



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Long Beach Audit Reveals Park Conditions Will Continue to Decline Unless City Takes Action Department Rejects Key Recommendations as City Develops & Maintains Parks without Adequate Funding**

Long Beach, CA – Long Beach City Auditor Laura Doud today released a Park Maintenance Audit. The City's park landscape and tree maintenance is overseen by the Parks, Recreation and Marine Department (PRM). The City outsources to private contractors the maintenance of over 29,500 trees and nearly 2,000 acres of grounds in City parks, facilities, and street medians costing over \$3.1 million annually. The audit found the City's parks and park trees will continue to decline unless the City changes its approach to managing resources, maintenance and park expansion.

The current condition of the parks and park trees is declining as the audit identified the following issues:

- 1 out of 4 park trees are dead or in poor condition and with no maintenance plan are only trimmed on an emergency or as-needed basis;
- the antiquated irrigation system regularly fails and contributes to standing water;
- trash left on park grounds is widespread and includes marijuana paraphernalia and broken glass;
- a prevalence of uneven turf, patches of dirt, and extensive weeds.

The audit found landscape conditions do not meet stakeholder expectations. City staff, citizens, park users and contractors all expressed dissatisfaction with park landscape conditions. This included seven out of ten sports groups that reported poor turf conditions exposing players to injury and requiring them to supplement their own maintenance activities.

Since awarding the landscape maintenance contracts in 2013, the City added 16 new parks and park improvements and 18 other locations such as street medians but did not increase contract funding at the time of expansion. By adding more areas to be maintained without increasing funds, the City tasked landscape contractors to maintain more with the same amount of resources. This, coupled with the state-wide drought, created significant challenges to adequately maintain City parks and trees. The City Auditor's Office estimated there is a \$1 million annual shortfall for park and park tree maintenance.

The audit also found mismanagement of resources due to lack of processes and controls which included:

- \$215,622 worth of relatively new equipment left unused in the City yard for several years;
- \$80,800 paid over 16 months for maintenance that was never performed.

PRM generally agreed with the audit findings, however the Department did not agree to undertake key recommendations, including:

- implementing a long-term, concentrated strategic approach to maintaining the City's parks and trees;
- expanding funding opportunities outside of the General Fund with a plan for naming sponsorships, donor programs and private-public partnerships to offset maintenance costs;
- reassessing park and recreation fees to include a provision for ongoing park maintenance;
- adopting a 5-year tree trimming schedule plan;
- developing clearer maintenance performance measures along with a park inspection rating program.

In her rebuttal to PRM's response, City Auditor Doud concluded that the Department prefers to operate in its current state regardless of the conditions without considering non-traditional solutions as recommended in

the audit. Based on PRM's response and their lack of alternative solutions, park conditions will continue to decline as the City adds to its park system without effective strategic planning or additional funds.

"I am concerned about the City's business-as-usual, shortsighted approach to maintaining our parks and trees," said City Auditor Laura Doud. "Parks play a critical role in creating healthy, livable communities in Long Beach. We want to ensure the quality of our parks are sustained for future generations. This requires effective stewardship and innovative efforts to acquire new resources."

The complete Park Maintenance Audit including a rebuttal to City Management's Response can be viewed [here](#).

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