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April 28th, 2026

Honorable Councilmembers
Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations
City Clerk, Room 395, City Hall
Attention: Rita Moreno

Subject: City of Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission Report – C.F.#26-0489

BACKGROUND

The Charter Reform Commission Report dated April 2nd, 2026 recommends an increase to the charter-required minimum funding for the Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) from the current 0.0325% up to 0.065% of assessed value on all property in the City to create more reliable funding for park maintenance, staffing and improvements. RAP supports this proposal in concept and provides this report for additional consideration.

RAP is one of only two city departments - the other being the Library Department - for which the City Charter sets a minimum level of financial support. For decades, funding for the RAP operating budget (annual staffing costs, equipment and supplies) has therefore been comprised of three primary sources: the charter-required allocation of General Fund dollars; revenue collection by RAP including fees, permits and other income-generating activities; and additional appropriations from the City's General Fund.

Last year the Department completed a comprehensive Park Needs Assessment that looked back at the last 25 years of investments in the park system and then evaluated present and future recreational and park needs throughout the City.¹ This assessment highlights the steep cuts to RAP that have occurred since the 2009 Great Recession, when the City began requiring the RAP Fund to reimburse the General Fund for "indirect" costs (employee benefits and city support services) and pay directly for utility expenses. These costs are covered by the General Fund for most City departments, but due to the budget crisis at the time these costs were shifted to the RAP Fund to avoid the impact of increasing RAP's operating budget as assessed property value increased over time.

This change in fiscal policy has led to dramatic increases in reimbursements to the General Fund and utility payments from the RAP Fund, having increased each fiscal year from \$38 million in 2010 to \$148.5 million in the proposed budget, which now represents 40% of the Department's overall annual budget. **The result has been disproportionate staffing reductions and service level cutbacks despite the growth of the park system and the expansion of the Department's operating responsibilities.** The City's operating budget grew by 68% between FY 2009 and FY 2023, while RAP's operating budget grew by roughly half as much (35%) over the same period after accounting for these General Fund reimbursements. **According to the Trust for Public Land, over the past five years the City of Los Angeles has dropped from 49th to 90th in its annual ParkScore ranking of the 100 largest cities in the country.** At \$92, LA's per-capita park investment is significantly lower than that of peer cities.

¹Visit needs.parks.lacity.org for more information on the Park Needs Assessment.



RESTORING RECREATION AND PARKS SERVICE LEVELS

Increasing the minimum Charter-required funding for RAP would provide the Department the resources it needs to restore service levels, address park equity gaps, and reimburse the City's General Fund for the full cost of its operations. Key areas of investment would include:



Recreation Services - Restoring public hours, services and programs at the City's 123 recreation centers, senior centers, and its museums and historic sites



Public Pools & Beaches - Restoring cut-backs to public hours at the city's 25 year-round and 27 summer pools and support funding for City owned beaches



Facility Repairs - Addressing deferred maintenance and repairs of critical park building infrastructure, and improving response to graffiti and vandalism



Park Maintenance - Restoring grounds-keeping and restroom cleaning staffing at 500 parks citywide



Park Safety - Restoring staffing levels to the Park Ranger Division to support initiatives like the park gate closure program, while also enhancing broader park safety and fire risk mitigation and prevention



Emergency Management - Dedicating appropriate staffing and resources for RAP's mass care responsibilities including cooling centers, shelters and evacuation centers



Homelessness Services - Restoring RAP's homelessness response teams to an optimal level to ensure a proactive approach to connecting Angelenos to services and addressing encampments across city parks



Planning and Project Delivery - Restoring and expanding staffing capacity in grants administration, park planning and project delivery



Park Equity - Addressing gaps in park equity through the acquisition of new parks and the activation of additional community school parks



Park Trees, Nature Areas & Climate Action - Restoring and expanding staffing for the management of natural resources, including the City's park trees, ecologically sensitive areas and lakes, and advancing nature-based solutions

¹Visit needs.parks.lacity.org for more information on the Park Needs Assessment.



PARK INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

As mentioned above, RAP recently completed a Park Needs Assessment (PNA). The PNA estimated a \$2.68 billion one-time capital improvement need to upkeep and renovate the City's existing park facilities, such as gymnasiums, recreation centers, and other park amenities. The PNA also compared the level of park amenities per capita currently provided in Los Angeles with that of other major cities. The PNA found that an additional \$12.31 billion in capital investment would be needed to bring Los Angeles up to the average park amenity per capita standard, or Level of Service, of other major peer cities.

To date, the charter-required minimum funding allocation has been utilized to support RAP's annual operating budget including staffing, equipment, materials and contractual services. Capital improvement funding for major park projects is typically sourced from local, state and federal grants, special funds such as in-lieu park development fees (i.e. Quimby fees), and other one-time funding sources including Capital and Technology Improvement Expenditure Program (CTIEP) monies. It should be noted that the Proposition K assessment expires this year.

An increase to the charter-required minimum funding allocation for RAP would greatly enhance staffing capacity to perform park planning and capital project delivery. However further analysis and consideration would be needed to determine what portion of the proposed funding increase would be allocated on an annual basis to capital construction. Additionally, long-term capital planning for park facilities and infrastructure will continue to be aligned with the City's overall capital improvement planning.

FISCAL IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS

It is important for the public to understand that increasing the minimum funding level to RAP set by the City Charter would not be a tax increase or a new tax. Increasing the percentage of assessed value set aside for parks would only increase the share of funding that RAP receives from the City's General Fund each year, which would have a fiscal impact on other City funding priorities.

The minimum charter- required funding allocation for Fiscal Year 2025-26 based on 0.00325 percent of assessed value of city property is \$292 million. The proposed increase of the charter-required minimum funding for RAP from the current 0.0325% up to 0.065% of assessed value on all property in the City would result in a total minimum appropriation of approximately \$584 million annually, based on current assessed value of City property.

RAP recognizes the significant fiscal impact of such an increase, and recommends that the City Council consider a **multi-year phase in approach** similar to the four-year phase in that was approved by voters as part of Measure L, which increased the minimum charter funding level for the Library Department in 2011. A phase in could mitigate the year-over-year impact to the General Fund and could support a service restoration plan over multiple years.

Sincerely,



JIMMY KIM
General Manager

¹Visit needs.parks.lacity.org for more information on the Park Needs Assessment.

