



135 W Green St  
Suite 200  
Pasadena, CA  
91105  
t: 323 223 0441  
f: 626 204 4444  
tjpl.org

December 8, 2020

Honorable Councilmembers of the City of Garden Grove  
11222 Acacia Pkwy  
Garden Grove, CA 92840

**RE: Report on the status of the Surplus Land Act process for the Willowick Golf Course. Action Item planned for December 8, 2020 City Council Meeting**

Dear Councilmembers of the City of Garden Grove,

On behalf of The Trust for Public Land (TPL), I respectfully submit this comment in response to the Inter-Department Memorandum on the sale of the Willowick Golf Course, which is to be heard by the Council tonight, at the December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 meeting.

The Trust for Public Land was established in 1972 with a mission to create parks and protect land for people. To date, we have protected more than 3.7 million acres, created and/or transformed nearly 2,000 parks, playgrounds, and gardens, and developed more than 2,000 miles of trails across the United States, all together putting a park within a 10-minute walk of more than nine million people. While the Trust for Public Land has helped states and local governments generate \$75 billion in new public funds for parks and open space, we are also adept at community-led projects that strengthen marginalized neighborhoods to address the urgent need for equity, access, and resilience.

Our proudest mission-delivery accomplishments include the largest expansion of Yosemite National Park with the addition of Ackerson Meadow, the protection of Dr. Martin Luther King's childhood home in Atlanta and the historic Stonewall Inn, and the creation of over 250 green schoolyards in New York City. Additionally, we maintain one of the largest and most comprehensive parks databases in the country that we use annually to rank public park systems in the 100 largest cities in the United States, including the Cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana.

Guided by our mission, Land for People, The Trust for Public Land has submitted two distinct Notices of Interest to the City of Garden Grove for review. The first, working under the auspices of the State Coastal Conservancy, proposes to acquire the Willowick site for open space/recreational use and thus invokes the super priority given by the Surplus Land Act statute to maintain open space and recreational use of land already zoned for such use, Sec. 54227 (b) of the Government Code. The second, again in collaboration with the Coastal Conservancy and also Clifford Beers Housing, proposes to acquire the site for both open space and affordable housing development, invoking the priority given by the statute to the affordable housing rubric to which the City is also obligated.

I want to make clear at this time that The Trust for Public Land's proposals are not to be conflated and indeed are distinct. Additionally, given our organization's long history of land

acquisition for public benefit, we believe our proposal prioritizing the site for open space/recreational use is the *only* proposal that satisfied the Surplus Land Act statute and thus the clear party for which the City of Garden Grove should commence the 90-day negotiation period.

### **The Public Health Benefits of Parks**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only 25 percent of American adults engage in recommended levels of physical activity, and 29 percent engage in no leisure-time physical activity at all. This sedentary lifestyle is contributing to an increased incidence of obesity along with obesity-related diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, congestive heart failure, and stroke. As one solution to the increased incidence of obesity, the CDC has called for more parks and playgrounds. Studies have shown that when people have access to parks, they exercise more.<sup>1</sup>

### **Climate Mitigation and Adaptation of Parks and Open Space**

Parks—especially those that are densely wooded and deep green—can counter urban temperatures exacerbated by heat-trapping buildings, pavement, and concrete. In August 2020, The Trust for Public Land published *The Heat is On* report, which found that communities with nearby parks can be dramatically cooler than those in so-called “park deserts.”<sup>2</sup> Our analysis of 14,000 cities and towns shows that nationwide, areas within a 10-minute walk of a park are as much as 6 degrees cooler than areas beyond that range. As temperatures in the cities such as Garden Grove and Santa Ana increase due to climate change, the need for parks and open space to mitigate against the heat islands is critical for public health.

A recent study by researchers at Portland State University and the Science Museum of Virginia found a strong correlation<sup>3</sup> between exposure to deadly heat and the historically racist housing policies known as “red-lining,” in which banks withheld home mortgages from Black families. The researchers examined 108 cities in the United States and found that red-lined communities were the hottest neighborhoods in 94 percent of the cities. The study cited a lack of greenspace and tree canopy as the chief reasons for the disproportionate heat exposure.

---

<sup>1</sup> Erica Gies, The Trust for Public Land, *The Health Benefits of Parks* (2006), [https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits\\_HealthBenefitsReport.pdf](https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits_HealthBenefitsReport.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Trust for Public Land, *The Heat is On* (2020), [https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/The-Heat-is-on\\_A-Trust-for-Public-Land\\_special-report.pdf](https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/The-Heat-is-on_A-Trust-for-Public-Land_special-report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy S. Hoffman et al., “The Effects of Historical Housing Policies on Resident Exposures to Intra-Urban Heat: A Study of 108 U.S. Urban Areas,” *Climate* 8, no. 1 (January 2020), <https://www.mdpi.com/2225-1154/8/1/12>

Over the last 30 years, extreme heat, on average, has been the deadliest form of weather – including floods, extreme cold, tornadoes, hurricanes, and other events – according to the National Weather Service. Climate change is making the problem increasingly more severe, with 19 of the hottest 20 years on record<sup>4</sup> occurring in the past two decades. The Union of Concerned Scientists predicts that, absent efforts to cut the greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change, the number of Americans<sup>5</sup> experiencing 30 or more days with a heat index above 105 degrees in an average year will balloon from 900,000 people today to more than 90 million by mid-century.

Parks and Open Space also serve as important green infrastructure to manage stormwater. To comply with the federal Clean Water Act and reduce urban flooding, America’s cities, including Santa Ana, are poised to spend billions of dollars to build green infrastructure projects to manage stormwater and comply with the MS4 Permit. With planning, forethought, and neighborhood engagement, these investments can be leveraged to maximize community benefits by creating and revitalizing existing designated open spaces. While the primary purpose of green infrastructure is to manage stormwater naturally, its strategic deployment can create significant economic, environmental, and social benefits beyond stormwater management making neighborhoods more livable, beautiful, and climate-resilient.

### **Park Equity and Access**

While the data is clear that parks improve the quality of life for all residents, not everyone has equal access to the kinds of parks that lower temperatures and allow for safe social distancing. Our data reveals that across the United States, parks serving primarily nonwhite populations are half the size of parks that serve majority white populations and nearly five times more crowded. In addition parks serving majority low-income households are, on average, four times smaller and nearly four times more crowded than parks that serve majority high-income households. In Santa Ana, again where the Willowick site is located, we see this reality play out as only 4% percent of city land is dedicated to parks and recreation while the national average is 15%.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, per The Trust for Public Land’s Park Score, the City of Santa Ana, where the Willowick Golf Course is located, ranks 85<sup>th</sup> out of the 100 largest cities in the United States and last among the ranked cities in Southern California in providing accessible open space for its residents. The City’s ranking on investment, or park spending per resident, is only 24

---

<sup>4</sup> Brady Dennis, Andrew Freedman, and John Muyskens, “2019 Capped World’s Hottest Decade in Recorded History,” Washington Post (January 15, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/01/15/2010s-hottest-decade-world/?arc404=true>

<sup>5</sup> Kristina Dahl et al., “Killer Heat in the United States: Climate Choices and the Future of Dangerously Hot Days,” Union of Concerned Scientists report (July 2, 2019), <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/killer-heat-united-states-0>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.tpl.org/city/santa-ana-california>

out of 100. While this analysis clearly demonstrates a lack of open space within the City, it already includes the Willowick site. Therefore, development of the site as anything other than open space will increase the disparities we already know exist in the Santa Anita neighborhood of Santa Ana.

Compare this with your city, the City of Garden Grove, where Mayor Steve Jones has pledged to adopt long-term, system-wide strategies to make sure every Garden Grove resident has access to all the benefits parks provide. Mayor Jones has also stated, "I have endorsed the vision that everyone deserves a park or open space within a 10-minute walk of home." <sup>7</sup> It is the City of Garden Grove's responsibility to support your neighbors in the City of Santa Ana with the same consideration and respect for the value and necessity of open space.

At 102 acres, a property the size of the Willowick Golf Course, that sits in the middle of a diverse community, is adjacent to the Santa Ana River, and is located in an area that can greatly benefit from the public health and economic benefits that a restored, and enhanced natural recreational area provides, is an opportunity that defines a region and destination. Preserving this site as open space and affordable housing, as is proposed by the Trust for Public Land, will allow for a community-led vision for equity, holistic community health, and climate resilience that will have a lasting legacy in Santa Ana for generations to come. If you have any questions or would like to speak further about this letter, please contact me at, [robin.mark@tpl.org](mailto:robin.mark@tpl.org) or 323.333.6310.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Mark', with a stylized, flowing script.

Robin Mark  
Los Angeles Program Director  
The Trust for Public Land

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tpl.org/city/garden-grove-california>