area of residence to physical activity. Although lack of access may be a driving factor influencing lower rates of physical activity in low-income communities, documenting specific elements associated with such access, such as park use, have not been as well described or documented. One study reported that attractiveness of public open space was associated with higher rates of walking. While other sources for physical activity can be identified, such as gyms, schools, health clubs, bikeways, martial arts, organized sports activities, and so forth, studies have also indicated that parks are a key resource for expanding opportunities for physical activity (Lee et al 2005).

Lack of access to parks, particularly safe parks, is considered a major public health concern. A 2003 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) developed by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, indicated that 25 percent or nearly one million California adolescents did not engage in the recommended levels of physical activity. The study also noted that neighborhood characteristics and access to safe parks impacted the level of adolescent activity or even if there was any amount of activity. The UCLA report further noted that safe parks contributed to regular physical
activity, particularly among low-income residents, those living in apartments, and/or those living in neighborhoods that were perceived as unsafe. (Babey et al 2005) Differences in access to places like parks that provide opportunities for physical activity (e.g., walking or jogging) also correspond to the level of physical activity undertaken by those either proximate to or distant from those places. (French et al 2001).

Studies have found that programs that encourage a combination of diet and physical activity can help lead to weight loss compared to no treatment at all. (Jain 2004) As a result, a number of interventions have been developed around the need for increased physical activity. For example, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Active Living Program promotes advocacy around increased park funding and development (Moudon et al 2005). This intervention research represents a rebirth of interest in the relationship of the built environment and human behavior. This has influenced and shaped environmental design, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, and urban planning. It is now well established that the existence and development of urban parks influences the daily behavior of people in the surrounding communities, including behaviors that have positive health outcomes. The public health perspective utilizes primary data rather than urban design research, which relies on secondary data. The public health approach has also drawn from social ecological models, while urban planning has used economics and related models and theories (Moudon et al 2005).

Increased public awareness about the epidemic of obesity, such as the growing understanding that the built environment influences human behavior, including various forms of physical activity, has raised the profile and importance of urban parks, particularly in low-income communities. Public health research is also now considered an influential factor in policy changes and constituency support around park funding and research has also been linked directly to education and promotion, providing grounding for policy and advocacy (French et al 2001).

Other Urban Park Benefits
Aside from discussions of public health and property values, there is a body of research that also explores the impacts of parks regarding such characteristics as social capital, sense of place, psychological well-being, and environmental factors, among others. This overview section provides a short discussion of some of these varied – and often linked – additional attributes.

Sense of Place
The issue of sense of place has figured significantly in the literature about parks, especially urban parks. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Judy Hutchinson, in discussing the community interest in the revitalization of MacArthur Park in the Pico Union area, describe the renewed interest among scholars in how urban parks, public buildings and spaces, and pedestrian-friendly streets enhance people’s sense of place and community in often impersonal and alienating urban settings. Distinguishing between what environmental psychologists characterize as “socio-petal environments” which
encourage social association and interaction and “socio-fugal environments” which discourage such associations, Loukaitou-Sideris and Hutchinson identify the urban park as a key type of socio-petal environment (Sideris and Hutchinson 2003).

Americans like to designate buildings, places, and other sites as “historic,” in order to link our past, present, and future, and give our children a sense of continuity and identity with the past. Historical sites in the city, in the form of public spaces and parks, can help provide people with a strong sense of place, a pride in their communities. Unfortunately, ethnic and working class communities are often overlooked when public officials and historic preservation groups designate or commemorate places as historic. The areas that surround the Los Angeles State Historic Park and Río de Los Angeles State Park sites may seem like abandoned railroad yards to some, but to the people in those neighborhoods, they have a deeper, and historic, significance. Yale University and former UCLA Professor Dolores Hayden has identified a “power of place” that can help diversify and expand the connection to different historical landscapes. “The power of place,” Hayden writes, contributes to “the power of ordinary landscapes to nurture citizen’s public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory” (Hayden 1995). However, that capacity “remains untapped for most working people’s neighborhoods in most American cities, and for most ethnic history and most women’s history. The sense of civic identity that shared history can convey is missing”(Hayden 1995).

However, Hayden notes recent efforts to establish a more diverse and inclusive definition of historic places, such as the National Park Service’s Black Heritage Trail on Beacon Hill in the Boston area. The Trail has provided visibility about the historical neighborhood of free blacks in the period prior to the Civil War. Hayden also notes that urban landscapes, like parks, also contribute to a stronger sense of history and place, especially among communities that are often ignored by those who focus primarily on the places populated by the rich and powerful. We need to recognize, she writes, “the social diversity of the city as well as the communal uses of space, very different from urban design as monumental architecture governed by form or driven by real estate speculation”(Hayden 1995). Hayden’s understanding of the power of place is reflected in the varied and diverse history of the Los Angeles State Historic Park and Río de Los Angeles State Park sites, including their most recent history that engaged diverse populations and connections to the urban landscape, as outlined in sections of this report.

**Psychological Benefits**

Researchers have identified how park-based leisure activities may improve moods, reduce perceived stress, and enhance a sense of well-being. Neighborhood factors positively associated with physical activity that improve that sense of well-being include enjoyable scenery, the frequency of seeing others exercise, and access and satisfaction with facilities. More research is needed to look directly at park-based leisure activities on activity levels (Rung-Bedimo et al 2005).

Psychologists have identified the positive benefits of natural environments on emotional well-being and mental health (Kaplan et al 1998). Researchers have documented that providing a view, especially one that includes vegetation, has positive implications for health and well-being. The benefits extend to those in schools, apartment residences,
workplaces, and hospitals (Kaplan 1993). Parks can serve as a form of “nature in the city,” providing especially significant benefit to children that establishes a type of “nature-play” not otherwise available (Louv 2005). Researchers have also identified that people value parks even if they don’t personally use them (Rung-Bedimo et al 2005).

**Social Benefits**

Parks have the capacity to build social capital through the provision of public space that can be utilized for social interactions and community-building. These interactions can lead to positive or negative outcomes depending upon the activities that take place at the park (e.g., drug dealing, family outings, educational programming, and so forth). Parks that incorporate trees and vegetation in their landscape create a sense of safety (Arnold 1993).

Parks and open spaces have the capacity to create a level of satisfaction and well-being, particularly if residents feel that such places “belong” to them and that they have a strong level of connection and ownership associated with those places. What becomes important is not only whether parks are used, but also the satisfaction related to the knowledge that such parks exist (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989).

**Environmental Benefits**

There are wide ranges of environmental benefits associated with urban parks, particularly in inner-city communities. The development of green spaces with trees and vegetation can reduce the urban heat island effect and reduce carbon dioxide emissions (Lowry 1967). In addition, parks have an absorptive quality that can absorb storm water flow and reduce impacts associated with storm water treatment. Vegetation of parks, even small parks in densely populated urban areas, can serve as habitat for urban wildlife, such as birds and small mammals. Trees are an important component of the vegetation in parks. They have been documented to remove pollutants from the air, generate oxygen, and control soil erosion (Sherer 2006).
This section includes two components designed to evaluate the community and regional interface with the two parks. It includes a demographic analysis of adjacent communities and a discussion of community perspectives and insights about the development of the parks.

### Demographics in Neighborhoods Surrounding Río de Los Angeles State Park

The Río de Los Angeles State Park is located in the northeast region of the City of Los Angeles, in council district 1, currently represented by Ed Reyes. The park is also in close proximity to council districts 13 (represented by Council member Eric Garcetti) and 14 (represented by Council member José Huizar). The neighborhoods immediately surrounding the park include Cypress Park, Glassell Park, and Elysian Valley, represented by ZIP codes 90065, 90039, 90012, and 90031. The park itself is located in ZIP code 90065, adjacent to the Los Angeles River, in the Glendale Narrows section of the river, north of downtown Los Angeles. Visitors to the park will include people coming on foot, bicycle, bus, and automobile. The sports fields at Río de Los Angeles State Park will likely draw athletes and spectators from beyond the surrounding neighborhoods, as there is a shortage of such facilities across the city.

#### Table 1. Demographics of the ZIP codes in the vicinity of Taylor Yard. (US Census 2000).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zip code / Community</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Percent of residents 65 years or older</th>
<th>Percent of residents under 18</th>
<th>Percent African-American</th>
<th>Percent Asian</th>
<th>Percent Latino</th>
<th>Percent non-Hispanic White</th>
<th>Percent foreign born</th>
<th>Percent speaking language other than English at home</th>
<th>Median household income ($)</th>
<th>Percent below federal poverty line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90065 Cypress Park, Glassell Park, Mount Washington</td>
<td>47,524</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>38,271</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90012 Chinatown, Solano Canyon, Civic Center</td>
<td>30,577</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>20,152</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90031 Lincoln Heights, Montecito Heights</td>
<td>38,409</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>25,300</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90039 Elysian Valley, Atwater Village</td>
<td>29,306</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>45,615</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ZIP codes surrounding the park include a high percentage of Latinos, people born in another country, and households speaking languages other than English. The median household varies from a low of $20,152 in 90012 (Chinatown, Solano Canyon, Civic Center) to a high of $45,615 in 90039 Elysian Valley, Atwater Village.

**Demographics in Neighborhoods Surrounding Los Angeles State Historic Park**

Los Angeles State Historic Park is located in the central city north planning region of the City of Los Angeles, in council district 1, currently represented by Ed Reyes. The park is also in close proximity to council districts 13 (represented by Council member Eric Garcetti) and 14 (represented by Council member José Huizar), and 9 (represented by Council member Jan Perry). The neighborhoods immediately surrounding the park include Chinatown, Lincoln Heights, Solano Canyon, and Elysian Valley, and Downtown, represented by ZIP codes 90012, 90013, 90014, 90015, 90017, 90021, 90026, 90029, 90031, 90039, 90065. The park itself is located in ZIP code 90012, adjacent to the Los Angeles River just north of downtown. Similar to Río de Los Angeles State Park visitors will come by many modes of transportation, including on foot, bicycle, car, train, and bus. The historical designation of the state park will also serve to draw in visitors from beyond the neighborhood and even

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Median household income ($)</th>
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</tr>
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<td>38.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>20,152</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90013 Downtown LA</td>
<td>9,727</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>8,855</td>
<td>58.1</td>
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<td>90014 Downtown LA</td>
<td>3,518</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8,633</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90015 Downtown LA</td>
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<td>29.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>86.1</td>
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<td>29.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>14,847</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90021 Downtown LA</td>
<td>3,003</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>53.4</td>
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<td>35.6</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>13,053</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90026 Echo Park, Silver Lake</td>
<td>73,671</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>62.8</td>
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<td>53.7</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>28,651</td>
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<tr>
<td>90029 Downtown LA</td>
<td>41,697</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>17.9</td>
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</table>
beyond Los Angeles. The historical significance of the Los Angeles State Historic Park and its place in the history of Los Angeles can provide an additional appeal for visitors throughout the southern California region, the state, and beyond.

The ZIP codes that neighbor the Los Angeles State Historic Park feature a significant population of foreign-born individuals and households speaking a language other than English in the home. The highest median household incomes at $38,271 are found in 90065 (Cypress Park/Glassell Park/Mount Washington) and the lowest at $8,633 in 90014 (downtown Los Angeles). Latinos make up the largest racial/ethnic group in all but 2 downtown ZIP codes (90013, 90014) and Chinatown/Solano Canyon/Civic Center (90012).

**Community Perspectives**
While the demographic analysis provides important information about the neighborhoods and residents surrounding the Los Angeles State Historic Park and Río de Los Angeles State Park, it is also crucial to identify perspectives and opinions about the new parks to establish a framework for park and community connections. In order to better understand the potential community benefits of the new parks, a range of interviews, participation/observation in meetings and events, and observations of park activities and use were conducted. Recent research, educational forums, and community evaluations undertaken and/or sponsored by the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute regarding the park sites, the northeast Los Angeles communities, the transportation corridors that are adjacent to the parks, and L.A. River and Arroyo Seco issues were also drawn upon as part of this analysis (Vallianatos and Shaffer 2003).

The 29 individuals interviewed were drawn from a convenience sample that included nearby residents, representatives from non-profit organizations involved in LA River/open space advocacy efforts, city staff, and community leaders. An interview guide with open-ended questions was used to solicit feedback on park development, opportunities for connecting to community members and maximizing community benefits, and concerns and suggestions about the park developments. The interviewees were all stakeholders with varying degrees of experiences with the park sites, and while there are overall trends in the analysis of the interview data, the sampling process doesn't yield conclusions that are generalizable to the neighborhood at large. Some had been engaged in the recent debates over the site and eventual land acquisition, others had been involved in interim park uses such as the Not A Cornfield project, and some aspect of the planning process for the parks, such as the Cornfield Advisory Committee. Meetings that were attended included community sessions associated with the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan process, the Friends of the Cornfield working group, the California Endowment’s Center for Healthy Communities, and various Not A Cornfield events.

Through the interviews, meetings, and observations of activities, the following issues emerged as key to the success of the parks. While not every interviewee mentioned all of these themes, these were the predominant ones that became evident. The section below is a summary of these themes, while section three of this report contains recommendations for maximizing community benefits from the parks.

**Access to the park**
In order for people to visit and enjoy the new state parks, they must be easily accessible by a variety of transportation modes. Several interviewees were concerned about access to the park on foot, bicycle, and via public transportation.
Pedestrians voiced support for clean and well-lit sidewalks, crossing lights, and shade trees and vegetation to beautify the walkway. Specifically at Los Angeles State Historic Park, there were suggestions for a street signal at the intersection of Ann Street and N. Spring Street, to facilitate safe crossing, especially for residents and students walking from William Mead Homes and Ann Street Elementary School. Bus riders suggested that service could be improved by extending the DASH bus route further down Spring Street instead of down Main Street. For passengers on the Gold Line, prominent signage at the Chinatown Station is needed to direct riders to the park entrance on N. Spring Street, since the flow of traffic out of the station is geared toward directing people to Chinatown. One of the more challenging access issues at the Los Angeles State Historic Park is access to the park from N. Broadway, as there is currently no access point on that side of the park, limiting access from Echo Park, Solano Canyon and Chinatown. A footbridge crossing the Gold Line to connect Broadway to the park, similar to what had existed in earlier years, would significantly expand access to the park.

At Río de Los Angeles State Park, new landscaping and lighting fixtures have improved the walking experience along San Fernando Road, otherwise marked by loud and fast-moving traffic. Despite these improvements, there still remain stretches of San Fernando Road that are paved on only one side of the street. Improvements for public transportation could include ample and consistent signage directing riders from the Gold Line stop at Lincoln Heights to the park. These improvements at both parks will make the park easier to get to and facilitate an enjoyable park experience.

Safety and Security
Several interviewees that lived or worked in the area expressed concern about adequate safety and security at the two new parks. They noted that due to the nature of urban life in Los Angeles, crime is a reality, and they suggested preventative measures that can be integrated into the design and staffing of the park to promote safety and security. Throughout the Not A Cornfield project at the Cornfield, as one interviewee noted, there was a constant presence on the site by project staff, visitors, and security guards. The presence of an on-site security guard created a strong sense of security among visitors.

Landscape design can also influence a sense of safety. While nearly all interviewees expressed a desire for lush vegetation on the site, one mentioned the need to balance safety with landscaping, so as not to create too many “hidden areas,” as he described it. He was interested in making sure that the landscaping and
vegetative growth didn’t create dark places that might cover illicit activities. In designing Río de Los Angeles State Park, landscape architects considered safety and view of the park from San Fernando Road, planning and constructing a berm next to the road and sidewalk to obstruct a full view of the park from the road to prevent drive-by shootings.

Interviewees also cited the role of adequate staffing at both parks in order to discourage illegal activity. Stakeholders also expressed the viewpoint that regular maintenance was important to keep the parks well kept and to instill in the community a sense of pride of ownership that is believed to lead to park stewardship. CSP could contract with local groups or the California Conservation Corps that hire local youth, as allowed by the Public Resource Code in Section 14000(f) to perform projects that enhance or develop natural resources, and maintain environmentally important lands and water (Río de Los Angeles State Park EIR).

**Interpretation and Education**

Both parks have the potential to provide a wealth of opportunities for interpretation and education for a variety of audiences, from families to scout troops, school classes to tour groups. Feedback from stakeholders underscored the importance of well-planned and executed interpretation and education in a variety of disciplines. Due to the multicultural population of the residents surrounding the parks, the Los Angeles region, and the state as a whole, the parks will need to offer interpretation in multiple languages so as to reach the largest possible proportion of the population.

While interviewees in general saw the benefits of some built structures, there were several who expressed concern that any interpretive structures not take up too much space as to overshadow the open space resources of the park.

An educator interviewed for this report was especially excited about the opportunity to link the state parks with local schools for educational field trips. He suggested that for the field trips to be most relevant to the students, educational offerings should link directly to the curriculum and to educational standards mandated by the state. Possible linkages between the parks and the curriculum could include topics in the biological sciences, archeology, anthropology, and history. The educator also commented that one of the barriers for field trips was the cost of transporting students to the site, so a walking field trip from a school to the park would eliminate the need for funding buses. Such a walking trip would need to include safe passageways and pedestrian signals to ensure student safety.

**Connectivity**

Stakeholders are concerned about general connectivity of the two new state parks, specifically how they are connected to each other, to other parks in the region,
to the Los Angeles River and greenway, and to other cultural resources in the neighborhoods. As its name implies, Río de Los Angeles State Park does have riverfront access at parcel G-1, though access to that part of the park is currently limited. Los Angeles State Historic Park is not connected directly to the river but is in close proximity from the northern end of the park. Stakeholders interviewed for this report were very interested in future land acquisitions that could include riverfront property and realize the vision of a Los Angeles River Greenway along the entire span of the river’s course. Other ideas to connect the parks to the river, even where this is no physical connection, include interpretive elements and references to the river and its importance in the founding and history of Los Angeles.

Connections between the two parks can be facilitated through branding opportunities such as common signage, joint brochures and interpretive materials, easy access between the two parks, and special events that span both parks. Partnerships and joint promotion with area cultural institutions, especially near downtown Los Angeles, can promote linkages between area attractions.

**Connecting community to the parks: Not a Cornfield**

Nearly all the interviewees had attended at least one of the Not A Cornfield programs spanning from the summer of 2005 through early 2006. Led by artist Lauren Bon and funded by the Annenberg Foundation, of which Bon is a trustee, the Not A Cornfield project utilized the site of the future state park for a “living sculpture in the form of a cornfield.” (http://www.notacornfield.info/mission.html). In addition to rows of corn planted on the 32-acre site, there was also a small hand planted garden tended by project staff and community members, a round drum circle/seating area, and a mile long path around the perimeter of the cornfield. The program faced opposition in its early stages by nonprofit organizations representing the community, and changes to the original design of the project were made to address some of these concerns, including the provision of a grassy area on the south end of the site instead of corn rows throughout the entire site. Despite early opposition, over time the program was praised for its success in bringing people from the surrounding neighborhoods and around Los Angeles to the Cornfield site for a wide range of cultural, artistic, agricultural programs. By welcoming visitors to the site and providing programming, security, and a venue for informal physical activity from 6am to 8pm, the project drew both attention and visitors to the site, which had long been vacant and neglected.
Park usage
Interviewees were asked what kind of usage they envisioned at the future park sites. Respondents articulated a desire for a community space that is natural and open, with shade trees, picnic tables, areas to barbeque, interpretive/educational information, family space, facilities for concerts, plays, bike-riding. They said they had heard other people talk about wanting a skate park, a gym, and a community garden. Respondents generally were pleased with the leasing of acreage at Río de Los Angeles State Park for formal sports fields and didn’t see a need for formal sports fields at Los Angeles State Historic Park. With the new fields at Río de Los Angeles State Park, interviewees felt that Los Angeles State Historic Park should be designed for other purposes.

Community Participation/Input
The majority of interviewees for this report had attended at least one planning meeting for the new state parks or the LA River Revitalization Master Plan. Several interviewees were very involved in the process, including service on the Cornfield State Park Advisory Committee. A few of those interviewed had not been very involved in the planning meeting. The interviewees were asked how community participation and input could be solicited to better plan for the park’s design and programming activities. Interviewees suggested that at least two weeks notice be given, and they shared several examples of other community meetings that failed due to insufficient lead-time. They suggested that refreshments helped to draw participants to meetings and that translation should always be provided. Furthermore, they noted that maps and other visual materials were helpful to paint a picture of development possibilities. There was a great deal of interest among interviewees about the design competition at the Los Angeles State Historic Park and the public input process of the competition.
SECTION THREE

THE STATE PARKS IN THE COMMUNITY AND THE COMMUNITY LOOKS TO THE PARKS: RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of the Los Angeles State Historic Park (Cornfield) and Río de Los Angeles State Park (Taylor Yard) provides key opportunities to identify and maximize a number of community, environmental, and economic benefits made possible in part by the location, recent history, and broad constituent base for the two parks. Potential barriers also need to be addressed, such as limited funding for maintenance, difficulties in sustaining community collaboration, and the relatively unique status of these two state parks in inner city areas, located on what had been previously identified as “brownfield” sites. The recommendations discussed below follow directly from the themes regarding the role of the two parks in the community and the region that have been identified as part of this assessment. They are also informed by the literature review conducted for this report and reference some of the innovative approaches that maximize key benefits and that are also applicable to both of the parks.

Recommendation #1: Establish a Community Liaison Position to facilitate support and connection between the parks and the City of Los Angeles, other public entities, foundations, and/or non-profit associations.

The lack of resources for park maintenance has been identified as a major barrier to park upkeep and use. In addition, the limited ability of park officials to develop and implement community-oriented programs and new park features can further hamper connections to the community. These barriers could become even more pronounced in the development of the two parks, due to funding constraints. The new parks, however, also provide important opportunities to serve as a community connector and environmental bridge; e.g., to downtown Los Angeles, Chinatown and Lincoln Heights with respect to the Los Angeles State Historic Park, and to the northeast corridor, linked directly to the path of the Los Angeles River, for both the Río de Los Angeles State Park and Los Angeles State Historic Park sites. There is strong interest among many park advocates to establish the parks as community places that strengthen local neighborhoods and also provide important regional landmarks that can help give definition to Los Angeles. To pursue such opportunities will require access to new funding sources and direct linkages with community organizations, public officials, private foundations, cultural groups, K-12 and higher education institutions, local park and recreation agencies and local businesses. The capacity of California State Parks to pursue such objectives is limited.

In order to better pursue such objectives, two related approaches should be undertaken. The first would involve the development of a community liaison position to expand the opportunities for community-connected work. This position could be established through a combination of state and other funding.
Among possible roles for the community liaison would be to identify funding sources, help establish and/or link to community groups focused on park issues, develop a planning and community input process for community programs, help arrange cultural and educational programs, develop oral history programs that link to the histories of the sites, neighborhoods, and the L.A. River, and establish community docent positions to help maintain the park and implement programs.

The second would involve the facilitation of linkages with the City of Los Angeles as well as other public entities and/or non-profit associations to strengthen the role of the parks in the community and the region. In addition, such linkages could include funding organizations which have committed resources and established a physical presence adjacent to or near the parks, such as the Annenberg Foundation and The California Endowment’s Center for Healthy Communities. These linkages could entail the development of joint programs to better serve the parks and the surrounding communities as well as expand the parks’ link to the L.A. River. This could include programs to increase access to the parks via transit and the L.A. River, streets that could be landscaped to enhance the view from and to the parks while reducing noise from traffic, the development of a farmers’ markets, community garden plots, and/or native plant nursery, cultural programs, and community representation in park planning and programs.

Recommendation #2: Develop pathways to create linkages and enhance the identity of the parks.

The parks have the capacity to serve as anchors or nodes in a series of pathways that could be designed between several locations. These could include a pathway between the two parks; a pathway between the parks, the bridges, and the L.A. River; a pathway connecting the parks to the planned bike path along the river; a northeast or Arroyo corridor connecting the Arroyo Seco to the L.A. River and the two park sites; connections established with all transportation corridors adjacent to the parks; and pathways between the Cornfield and Union Station and La Placita/Olvera Street through the northeast side of Downtown Los Angeles. Several design features could create a consistent image linking to the parks. These features might include walkways with designated landmarks; linked murals; published guides; or dedicated bike and pedestrian pathways. The parks can serve as initial entry and end points for such pathways and can include materials, art, and maps to identify linked sites. The parks could also be integrated into annual bike and walk events, such as the June 2003 ArroyoFest event where several thousand Angelenos rode their bikes and walked on the Arroyo Seco Parkway/Pasadena Freeway.

The original plan for ArroyoFest (though not feasible due to timing and park development factors) was to have the Cornfield serve as the end destination of the walk and bike ride and the site for a community festival (eventually located at Sycamore Grove Park). In addition, the pathway concepts, including a landscaping element, could be linked to the Scenic Byway designation of the Arroyo Seco Parkway/Pasadena Freeway, also a source of funding for such initiatives. The LA City street designations should be modified for streets adjacent to the parks, to allow for safe pedestrian passage and make the streets part of the park zone. These recommendations are consistent with
both parks’ general plans and environmental impact reports, and successful development of linkages between the parks will require the collaborative efforts of multiple agencies.

**Recommendation #3: Create better access points to the parks from the Gold Line Stations and adjacent neighborhoods.**

Convenient and safe access by pedestrians, bikers, and transit users are essential for enhancing park use and maintaining a core environmental identity for the park. This can be accomplished by establishing dedicated footpaths for the two parks from the Gold Line stations at Chinatown and Avenue 26; changing traffic signals (and establishing new crosswalks) for adjacent streets that feed into the parks; creating a bike lane that approaches and leaves the park sites; and encouraging better bus and DASH connections by creating a stop at the park entrances, working with LAUSD to secure funding to create access from school site #13 to G-1. The approach to parking should be framed by a minimal rather than maximum-use approach, both in identifying the number of parking spots required, not extending beyond the parking places already designated, and establishing landscape features that minimize or reduce parking’s environmental impacts such as pervious paving systems.

Both parks have significant barriers to access. At Río de Los Angeles State Park the park is accessible from San Fernando Road, but there are no access points from the Los Angeles River. At Los Angeles State Historic Park there is access from North Spring Street, but not from Broadway. Creative ways to overcome these barriers will increase access to the park from multiple directions.

City Planning Staff, with the help of the community, need to examine the Transportation Element of the General Plan that includes the Northeast Community Plan for Río de Los Angeles State Park and Downtown North Community plan for Los Angeles State Historic Park to create a community friendly transportation access plan.

**Recommendation #4: Collaborate with the City of Los Angeles to enhance the 35 foot easement along North Spring Street that enhances rather than detracts from the parks’ experience.**

This recommendation is particularly significant for the Los Angeles State Historic Park site. Currently North Spring Street is a barren, wide street that creates a visual eyesore, lack of shade, and any other feature of the landscape that could enhance rather than detract from CSP’s adjacent Los Angeles State Historic Park property. Landscaping the 35-foot easement along North Spring Street and making it a connector and attraction to the park can provide calming to traffic and buffer noise. Planting shade trees will enhance the visual and environmental values of the overall park environment, and utilizing the street as
an addition to the park’s features will make the park and the surrounding area more inviting to visitors. The City of Los Angeles’ plans to widen North Sprint Street should include joint planning initiatives to ensure complimentary development for fences, parking, and seamless transitions between the park and its surrounding areas.

**Recommendation #5: Develop food themes that provide historical links and can also enhance community food security and the visual landscapes associated with food.**

Plans have been explored to develop a farmers’ market at or near the Los Angeles State Historic Park site. Food-related themes for the parks also have historical relevance since the zanja madre served as the irrigation ditch for adjacent farmlands, and the areas bordering the L.A. River were considered productive agricultural lands whose soils became enriched from the periodic flooding of the river. Los Angeles’ rich and varied agricultural history, which can be traced back as far as the period preceding the development of the Pueblo, continued well into the first third of the 20th century.

The development of a farmers’ market at the Los Angeles State Historic Park site and exploration of possible food fairs at both parks (as well as exploration of a farmers’ market at or near the Río de Los Angeles State Park) would be a valuable first step in establishing a food theme for the parks. In addition, a community garden, including possible ethnic or cultural themes (e.g., the concept of a Thai and Chinese herb garden) would also enhance such a theme.

**Recommendation #6: Establish linkages to each of the areas adjacent to the parks, including Lincoln Heights, Chinatown, and the northeast part of downtown Los Angeles from Union Station and La Placita to the parks.**

The literature review indicated the importance of parks in urban areas for adjacent neighborhoods and workplaces, particularly for residents, employees, and local businesses that are within walking or biking distance from the parks (<½ to 1 mile). Linkages to encourage park use among area residents can be established through park-related programs (e.g., concerts, health fairs, park festivals, etc.); implementation of community-identified park features (e.g., jogging and walking paths in both parks; soccer fields in Río de Los Angeles State Park, etc.); community docent programs; and engagement in local area community and transportation planning, such as a Central City North Master Plan that could be developed for the northeast downtown area between Union Station and the parks. Features of the park that enhance local area use (e.g., access and safety considerations) need to be identified and implemented at an early stage of park development.

**Recommendation #7: Establish a regional identity for the parks that emphasize their “power of place” historical roots, their environmental features, and their connections to the L.A. River.**

The recent history of the Los Angeles State Historic Park and Río de Los Angeles State Park sites, as well as their multiple historical identities that pre-date the founding of the Pueblo and extend through the 20th century, can help establish a regional identity for the parks. The parks can further enhance those regional identities by emphasizing environmental themes (open space in the inner city, transforming a former brownfield into a usable “green field”, the food-related themes such as the community garden or farmers’ market, and landscaping designs that emphasize specific environmental attributes). The most
visible of those regional identities that should be further nurtured and developed is the connection to the Los Angeles River. This could be implemented through park programs, walk and bike access to the river, linkages to the L.A. River Center and Gardens through joint programs, exhibits, etc., and the development of maps, guide books, and other materials that link the parks to the river. Power of place identities are important for developing a sense of community ownership of the parks. An example of a power of place initiative would be to commemorate the invaluable role of the late Chi Mui and his contributions toward securing open space for Angelenos. This linkage would be especially meaningful to neighboring Chinatown residents and to the broader Chinese community in the region.

**Recommendation #8: Establish a strong “physical activity” dimension to the park environments as part of park use. Also provide a strong “contemplative,” quiet space to park use that emphasizes the concept of “open space” in the city**

In relation to its recreational function, both parks should provide for jogging and walking paths around the park perimeter and provide a link to jogging, biking, and walking paths adjacent to the parks (and also linking the parks to other sites). These important physical activity benefits have become a significant community benefit not otherwise available in areas where walking, jogging, or biking face significant barriers present in the existing streetscape. In relation to its contemplative features, both parks should be landscaped to provide shaded environments, visual sightscapes of different views of the city and/or the L.A. River, and small, diverse and protected micro-environments that establish a connection to native plants and other important environmental features in the park landscaping. While both parks are reconstructed environments, they offer important connections, by their relative size and location, to the idea of reinventing “nature in the city” and the benefits associated with access to green space that have been identified in the literature review.

**Recommendation #9: Develop a major educational program related to the parks**

The local area schools could benefit significantly through a range of educational programs established through or in conjunction with existing park programs. This could include historical programs, farmers’ market and community garden demonstrations, L.A. River and park related tours, river clean-up activities, arts and cultural programs, and science-based field work. To develop these programs, CSP needs to work with school districts, schools, and other educational partners to define subject areas related to the parks, develop curriculums to meet standards, and include students in the program planning. Other innovative ideas include developing student internships and community-based learning opportunities and linking community college certificate programs with the park and its employment needs.

**Recommendation #10: Develop continuing park programming.**

Park visibility and area resident and regional connections to the park can be enhanced through a format of regular programming, including regularly set times for on-going events (e.g., Thursday or Friday evenings; Saturday mornings for children-related events). Weekly programs could include talks, presentations, teach-ins and panel discussions of interest to park users and community residents; cultural events such
as film screenings, concerts, dance performances, or art displays; storytelling and oral history sessions; and presentations by well-known public figures (e.g., Hollywood film stars, writers or directors who used the L.A. River and/or the rail yards and park site as the backdrop to a film sequence). The regular programming can also be shared with community-based organizations, K-12 schools, higher education, and other community or public agencies and/or co-sponsored (or co-hosted at other nearby locations) with entities like the L.A. River Center and Gardens, the Friends of the Cornfield, or local Neighborhood Councils.

**Recommendation #11: Explore the feasibility of developing an interactive web site to provide programming information, park use feedback, and visual and historical experiences of the two parks, the L.A. River, local communities, and different dimensions of Los Angeles itself.**

Through the community liaison position an interactive web site should be established to explore collaborative opportunities that enhance or maximize visitor services, expand recreational and educational development, and develop a sense of community ownership and participation in park programming and activities. Such a web site could be developed through in-kind support, targeted fundraising by the community liaison and park partners, and/or partnerships with groups or foundations such as UCLA’s REMAP. REMAP is a program that brings artists and engineers together to examine the sources and processes of new techno-cultural changes that explore new modes of expression, interrogate cultural biases of technology, and create pragmatic tools for community-specific applications.

**Recommendation #12: Identify buildings and land near the parks that can accommodate the development and preservation of affordable housing, to guarantee that the development of these parks encourages income diversity rather than gentrification.**

The promise of these new urban parks is to create opportunities for community engagement, physical activity, tourism, and recreation. It would be a misuse of public funds if, by creating these urban parks, the existing mixed-income communities are destroyed by gentrification. The proximity of these urban parks and their surrounding residential communities to downtown LA, which is undergoing intense pressures toward gentrification, requires that policy makers and community residents recognize the tools available to them to mitigate displacement. CSP should work with local public officials to help develop a neighborhood stabilization plan. This can be in the form of public policies that can help strengthen the viability of mixed income communities by protecting the existing inventory of affordable housing and adding new mixed income housing on sites near the parks. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including the adoption of an inclusionary housing ordinance by the city, the purchase and renovation of existing residential buildings by nonprofit organizations in order to preserve them as mixed income housing, outreach and education of renters regarding their rights, and the encouragement of mixed-use development in the areas that combines schools, libraries, retail, and mixed-income residential development.

*Castelar Apartments, affordable housing development in Chinatown. Photo courtesy of Livable Places*
CONCLUSION

Important and significant opportunities are available for Río de Los Angeles State Park and Los Angeles State Historic Park to serve as prime community resources for environmental habitat and restoration, recreational activities, social gathering points, physical activity outlets, and education and interpretation. Both parks have the potential to serve as focal points in northeast/downtown Los Angeles to provide definitive spaces for park users to connect to the city’s past, present, and future, to urban nature, and to each other.

In general, park developments are associated with a number of benefits related to property values, public health, social connectivity, and environmental conditions. In order to maximize these benefits and lessen any negative impacts associated with park development, collaborative efforts between California State Parks and other agencies are required to help establish a power of place framework, preserve affordable housing, enhance strong urban greening benefits, adequately maintain parks to promote neighborhood safety, improve access to transportation resources, and provide linkages to other parks and area resources.


LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

James Rojas, Latino Urban Forum, Downtown Resident
Isabelle Duvivier, Duvivier and Associates
Lewis MacAdams, Friends of the Los Angeles, Downtown Resident
Lauren Bon, Not A Cornfield
Cara di Massa, LA Times
Cathy Ortega, William Mead Homes Residents’ Association and Not A Cornfield
Joel Reynolds, Natural Resources Defense Council
Tim Grabiel, Natural Resources Defense Council
Jill Sourial, Council District 1, Councilmember Ed Reyes’ Office
Larry Frank, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa’s office
Larry Kaplan, Trust for Public Land
Elva Yanez, Trust for Public Land
Chuek Yan Choi, Castelar Elementary School
Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, UCLA Urban Planning
Beth Steckler, Livable Places
Deborah Schoch, LA Times
Gwen Walden, Center for Healthy Communities, California Endowment
Jean Miao, Center for Healthy Communities, California Endowment
Joe Linton, Friends of the Los Angeles River
Tim Brick, Board of Directors, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Pedro Navidad, Downtown Resident
Fabian Wagmister, UCLA and Resident near the Cornfield
Dara Gelof, Resident near the Cornfield
Jerry Vivas, coordinator at William Mead Homes
Chanchanit Martorell, Thai Community Development Center
Sean Woods, California State Parks
Dianna Martinez, California State Parks
James Newland, California State Parks
Jay Gonzalez, Los Angeles Unified School District