

**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

**DATE:** April 4, 2018

**TO:** Councilmember Nury Martinez, Chair  
Councilmember Paul Koretz, Vice Chair  
Councilmember Paul Krekorian  
Councilmember Gilbert A. Cedillo  
Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell  
Energy, Climate Change and Environmental Justice Committee

**FROM:**  Enrique C. Zaldivar, Director and General Manager  
LA Sanitation

**SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO THE MAY 10, 2017 CITY COUNCIL MOTION 25A, CF: 15-0499. RELATIVE TO STRATEGIES TO PROTECT AND IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY IN THE CITY**

On May 10, 2017, City Council (Council File #15-0499 instructed LA Sanitation (LASAN) to report back on options to sustain and enhance biodiversity in the City.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Instruct LASAN to continue to lead the work of the Inter-Departmental Biodiversity Team (IBT), Biodiversity Expert Council (EC) and the Biodiversity Stakeholder Group to complete the next steps in implementing a Biodiversity Index specific for Los Angeles (LA).
2. Instruct LASAN to report back annually on progress toward strengthening Biodiversity policies and strategies and identifying gaps in equity for all communities.
3. Instruct the IBT led by LASAN, to develop a work plan with recommendations, including the feasibility of a Biodiversity Impact Statement that could be included on future Council reports.
4. Instruct LASAN to seek grant funding opportunities, such as the Packard Foundation, and to work with the Office of the City Administrative Office (CAO) and the Office of the City Legislative Analyst (CLA) to identify sources of funding to further develop the Biodiversity Index.
5. Instruct LASAN to lead a series of community engagement workshops for public education and outreach.

## DISCUSSION

On May 10, 2017, City Council adopted a motion to evaluate strategies to protect and enhance biodiversity in the City, and to explore the creation of an "Index" to track future biodiversity change, CF 15-0499, Item 25A. The Motion instructed LASAN to:

- 1) confer with the Mayor's Sustainability Team and City departments to report to the Council on options/programs to sustain and enhance biodiversity in the City, including the City's areas of responsibility outside of the City (for example, the Owens Valley); and
- 2) in conjunction with the specified City departments, solicit input from local universities, non-governmental organizations, and relevant governmental agencies to develop:
  - a. Citywide evaluation metrics for a biodiversity index (modeled after the Singapore Index [SI]) including options on how to protect and enhance citywide biodiversity and mitigate negative impacts;
  - b. Policies/projects that enhance biodiversity and consider the following priorities/strategies, among others: where communities currently lack access to natural areas and open space; where linkages between habitats can be restored, created, or strengthened; and where biodiversity provides a particular benefit to larger ecosystem functions and services;
  - c. Options for community engagement and outreach strategies, with an emphasis on outreach to communities that currently lack access to natural areas and open space.

LASAN established an Interdepartmental Biodiversity Team (IBT) and a Biodiversity Stakeholder Group. Both groups met to discuss biodiversity priorities and lay the foundation for creating a customized Los Angeles Biodiversity Index. Staff presented the City's need for biodiversity metrics, and introduced the purpose and elements of the SI. A strong collaboration is essential in gathering the information to support the Biodiversity project and build environmental resiliency while enhancing the City's livability, sustainability, and social equity.

Multiple Departments have a strong interest in measuring, protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of the City. The LA Zoo and Cabrillo Marine Aquarium are examples of facilities dedicated to biodiversity through visitor education and species protection. The Planning Department uses biodiversity data to support planning projects, including the current update to the General Plan. The Bureau of Engineering is responsible for performing California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analyses to ensure City projects consider environmental impacts as they are developed. Several City departments support the success of biodiversity programs via their land use or operations (LA World Airports, The Port of LA, Department of Water and Power, Recreation and Parks, Bureau of Street Services Urban Forestry Division,

LASAN Watershed Protection Program, Bureau of Engineering). The IBT also included staff from the City Council Offices and Mayor's Office on behalf of the interests of their constituents.

LASAN is committed to continuing to strengthen IBT collaboration. This is critical to the success of implementing a citywide biodiversity program. LASAN will also continue to engage in one-on-one work with departments with regards to ongoing biodiversity-oriented projects to: 1) provide technical expertise and improve project biodiversity performance; and 2) better learn how departments' activities interrelate with biodiversity so that an integrated and actionable Los Angeles Biodiversity Index can be crafted.

The initial Stakeholder Group brought together individuals interested in biodiversity issues. More than 100 individuals were identified with most organizations participating in our presentation of the SI. The group was surveyed for data sets available for consideration and inclusion in measurement of the SI. The meeting ended with a lively discussion of possible indicators important to developing an Index for LA.

Additionally, the Stakeholders were surveyed to identify individuals with expertise and a strong interest in biodiversity issues in order to establish a Biodiversity Expert Council. The Expert Council (EC) was comprised of more than 30 individuals from several universities, non-profit organizations, and City departments working on the issue. Ultimately, the EC met for two days at the LA Zoo on August 30 and 31, 2017 to consider the metrics and available data sets to complete measurement of the "Singapore Index on Cities' Biodiversity" for LA, and to provide recommendations for how the SI could be modified to create a future Index for LA (all participants are listed in the attached report).

The EC discussed and scored the existing data to complete a preliminary measurement for the 23 indicators included in the SI. The formal SI measurement that followed revealed a score of 48 out of 72 possible points. While this score is favorable, it was clear that due to differences such as scale, urban form, climate, geomorphology, and other considerations, SI indicators did not always adapt well to Los Angeles, and that more meaningful metrics are needed to help the City understand biodiversity change over time and address key biodiversity shortcomings. The SI score details and recommendations for improved indicators and management activities are described in the attached 2018 City of Los Angeles Biodiversity Report (the Report).

Moving forward, LASAN recommends that we continue leading this effort by providing additional analysis to develop and implement an effective Biodiversity Index specific to Los Angeles. We propose to conduct further analyses, planning, and implementation in the following areas:

- improve understanding of biodiversity in Los Angeles (Biodiversity Characterization) leading to a series of maps displaying needs and opportunities for enhancement and conservation;
- identify projects in progress that may serve as a testing ground for strategy and Index development; and,

- begin to develop a shared vision with stakeholders and the community at large for the future of biodiversity in Los Angeles (Biodiversity Vision).

Beyond the initial work, additional steps are needed, including:

- develop the LA Index based on the Characterization and Vision;
- consider developing a “decision support tool” to guide implementation and monitor progress;
- develop biodiversity best management practices for Los Angeles;
- evaluate the feasibility of requiring a Biodiversity Impact Statement on future Council Reports; and,
- develop a workplan that would include all of the aforementioned steps as well as cost estimates of how the work would be supported throughout the key City departments.

Ultimately, the LA Index would lead to a series of recommendations, performance metrics, and data layers that would support decision making related to planning, design, and management of biodiversity in the City, and be included in the update of the City’s General Plan and Community Plan updates. The information would also be used to inform and update the Sustainable City pLAN, the Resilient LA Strategy, guide green infrastructure development and major projects including the 2028 Olympics and LA River planning as well as a variety of other land management and development projects.

An important outcome of the Motion has been the development of an appropriate definition of “Biodiversity” for LA. While there are many highly technical ways to describe the concept, it is most easily understood to be *the variety of plants, animals, and other species interacting with their environment to maintain the balance of nature*. In cities, these environments include the natural areas, urban landscapes, and other built environments that these species call home. “Maintaining the balance of nature” in urban areas also includes ensuring that biodiversity provides for the health, safety, and welfare of people. This includes improving air and water quality, cooling the city and adapting to climate change, providing educational and recreational opportunities, and supporting mental health and well-being, among others.

LASAN is pleased to continue to lead this challenging effort and will report back regularly on progress toward achieving measureable benefits for the public and the nature we steward.

#### FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

This is a citywide program and while LASAN can fund some of the work that is directly related to the impact of LASAN operations on biodiversity, other funding sources are required for other aspects of the work. A request for General Fund funding to continue this work has been submitted for consideration in the Fiscal Year 2018-19 budget.

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c: Dr. Mas Dojiri  
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