

### Editorial

## LB park system problems must be worked out

The past few days have not been the finest for Long Beach's award-winning parks program, once again proving that the grass isn't always greener on the other side of the fence.

First came a scathing audit by City Auditor Laura Doud criticizing the city for poor oversight of trees and parks.

That bombshell was still simmering when residents were treated to the shocking sight of several Coral trees that had their beautiful canopy tops chopped off.

Even Mayor Robert Garcia said he was "incredibly upset and saddened" when he heard of the barren Coral trees.

So what's going on with the Long Beach parks system which boasts on its website that it has won the National Parks and Recreation Society's Gold Medal award four times for outstanding management practices and programs?

Some of the problem reminds us of the prison warden in "Cool Hand Luke" telling stubborn prisoners, "What we've got here is failure to communicate."

But this problem isn't all a lack of communication. Much of the issue depends on how you look at problems and how to solve them. And there are plenty of problems in management of the park system, according to the audit.

Some of the findings: A quarter of the trees in Long Beach are dead or in poor condition. Seven of 10 sports groups who use city fields say conditions expose players to injuries. Irrigation problems at local fields cause flooding and waterlogged turf.

The audit, the first of its kind conducted in at least a decade, covered the operations of local parks during the period from Oct. 1, 2013, to Sept. 31, 2015.

The good news: During that time, the city has added 16 parks and made park improvements at 18 other locations.

The not-so-good news, according to the audit: Despite

these additions to the park inventory, the city has not allocated any more funding to maintain them, putting a strain on contractors who have been unable to manage the additional workload.

The audit said the city manager's office has estimated it would cost \$113 million to make the park irrigation system more efficient. There also was an estimate of an annual shortfall of \$20 million for ongoing maintenance.

In a rare rebuttal to the city's response to her audit, Doud attacked the response as continuing "the same shortsighted, business-as-usual approach, which likely leads to a continued state of decline of city parks and trees."

The audit recommends, among other things, an updating of the department's strategic plan. There also was disagreement on how to obtain further funding for park improvements.

City spokeswoman Kerry Gerot said the one percent sales tax increase will provide nearly \$20 million to address issues raised in the audit, including tree trimming, facility repairs and modernization of irrigation systems.

The city has a new Parks, Recreation and Marine director who said her staff is working on issues raised in the audit but added that it was not business as usual as Doud said.

Somewhere in this thicket of disagreements lie solutions that must be found. Better communication is needed on setting priorities on what needs to be done.

If they have to, the mayor and city council must step in and act to resolve these issues. Our park system is too important to our quality of life to have it deteriorate.