



City of Culver City

Staff Report

File #: 22-146, Version: 1

Item #:

CC - Discussion of and Direction Regarding (1) Preparation of Detailed Design Plans and Specifications for Opening of the Jackson Avenue Gate to the Ballona Creek Bike Path and Returning to City Council with the Design in September 2021; and (2) Operation of the Jackson Gate and Allowing Pedestrian and Bicycle Access to the Path 24 Hours, 7 Days a Week Versus Establishing Nights Restriction. (continued from 08/09/2021 meeting)

Meeting Date: August 23, 2021

Contact Person/Dept: Heba El-Guindy/Public Works

Phone Number: (310) 253-5628

Fiscal Impact: Yes No

General Fund: Yes No

Public Hearing: **Action Item:** **Attachments:**

Commission Action Required: Yes No **Date:**

Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - City Council (08/18/2021)

Department Approval: Charles D. Herbertson, PW Director/City Engineer (07/28/21)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council discuss and provide direction on (1) preparation of detailed design plans and specifications for opening of the Jackson Avenue gate to the Ballona Creek Bike Path and returning to City Council with the design in September 2021; and (2) operation of the Jackson Gate and allowing pedestrian and bicycle access to the Path 24 hours, 7 days a week versus establishing night restrictions, which could affect the Gate design.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

The Jackson Gate Project is one of many starting points for the discussion around realizing a goal from the 2016-2020 Council Strategic Plan, *Enhance the Restoration and Utilization of Ballona Creek*. The objectives outlined include: a) Make the Ballona Creek Path more walkable, bikeable, and connected to the City; and, b) Make the Ballona Creek a Recreational Attraction. The Ballona Creek's rich history and the changing landscape of Culver City give the City an opportunity to make

the Ballona Creek a unique and desirable water and recreational amenity.

Part of the Strategic Plan Goal is to “work with adjacent property owners to create agreements to improve the Ballona Creek access points and other right-of-way improvements”, which includes discussions of opening up access points and increasing connectivity to transit. Another component is to “identify and determine the feasibility of potential Ballona Creek recreational improvements;” “include Ballona Creek recreational improvements in the Culver City Recreational Master Plan and prepare cost estimates;” and “implement the plan, including the Capital Improvement Project (CIP) budget.” All of these initiatives have started to take shape under the Ballona Creek Revitalization Project.

In 2017, two members of the City Council and the Public Works Director met with Council Member Mike Bonin from LA Council District 11 to discuss opening-up a gate along Ballona Creek that would service the Sunkist Park neighborhood. This potential gate opening is under the jurisdiction of the City of Los Angeles. In exchange, Council Member Bonin requested Culver City consider opening-up other access points to the Creek in its residential areas.

In April 2018, staff met and discussed a community outreach plan to start a discussion about the possibility of using the Jackson Avenue Gate as a Ballona Creek access point. Public Works staff led an AARP grant application to fund the community outreach and possible design plans. This discussion also included the community concerns that emerged during the 2004 Ballona Creek and Trail Focused Special Study.

At that point, the CivicSpark Fellows had already begun work on the Ballona Creek Revitalization Project, led by the Community Development Department. The Jackson Gate Project would be one of the many project ideas that emerged out of the Ballona Creek Task Force Meetings.

At the June 19, 2018 Mobility, Traffic and Parking Subcommittee meeting, staff discussed the AARP small scale grant application. At the August 14, 2018 Subcommittee meeting, staff shared that the grant application was not awarded and that the City would amend its contract with the City’s consultant Alta to conduct outreach and prepare conceptual designs.

On May 18, 2019, Public Works staff and CivicSpark Fellows held a community meeting at Carlson Park. City and Fellows staff spoke with neighbors and the community about the proposed idea and fielded questions and concerns. At the same time, an online survey was made available and advertised through postcards, social media, and on the City’s website to capture community input about the possibility of opening up the Jackson Gate. The online community survey was made available and advertised through postcards, social media, and on the City’s website to capture community input about the Jackson Gate Project. The survey closed at the end of June 2019 and staff completed its review of the data.

The survey contained six questions to capture the extent of community use of the La Ballona Creek multi-use path, potential use of the Jackson Gate if opened, residences proximity to the Gate of the respondents, and additional feedback. Attachment 1 illustrates findings of the community survey. As can be concluded from the survey results, about 380 area residents responded to the survey.

Approximately 66% of the respondents live more than three blocks away from the gate, and about 55% of the respondents indicated that they would use the gate a few times a month or a few times a year. A majority of the area residents associate usage of the Ballona Creek Bike Path as a form of exercising and having fun. Only 199 area residents provided additional comments, with 111 (56%) in favor of opening the gate.

In June 2019 community members submitted a petition signed by 262 area residents voicing their opinion against the opening of the Jackson Gate. They later updated the petition to include additional signatures for a total of 320 area residents and re-submitted it in July 2019. The reported concerns are regarding personal and traffic safety, traffic congestion, crime and gang activities, graffiti, and the presence of coyotes. The signed petition, a map identifying the residences of respondents, and the stated list of concerns are enclosed under Attachments 2 and 3. (Note: The home addresses of the petitioners have been redacted for the public record. A copy of the unredacted petition has been provided to City Council.)

A draft concept plan (Attachment 4) was prepared for discussion purposes should the Jackson Gate be opened as a pilot project, or on a permanent basis subject to community feedback and City Council consideration. The plan has not yet been finalized and mainly proposes a vehicular gate to be closed at all times except when needed by maintenance vehicles. The plan also proposes a 5-foot pedestrian gate to be closed at night and early morning to address safety concerns. In addition to improvements to signage and pavement markings, the plan identifies the need for devices that would improve visibility for pedestrians and cyclists and minimize conflicts.

During the August 15, 2019 Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) meeting, staff briefed the BPAC members on the history of the project. The item was for discussion only and no action was taken by the Committee. During the meeting, at least three community members spoke in favor and three spoke against opening of the Gate. The in-favor opinions noted improving connectivity and enhancing safety of the Bike Path users without adversely impacting the abutting community. Voiced opinions against the opening of the Gate noted potential for adverse impacts to the residents' quality of life, increased traffic and changing the character of a residential street, and increased crime.

During the April 15, 2021 meeting, the BPAC members approved a motion to form a subcommittee consisting of BPAC Chair Weiner, Vice Chair Nomura, and Member Diga Jacobson to draft a letter to City Council supporting the opening of the Jackson Gate for presentation to the full Committee on May 13, 2021. The attached letter (Attachment 5) was finalized and voted on by the BPAC members in seeking City Council consideration and approval.

An update on the project was also presented by the Public Works Director to the Mobility, Traffic and Parking Subcommittee on June 22, 2021. The Subcommittee also heard public comments voiced in advance and during the meeting, and asked staff to bring the opening of the Jackson Gate for City Council consideration as soon as possible.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

The requested City Council direction to staff has no fiscal impact, and there are currently sufficient funds under existing contractual engineering services to prepare detailed design plans and specifications associated with opening of the Jackson Gate. The detailed design can then be presented to City Council in September 2021, at which time City Council can make a final determination with regards to the opening of the gate, the detailed design, piloting the project with a follow-up review versus permanent opening of the Gate, and hours of access to be permitted.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1- Results of the May 2019 Community Survey
- 2- June 2019 Community Petition against the Opening of the Jackson Gate
- 3- Map Accompanied with the June 2019 Community Petition
- 4- Draft Concept Plan Prepared for Discussion Purposes of the Gate Opening
- 5- BPAC Letter Requesting Council Consideration of Opening the Jackson Gate

MOTION

That the City Council:

1. Provide direction to proceed with preparation of detailed design plans and specifications for opening of the Jackson Avenue Gate to the Ballona Creek Bike Path and returning to City Council with the detailed design in September 2021; and
2. Provide direction regarding the operation of the Jackson Gate and allowing pedestrian and bicycle access to the Path 24 hours 7 days a week versus night restriction, which could affect the Gate Design; and/or
3. Provide other direction as deemed appropriate.