



To: Mayor and City Council

From: City Manager

Meeting Date: March 28, 2023

Subject: APPROVE RESOLUTION INITIATING APPLICATION TO THE LOS ANGELES LOCAL AREA FORMATION COMMISSION FOR THE FORMATION OF THE LOWER SAN GABRIEL RIVER RECREATION AND PARK DISTRICT (SB 268)

Recommendation:

1. Approve a resolution authorizing staff to initiate an application to the Los Angeles Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO) for the formation of the Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Parks District;
2. Authorize the City Manager to execute, all documents required to submit, process, and implement said application in a form acceptable to the City Attorney; and
3. Approve the Categorical Exemption for the proposed annexation under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 20, as a change in the organization of local agencies.

Fiscal Impact:

The LAFCO application fee is expected to be approximately \$9,000, which is included in the FY 2022-23 General Fund appropriations. No additional funds are needed at this time.

Background:

In October of 2017, California Senate Bill (SB) 693, sponsored by former Senator Tony Mendoza, was signed into law authorizing a local agency to initiate the formation of the Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Parks District (SGR District) with a deadline of January 1, 2020, which has since then expired. Subsequently, California Senate Bill (SB) 268 was introduced by Senator Archuleta and signed into law in October of 2021, extending the formation deadline to January 1, 2024.

As sponsors of SB 268, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles River and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) is a critical partner providing direct administrative support, aiding with outreach and engagement to local cities and jurisdictional authorities, and offering technical

assistance. The RMC was created by the California State Legislature in 1999 with a mission to preserve open space and habitat in order to provide for low-impact recreation and educational uses, wildlife habitat restoration and protection, and watershed improvements within our jurisdiction.

Discussion:

The 2016 Los Angeles County Parks Needs Assessment determined that the City of Pico Rivera has only 1.3 acres of parks and open space for every 1,000 residents, which is far below the Los Angeles County average of 3.3 acres and the national average of approximately 6 acres. In 2020, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) informed the City of Pico Rivera that the Whittier Narrow Dam Safety Modification Project (WND Project) would result in permanent impacts to Streamland Park (14-acres), the Pico Rivera Golf Course (30-acres), and Bicentennial Park (60-acres). Pico Rivera is estimated to lose approximately 104-acres, or 57% of its total parks land within the city. The WND Project will also permanently eliminate Avenida Vicente Fernandez (formerly known as Sports Arena Drive), the primary access road to the Pico Rivera Sports Arena, which will have a devastating effect on economic activity in the region associated with large-scale entertainment events.

Based on these realities, the City of Pico Rivera developed a comprehensive framework to prioritize and aggressively expand access to parks, open space, trails, and recreational opportunities while simultaneously stimulating economic development along the San Gabriel River and the Rio Hondo. SB 268 is a critical component to help achieve that goal. As a result, Senator Bob Archuleta identified the City of Pico Rivera as the most suitable agency to lead the establishment of the SGR District.

The Lower San Gabriel River is largely defined by the Whittier Narrows Dam on the north and the Pacific Ocean in the City of Long Beach to the south. According to the CalEnviroScreen 4.0, many census tracts along the river are categorized as “disadvantaged communities” due to disproportionate exposure to poor air quality resulting from congested freeways such as the I-605, I-5, SR-91, and the I-405. The San Gabriel River also features a Class-I bike path that connects to numerous points of interest thereby serving as a backbone to the regional active transportation network in Los Angeles County. Beyond its primary purpose as a flood protection and control channel, the Lower San Gabriel River offers an opportunity to introduce new parks and recreation space, revitalize natural habitats, promote new economic activity, and enhance the micro-mobility system.

Funding to enhance existing parks or to build new parks is typically made available through competitive grant programs at all levels of government. However, identifying a steady stream of resources to maintain and operate those parks in perpetuity is often the most pressing challenge. For example, the State Water Bond (Proposition 1) provides funding for the revitalization of the Lower Los Angeles River watershed, including a \$30 million

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direct allocation to the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and a share of \$100 million for urban creek restoration. These funds are strictly reserved for acquisition and development of facilities and cannot be used for operations or maintenance. Hence, the need to establish a long-term, unified funding strategy that benefits all cities throughout the San Gabriel River corridor.

SB 268 authorizes Los Angeles County cities along the Lower San Gabriel River to form a multi-jurisdictional Special Assessment District to:

1. Promote the development of open space and parks along the Lower San Gabriel River.
2. Identify funding and resources to promote the revitalization of the Lower San Gabriel River and open spaces along the river for the benefit and enjoyment of local communities.
3. Acquire, construct, improve, maintain, and operate parks and open space along the Lower San Gabriel River.

Furthermore, SB 268 specifies that the initial board of directors shall consist of no more than 15 members, as follows:

An appointee from each City Council:

- City of Downey
- City of Whittier
- City of Pico Rivera
- City of Norwalk
- City of Santa Fe Springs
- City of Artesia
- City of Bellflower
- City of Cerritos
- City of Lakewood
- City of Hawaiian Gardens
- City of Long Beach
- 2 public members appointed by the LA County Board of Supervisors. Members must reside in the Lower San Gabriel River region.
- The executive officer of the RMC
- The initial board may appoint 1 public member residing and representing a non-profit organization that serves the Lower San Gabriel River region; specializes in open space public education and outdoor activities.

To ensure due diligence while striving to gain overarching consensus, Pico Rivera in partnership with the RMC (Project Team) have been actively engaging and informing local city managers, public works directors, and parks directors along the Lower San Gabriel River about the overall background, intent and purpose, and next steps associated with SB 268.

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Although each city is generally supportive, staff has prepared the following summary of comments and responses received during the initial round of stakeholder outreach:

#	Comment/Sentiment	Response
1	Desire to develop a united vision, mission, and goals.	The formation process will require a robust public and stakeholder outreach effort to guide the development of a vision, mission, and goals for the district.
2	Desire for additional outreach, especially with City Councils and appropriate City Commissions.	
3	Concerns about further marginalizing property tax local returns.	All entities, including Pico Rivera, are aligned with these concerns and prefer to explore tax increment financing, grants, riverfront development agreements, and other creative funding strategies.
4	Concerns about any new tax assessments of any kind.	
5	Concerns about duplicative goals and objectives with the RMC.	Although the goals are very similar, the RMC does not implement, maintain, or operate parks. As an extension of local jurisdictional authority, the district can facilitate and/or support park implementation, maintenance, and operations.
6	Concerns with including municipalities that are not in direct proximity to the San Gabriel River, may not see benefit.	The goal of establishing the district is not only to revitalize the riverfront areas, but also to extend access and connectivity to the river and regional bike path.

Conclusion:

Staff recommends that the City Council approve the resolution (Enclosure 1) initiating the application process with LAFCO for the formation of the Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Park District with the City of Pico Rivera as lead applicant in partnership with the RMC.



Steve Carmona

SC:JH:smc

- Enclosures: 1) Resolution
 2) Senate Bill 268 – Final Bill Text
 3) Lower San Gabriel River Parks District – Initial Map