

Park Access in Los Angeles: Policy Gaps, Funding Inequities, and Spatial Impacts

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Defining the Problem

There is not enough park space for low-income and marginalized residents of the City of Los Angeles. Low-income communities and communities of color have significantly less access to parks, safe open space, and recreational resources than wealthier, predominantly white areas. As a result, Los Angeles faces a persistent and well-documented gap in park access that directly impacts the health, safety, and overall well-being of its low-income residents of color. One of the most influential park tax programs, Proposition K (1996) is set to end after the 2026-27 fiscal year. Los Angeles faces a crossroads. The city faces climate threats never before seen, which will only worsen disparities. It also holds opportunities, with the potential to update and improve Proposition K, helping to expand park access across the city of Los Angeles.

Historic redlining, inequitable distribution of public funding, and market-driven development patterns have shaped the park landscape across Los Angeles. Redlining systematically denied economic investment opportunities to marginalized communities on the basis of race (Graetz and Esposito 2023). The Home Owners' Loan Corporation, an agency created by The New Deal to refinance homes during the Great Depression, helped refinance mortgages and keep families from house foreclosure. The HOLC helped refinance millions of mortgages, though only for white, 'low risk' neighborhoods. Black and marginalized neighborhoods were deemed "hazardous," being denied debt refinancing and investment opportunities. This discrimination has shaped cities across the US, keeping communities of color confined within inner city

neighborhoods, and giving only white communities the opportunity to relocate to an all white suburbia (Jones 2023). Disinvestment and neglect have left low-income, marginalized neighborhoods with less development and infrastructure (Tijerina 2019). As a result of inadequate investment, these neighborhoods have less greenspace.

Public funding decisions in Los Angeles have played a major role in creating today's unequal distribution of green space. For decades, the city allocated park funding based on political influence, and the priorities of wealthier neighborhoods that were better positioned to advocate for resources (Rigolon et al. 2024). Bond measures and capital improvement funds often flowed toward projects with strong political backing or toward areas where land was easier and less expensive to acquire. These neighborhoods consisted of low-density, affluent parts of the Westside, the Valley, and hillside communities. Meanwhile, dense neighborhoods like South LA, East LA, and parts of the Harbor area saw far fewer investments, even as their populations grew and their need for parks increased (Wolch et al. 2005). Because public investment followed patterns of privilege rather than equity, communities that already had abundant parks continued to receive upgrades, while park-poor neighborhoods were left with aging facilities and limited open space.

Park inequities are further exacerbated through the neglect of park space overall. Politically, opening new parks is rewarded more than maintaining existing ones. Elected officials gain far more visibility and credit from cutting the ribbon on new parks than quietly maintaining established parks (Mullin and Hansen 2023). This creates a major barrier to establishing park

equity, as even new parks that are built in underserved communities may be completely ineffective in the long run. Without dedicated maintenance budgets for new park and open space projects, restrooms deteriorate, equipment breaks, irrigation fails, and safety issues escalate (Congressional Research Service 2024).

Park neglect affects low-income, Black and Latino neighborhoods the hardest in LA. Parks are built, neglected until they are condemned, and a major capital project replaces it years later. This cycle has been thoroughly researched and explored, and is called the build-neglect-rebuild cycle. Underserved communities are granted less parks than higher income neighborhoods, and the parks that are built are subjected to a build-neglect-rebuild cycle, reducing their usability.

New parks can also bring gentrification when implementation is poorly managed. Gentrification occurs when an influx of investment geared toward wealthier people raises prices, pushing out existing families and residents (Owusu 2024). Gentrification is at risk of occurring when implementing new parks, as new projects push out residents and families, the park's original beneficiaries.

Parks provide critical benefits: improved physical and mental health, shade and cooling during extreme heat, opportunities for social interaction, and resilience against climate change. When parks are absent, residents experience measurable harms. These include higher rates of chronic disease such as obesity and asthma, elevated heat exposure during increasingly severe heat

waves, and weaker community networks and social cohesion. In this way, the unequal distribution of park space is not simply a land-use issue; it is a public health issue, an environmental justice issue, and a community development issue. The inequitable distribution of parks means that entire neighborhoods do not have reasonable access to green space. Some residents live miles from the nearest park. Others rely on small, poorly kept spaces that cannot meet the needs of dense communities.

Unequal park access directly shapes the health and future of families across Los Angeles.

Without parks, residents have fewer safe places to be active, which contributes to higher rates of chronic illnesses such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Marginalized communities and neighborhoods simply do not have safe areas to be outside, as Particulate Matter 2.5 contaminates local air and puts residents at risk (Macfarlane et al. 2021).

Without access to parks and public spaces that block and clean air, chronic diseases such as asthma are more prevalent.

The mental health effects are also significant. Parks reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and overall psychological strain. They offer environments where residents can escape noise, crowding, and heat. Without access to nature, communities experience higher stress levels and fewer opportunities for social connection and emotional regulation. For children, the absence of play spaces can hinder cognitive development, limit creativity, and reduce opportunities for safe, unstructured outdoor play; all of which are central to healthy growth (Wolch et al. 2011).

The climate consequences are especially dangerous. Many marginalized LA communities are located in intense urban heat island zones, where a lack of tree canopy, shade, and vegetation causes temperatures to spike far higher than in greener neighborhoods (Wilson 2020). Without parks, these areas get hotter, retain heat longer, and expose residents to greater risk of heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and other temperature-related illnesses (Harlan et al. 2006). Extreme heat is already the deadliest climate hazard in California, and its effects fall overwhelmingly on neighborhoods without green space. Seniors, young children, outdoor workers, and people with chronic illnesses have the most heightened vulnerability.

Without funding structures that truly address historic and persistent inequities, Los Angeles will continue to deliver vastly different life opportunities and outcomes depending on where residents live. Parks serve a vital role in the health and future of residents. Without parks, neighborhoods and communities will be unable to prosper, resulting in diminished opportunities and worse outcomes.

Evidence

There is strong evidence of park inequities across the US. There are large inequities in park acreage and quality (Rigolon 2024), as well as in park access (Wolch et al. 2005). When access disparities occur, health outcomes are affected (Macfarlane et al. 2021). Ultimately, this is associated with disproportionate health outcomes, with some racial and socioeconomic groups living longer healthier lives, and some leading shorter ones (Macfarlane et al. 2021). This

problem is especially evident in Los Angeles, a city highly segregated by race and socioeconomic status. Both the city of Los Angeles and local interest groups have engaged in many efforts to reduce park disparity throughout the city, including park fee ordinance changes, Proposition K (1996) and park project developments such as the 50 Parks Project. These efforts have been effective, but more work is still needed (Rigolon et al. 2024, Ferguson et al. 2014). Climate change will only exacerbate outdoor access equality (Tian et al. 2024).

Various studies, reports and surveys have been conducted to assess if park access exists, and the extent of those negative sequelae. Park access is a proven problem all around the world. A literature review sampling various studies occurring in 49 developed cities found that low socioeconomic individuals and people of color have access to fewer acres of parks, fewer acres of parks per person; the parks that are available are of poorer quality, maintenance, and safety than more privileged people (Rigolon 2016). Park access is a real issue, and one that did not occur naturally. Exclusionary zoning and redlining contributed to residential segregation. When The New Deal stimulus was placed toward cities across the US in the 30s, it was disproportionately invested in white neighborhoods (Owusu 2024). City investments have also favored high income white neighborhoods over the decades. This inequitable distribution of wealth has damaged communities and residents, and must be addressed.

The City of Los Angeles is part of the issue, with many residents having poor or disproportionate access to urban parks and outdoor opportunities. Hispanic communities within Los Angeles are the most densely populated, followed by African American communities and Asian and Pacific Islander communities. In these communities, citizens in Latino communities hold only 1.6 acres

of park per 1,000 people. African American communities hold 0.8 acres of park per 1,000 people, and Asian and Pacific Islander communities hold access to 1.6 acres per 1000 people (Wolch et al. 2005). In contrast, white neighborhoods within the City of Los Angeles enjoy 17.4 acres of park per 1000 people (Wolch et al. 2005). Such drastic inequities in park availability clearly demonstrate differences in access. When more park space is available in a neighborhood, residents do not need to travel as far to open space, and have more health benefits. Neighborhoods with less access must travel further, which minimizes accessibility and leads to infrequent park visits.

The negative health effects seen in less access to park space is relevant to children as well. Another study by Wolch et al. sampling of 3,173 children aged nine to ten in Southern California found that children living within 500 meters of a park or recreation zone held significantly lower Body Mass Index than those living further from parks (Wolch et al. 2011). The negative effects of disproportionate access to park space is clear and vast, spanning all age groups and household members. The disparities found only highlights how this issue needs to be addressed. More parks need to be brought to marginalized communities.

Shortcomings of park access are associated with worsened health outcomes, meaning marginalized communities live shorter, more unhealthy lives. In New York City, a study done by Macfarlane et al. has shown strong, positive correlations between park access and greater physical activity rates. Communities with lower access to physical activity experience poorer health outcomes (Macfarlane et al. 2021). This means communities that have historically low access to parks are more vulnerable to negative health outcomes. The study also found negative

correlations between park access and obesity, beyond what is statistically accounted for in physical activity and socioeconomics (Macfarlane et al. 2021).

Another study by Connolly et al, measured life expectancy alongside green space at the tract level in the County of Los Angeles. Results found a positive correlation between life expectancy and park access, finding that several months were added to life expectancy given incremental increases in park access (Connolly et al. 2023). The health implications of park disparity signals the importance of this issue, and how it must be urgently addressed.

While one clear answer to addressing park poor neighborhoods would be to build more parks in low-income communities and communities of color, the resolution is not so simple. Studies find that adding parks in certain areas can lead to ‘park congestion’ or ‘pressure,’ where gentrification could likely occur (Sister et al. 2010). Gentrification occurs when a marginalized community experiences an influx of investment, leading to higher rent and real-estate pricing, which pushes out existing residents and replacing them with wealthier families. Gentrification displaces long-term, low-income residents and changes the neighborhood’s character and culture (Wolch et al. 2014). Parks must be expanded in low-income communities within Los Angeles, but it must be done in a way that reduces the risk of gentrification. If gentrification occurs, Latino and African American communities will not be able to see the benefits of new parks in their neighborhoods. In order to find low pressure areas for new parks, community engagement is needed (Sister et al. 2010). When marginalized neighborhoods are able to voice their opinions about where parks would be most beneficial and effective, gentrification is unlikely to occur.

I have conducted my own research on park access within The City of Los Angeles to better understand disparities and effects taking place. I first conducted my own data analysis, comparing the share of park space per tract with median income, percent white, percent Black, percent Asian and Pacific Islander, percent Hispanic, percent Native American and Alaska Native, population density, and unemployment rates. Geospatial park data from The Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation provided park areas, names, and addresses of every park in The City of Los Angeles. Tract level data on income, race, population density, and unemployment were sourced through The American Community Survey (ACS) 2023 5-year estimates. Outside of data analysis, I conducted an informational interview with a staff member working at The Employment and Workforce Development Department for The City of LA.

My data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics and a regression analysis. I calculated each variable's quartiles and correlations first. Then I used linear regression models to explore the relationships between the share of park space in a tract and characteristics of the tract population.

Distribution of park shares across the city shows that park land is extremely unevenly distributed across census tracts in The City of Los Angeles. The median value of park share is 0, indicating that more than half of all LA census tracts hold no park space at all. The mean value of 1.3% is substantially higher than the median, which suggests a small number of tracts with large amounts of park space drive up the average. This is seen further when analyzing the 95th and 99th percentiles, each holding values of 0.069 and 0.241 respectively. Few tracts contain very large amounts of parkland, likely encompassing major parks and natural preserves.

In running a correlation analysis, findings displayed weak relationships between variables, though relationships did align with socioeconomic trends found in the earlier discussed studies. Median income is positively correlated with the share of white residents ($r = 0.65$) and negatively correlated with the shares of Black ($r = -0.22$) and Hispanic ($r = -0.2$) residents. This indicates that higher-income tracts tend to be whiter, while lower-income tracts are more likely to have higher proportions of Black and Hispanic residents. The park share variable displays positive correlations with the share of white residents, and median income.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix between park share of tract (Park Share) and population characteristics: Median Income, Share white, Share Black, Share Asian or Pacific Islander, Share Hispanic, Unemployment Rate, and Population Density.

	Park Share	Median Income	Share white	Share Black	Share Asian or Pacific Islander	Share Hispanic	Unemployment Rate	Population Density
Park Share	1							
Median Income	0.03	1						
Share white	0.06	0.65	1					
Share Black	-0.03	-0.22	-0.39	1				
Share Asian or Pacific Islander	0.03	0.07	-0.05	-0.21	1			
Share Hispanic	-0.03	-0.2	-0.33	-0.04	-0.33	1		

Unemployment Rate	0.02	-0.02	-0.29	-0.01	-0.27	0.28	1	
Population Density	-0.04	0.04	-0.09	0.06	-0.05	0.12	0.25	1

The correlation between park share and median income ($r = 0.03$) is weakly positive, suggesting that wealthier tracts may have slightly more park area, though the relationship is weak. Park share shows a weak positive correlation with the white population share ($r = 0.06$) and weak negative correlations with Black (-0.03) and Hispanic (-0.03) shares, which modestly supports the hypothesis that predominantly white and higher-income tracts have better park access.

Though these correlations are weak, it is very clear that tracts with larger shares of white residents, and residents of higher income, have more park access. These three characteristics all have positive correlations with each other, which is supportive of the claim that through historical redlining and disinvestment, economic growth has been kept in white communities, where income is higher and park access is greater.

Finally, unemployment is weakly negatively correlated with white population share (-0.29), and weakly positively correlated with the Hispanic share (0.28), suggesting that minority communities face greater economic disadvantage. While none of these correlations are strong enough to indicate strong relationships, the directions of these patterns are all consistent with previously discussed studies, and their findings that structural inequalities have influenced economic stability, health, and park accessibility across Los Angeles tracts.

Table 2: Regression analysis testing park shares against all characteristic variables is displayed with their coefficients, robust standard errors, and p-values.

Park Share	Coefficient	Robust Standard Error	P-value
Median Income	$-4.77e^{-8}$	$3.49e^{-8}$	0.172
Share white	0.0002	0.00009	0.057
Share Black	0.00002	0.0001	0.88
Share Asian or Pacific Islander	0.0002	0.0001	0.21
Share Hispanic	$-8.38e^{-7}$	0.0001	1
Unemployment Rate	0.0009	0.0005	0.05
Population Density	$-1.42e^{-6}$	$9.99e^{-7}$	0.154

Regression analysis findings proved inconclusive, with coefficients being near zero, and holding low levels of significance. Though they are small, the share of white residents held positive coefficients with park share, and the share of hispanic residents held a negative coefficient. Again, these correlations support claims that white, privileged communities hold higher access to park spaces in their tracts compared to marginalized communities and groups, but their statistical significance is low.

An informational interview with a city administrator brings more information on park access disparities and opportunity disadvantages low-income and communities of color face. My

interviewee has worked in The City of Los Angeles housing department for over seven years. Her work on the city's Assessment of Fair Housing within the general plan found that low-income housing is often located in areas with the highest environmental pollution, the least access to jobs, and limited green space. She emphasized that these inequities are deeply entrenched and tied to long-standing patterns of disinvestment and discrimination.

Funding structures can reinforce park inequities. The LA Park Fee Ordinance requires new developments to contribute to nearby parks within a two-mile radius, but since most new development occurs in higher-income neighborhoods, those areas continue to see more park investment. Meanwhile, areas like South LA, which are already park-poor, see little new development and therefore receive fewer park funds. She explained that in places like South LA, the only real development we see is 100% affordable housing which doesn't have to pay the fee, meaning wealthier neighborhoods benefit most from this system. Development-linked park funding can deepen spatial inequities rather than alleviate them. Siloing high income communities from spreading wealth and public infrastructure projects to other parts of the city.

A holistic and neighborhood-based planning approach that integrates housing, parks, and other community needs is most effective. The city lacks coordination across departments. Parks, housing, and economic development all operate separately. This fragmentation hinders equitable, comprehensive investment from occurring in low-income communities. When major green investments occur, such as with the LA River revitalization or the new Slauson Avenue bike lane, anti-displacement strategies are often overlooked, allowing gentrification to undermine the

benefits for existing residents, as local communities are not included in the planning. The most effective strategy would involve targeted local planning and investment strategies, with dedicated funding streams for both affordable housing and park space. Her perspective underscores that addressing inequities in park access requires not just new parks, but coordinated public investment that protects existing communities while also expanding opportunities for residents.

Alternatives

In light of this issue, there are several paths forward, each with varying costs, feasibilities, and effects. In the first scenario, existing conditions remain unchanged. The second course of action implements targeted, equity-based funding reform to existing policy. Finally, drastic measures can be taken through new policy, dedicating funds and tax revenues to closing park-access gaps.

The first, most feasible option is to continue with current policy, as no changes to policy or practices are needed. In Los Angeles, current city policy aims to expand park space and redistribute wealth through public infrastructure. Though these policies are ineffective and set to expire soon, they still place millions of dollars toward building and maintaining parks. City Policies include: The LA Park Fee Ordinance, Proposition K, and state and federal grants.

The Los Angeles Park Fee Ordinance, passed in 2017, are developer impact fees charged on new residential development. Fee amounts are set by ordinance and adjusted annually. The current fee schedule, effective July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026, mandates \$8,805 charged per non-subdivision dwelling unit, and 17,964 dollars charged per subdivision unit. These fees are restricted to capital

uses, only being spent on the purchase of park land, park development, and capital improvements—as opposed to maintenance of existing parks.

There are several shortfalls to the ordinance, as park equity is not guaranteed. Because there are no binding equity rules, political pressures and existing power structures tend to shape which neighborhoods see investment. When new developments occur and park fees are generated, local politicians feel pressure to keep park taxes within their district, leaving neighborhoods who most need funding behind (Rigolon et al.). Without “hard” targets or requirements, investments may go to places that already have some parks or capacity, rather than to areas that have little to none. A significant amount of the ordinance revenue went to park maintenance projects instead of the construction of new parks, limiting the potential construction of new parks in poorer communities. Geographic issues plague the ordinance as well. New parks that are funded by real-estate developments can only be built within a two mile radius of the taxed residential development, restricting optimal park locations. Underserved communities that are most in need often have very little high-end residential development, which means fewer fee-generating projects, and thus fewer parks (Rigolon et al.). Without new development, fewer fees are collected there; those areas do not benefit from funding from that particular source.

Proposition K generates \$25 million per year for parks through property taxes. The initiative began in 1996, and has been redistributing wealth through park acquisition, construction, improvement, and maintenance. Proposition K sets aside a portion of the \$25 million generated each year to fund competitive grant projects. City departments, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies serving youth recreation are eligible to apply. This system is closest to a

community-based park funding approach, funding local organizations to carry out new capital projects.

The initiative has helped build numerous parks in underserved neighborhoods, but has underperformed given its potential. Research has shown that the allocation of Proposition K grants has tended to favor neighborhoods that are better resourced. Neighborhoods with fewer resources sometimes apply less frequently or less successfully, and thus receive fewer grants (Wolch et al.). The 30-year initiative will expire in the 2026-27 fiscal year, shutting down a significant revenue stream dedicated to the creation of new parks.

The last primary revenue source funding the creation, improvement, and expansion of LA parks comes from competitive grants, and bond derived funds at the state and federal level. An example of this is Proposition 68, a statewide park fund that distributed 650 million dollars across the state to various park programs. Revenues from this source vary the most as the amount awarded to LA depends on a successful grant application. Some application cycles can bring large sums to invest in capital, other years may bring very little.

Second, policy could be reformed to bring equity-focused improvements that still build on LA's existing park policies. Regardless of where new housing development takes place, 50 percent of development fees could be reserved to go directly to identified high-need areas, instead of going completely to the neighborhood where development occurs. This changes the current ordinance minimally, simply mandating a share of park fee revenues go beyond the 2-mile radius to areas most in need. Additionally, this reform could expand incentives for developers to build in more

densely populated areas of the city. Expedited permitting and fee waivers for developers could help spur more growth in areas that most need it. Helping poorer districts to become more attractive to developers, and thus generating more park fees.

The third final alternative implements drastic changes, expanding revenue sources and setting dedicated long-term park equity programs in place. Instead of a tax assessment per parcel, property tax would be expanded through taxing assessed value of property, greatly expanding the funds generated. With expanded capital, the new measure would invest more heavily toward the expansion of park access in communities and neighborhoods that most need it.

Beyond funding expansions, the new proposition could mandate a community-driven grant process. Proposition K's competitive grant program is run by a steering committee, and carried out by the Bureau of Engineering's Recreational & Cultural Facilities Program. Similar to Proposition K, this new proposition could establish a steering committee dedicated to collaborating with neighborhood groups, assuring money is allocated to the direct park needs of residents. When applying for a grant, city departments and nonprofits would have to adhere to new requirements, such as documenting how they engaged residents through public workshops, surveys, or meetings with neighborhood councils. The steering committee would assign higher scores to applications that demonstrate engagement, partner with local community-based organizations, and ensure capital investment in park poor areas is effective.

Criteria

Evaluating the effectiveness of policy is crucial to determine which policy path is best. Though aggressive policy updates may be the most effective in fulfilling a goal or eliminating an issue, it may be infeasible due to its expense, both financially and politically. Policy that holistically addresses an issue but is unlikely to pass is just as ineffective as policy that does not address the issue at all. Because of this, the three policy alternatives proposed will be evaluated on the following four criteria to assure a comprehensive, well-rounded analysis: equity, efficiency, political feasibility, and long-term sustainability.

Equity is the basis of the issue, and thus most directly assesses the effectiveness of a policy. low-income neighborhoods and communities of color have been historically underserved through a lack of investment. Policy is scored as more effective if it addresses this disparity in capital investment and park access. This can be done through the implementation of new parks, addressing environmental health concerns in high risk areas, or community voice in decision making.

Efficiency measures a policy in its ability to deliver the most effective change per dollar spent. It considers the financial feasibility of a policy change, and if the resources needed result in substantial change. In the political landscape, funds and tax revenues are in constant turmoil. Opposing leaders debate financial decisions heavily, and if investments seem ineffectual, they are cut. Policy that utilizes public monies to benefit a large amount of people warrant their costs remain unchanged, even in changing political landscapes. This criteria often has an inverse relationship with equity, as the most equitable projects are the most time and resource intensive.

Political feasibility examines whether a policy is likely to gain support from elected officials, voters, agency staff, and community groups. A policy may be effective in addressing equity and environmental justice but face political pushback from wealthier neighborhoods and districts, private interests, or budget conscious officials. This criteria keeps the analysis grounded in real-world constraints, as the best policy may not be observed as such in the public eye.

Finally, long-term sustainability evaluates a policy's long-term maintenance, responsiveness to climate change, and consistent sources of funding. Los Angeles' park system is already threatened by heat, drought, and chronic maintenance funding shortages. These issues will be experienced disproportionately by marginalized communities and low-income neighborhoods, and this risk must be addressed. Policies that stipulate long term commitments and green infrastructure are critical in a changing climate, as an evolving issue like climate change must be continuously combatted for years to come.

Outcomes

The three policy alternatives are first outlined in a table, and expanded upon thereafter.

Table 3: Each policy alternative is assessed by the four variables outlined: equity, efficiency, political feasibility, and long term sustainability.

Policy Alternative	Equity	Efficiency	Political Feasibility	Long Term Sustainability	Key Assumptions / Uncertainties
No Change	Distributional impact: 0% improvement	Highly efficient, as no changes made mean no costs	Very feasible, as no changes need to be voted upon	Does not address inequities. These inequities will only worsen as climate change worsens	Assumes no other changes to park programs are made
	Target population: Low-income, Black, and Hispanic communities.				
	Time horizon: long term				
Modifying existing Park Fee Ordinance	Distributional impact: Some improvement, with a portion of all development fees now being devoted to capital investment in park-poor areas.	Estimated costs are low, as no new funds need to be created or generated to create this change. Existing funds are reallocated.	The proposed change must be drafted by a city staff, elected official, or by a stakeholder/developer. The city council must then vote on it to pass.	This change does take steps to help invest in underserved communities, though not by a substantial margin.	District members representing high income districts and white communities will look at this change in policy the least favorably. Though it is a modest portion of the fees these districts collect, political leaders may vote against it to keep wealth and investment

					in their own districts.
	Projected impact: 50% improvement to financing new parks in park-poor communities.	Funding source: LA Park Fee Ordinance	This change does not involve setting or increasing fees, so regulatory state laws do not apply.	Half of the fees generated across the city would go to those most in need. This investment amount would not be substantial enough to ward off the extreme effects of climate change.	
	Time horizon: long term				
New policy to replace Proposition K	Projected impact: Substantial improvements to equity	Estimated costs are high, as this would add a new property tax to all LA residents.	This is the most infeasible, involving a two thirds vote in a citywide election to pass	This change brings the most well rounded, equity based solution	LA voters may or may not look at this ballot initiative favorably.
	Target population: Low-income, Black, and Hispanic communities.	Funding source: New property tax code	Residents of western and northern Los Angeles may see little to no benefits to this type of bill, reducing incentives to vote yes.		
	Time Horizon: long-term	Estimated cost: \$25 million per year for LA residents			

If no new policy is implemented, Proposition K will expire next year on June 30, 2027, ending the most significant capital investment program LA has ever had. Park funding will drastically decrease. Equity issues and historic racialized development patterns will not be addressed. The grant process will end, and community-based funding opportunities will no longer be available.

In the end, park disparities will continue to increase, becoming more stark as park fee ordinance revenues continue to invest capital exclusively in wealthier, whiter neighborhoods. At the same time, low-income and marginalized communities with less growth will stagnate, generating very little in park fees and ultimately leading to marginal park growth. Climate change will worsen health impacts, exposing underserved communities to extreme heat and higher rates of pollution.

The second policy alternative brings marginal benefits to park-poor communities. The policy restructures the park fee ordinance, allocating half of the revenue generated from each development for underserved communities. It also reduces the barriers developers may face in the construction and permitting process, reducing barriers to developing in densely populated areas. Only half of the funds are distributed outside of the district of origin, so equity is only partially addressed.

Though equity is only partially addressed, the policy is efficient. Fee structuring is not changed or increased, only specifications as to where half the generated funds go. With increased investment, park projects and capital improvements can be completed in areas with little to no fee revenue from their district. Clear funding allocations on the basis of equity greatly reduce disparities, and bring park access to more neighborhoods throughout the city.

Finally, a complete replacement of Proposition K brings the most well rounded, equitable solution to the city of Los Angeles. Mandating equity to be considered when funding new park projects assures that neighborhoods and communities most in need of improved park access get investment. This new policy would also redistribute millions of dollars to park projects for the

long-term, not by a set amount of years like its predecessor. The bill would be the most effective in long-term sustainability, providing the most resources and limiting the impacts of climate change on those most vulnerable.

Seattle has already implemented this type of policy through the Seattle Metropolitan Parks District (SPD) property tax levy. Through expanded property tax, Seattle charges up to 75 cents per 1,000 dollars of assessed property value, though this fluctuates annually. This revenue then funds capital investment projects, maintenance, recreation services, and equity-based improvements. Work programs are structured in a six year funding cycle, meaning project funding plans are approved on a six year basis. When agencies apply to receive funding for a six year period, they are assessed using Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) equity toolkit, and by the SPD's capital project prioritization framework. Using the RSJI toolkit, agencies that apply must analyze which racial groups benefit or are burdened by the proposed project. Any displacement risks, vulnerabilities, and access barriers must be reported. Agencies are mandated to bring community engagement with marginalized groups (Seattle Park District 2020). When assessing which projects receive funding, SPD's capital project prioritization framework utilizes an equity zone index, scoring projects by local income levels, percent renters, race and ethnicity composition, age groups, and health indicators (Seattle Parks & Recreation 2023). Projects that score higher in this index receive priority for capital investment. Seattle's Park District policy has pushed the city to be one of the most abundant in park access. Incorporating this policy into Los Angeles would likely bring the same benefits.

Key uncertainties of implementing this policy would mostly reside within the review process and stakeholder meetings. This new policy is only effective if the review board is well representative, and honors equity scoring when considering new park projects. Effectiveness is dependent on collaboration and inclusivity. If the review board can effectively collaborate with neighborhood organizations to bring the most effective and fruitful projects to fruition, the proposed bill will be effective. If neighborhood voices are not heard, and collaboration does not ensue, the policy will be substantially less effective.

Trade-offs

Though doing nothing is the easiest, requiring no investment or changes to occur, it is completely ineffective. Proposition K will expire, and leaving the park fee ordinance unchanged will leave worsened inequities. Nothing positive will come of this, and economic, climate, and social damages will ensue. Though they are less efficient and feasible, the other two proposed alternatives rank higher above inaction.

In terms of long-term sustainability, amending the park fee ordinance is only partially effective. Proposition K still expires in Fiscal Year 26-27, cutting off \$25 million of investment to parks. This will slow the rate at which new parks in high need areas will be built, and would not be significant enough to counter the extreme effects of climate change in the long-term. Low-income and communities of color will still disproportionately experience the effects of extreme heat, air quality, and decreased health outcomes.

Though less effective, amending the park fee ordinance is politically feasible since there are few barriers to updating this ordinance and few groups who might oppose it. This type of change would fall under the normal municipal code amendment process. The proposed change must be drafted by a city staff member, elected official, or submitted to city council via a proposal from a developer or stakeholder. The proposed change would go before the council as legislation to be reviewed, a process that typically takes 1 to 2 years. If city council votes to pass the amendment, the updated policy would be adopted into the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC), and would take effect typically 30 to 60 days upon passage. There are likely few to oppose this type of change, making it likely to pass. Developers and private interest groups often oppose fee ordinance policy, as it makes builds more expensive. In this case, fees are not being raised. Neighborhoods and local communities do not directly lose funding since the change only mandates that half the funds go to projects in nearby areas, not to communities where investment is already abundant.

As mentioned earlier, policy that is the most equitable tends to be the most resource-intensive, which is demonstrated in the last alternative. This new parks program bill would require a new review council to assess all projects, and constant neighborhood community meetings to ensure that generated funds are being invested where they are most needed. This would involve a large administrative expansion to hire the needed city staff to run the program, as well as a substantial amount of hours to meet, review, and discuss proposed projects.

Outside of costs, the proposed bill would need to be passed in a citywide election, making this policy the least feasible of the three proposed alternatives. The bill would need to be drafted by a

city councilor, and reviewed by the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee. If the committee votes to approve the proposition, it is placed on the ballot. Once on the ballot, it must be voted on through a municipal election. Los Angeles holds municipal elections every two years, with the upcoming primary nominating election being on June 2, 2026, and the general municipal election falling on November 3, 2026. This measure would need to be placed in one of those ballots, and pass a citywide election by a simple majority. Though there are many who stand to benefit from this proposed policy, many do not. High-income neighborhoods would likely pay this increased property tax, and see no new park development in their communities, as the generated money would go toward projects in areas most in need. To high-income neighborhoods in power, this policy only holds drawbacks. As a result, large political campaigns supporting a “No” vote could be launched, and as this demographic has more financial resources, a “No” campaign could win.

That being said, the third policy alternative would benefit the most people, and provide the needed changes to address park access inequity. With more administrators and close collaboration with neighborhood groups, effective park projects would be administered while minimizing gentrification. By including local groups and properly assessing neighborhoods in need, diffused park investment would reduce local price pressures, effectively eliminating chances of sharp price increases and low-income resident loss.

Recommendation

To address park access inequity effectively and efficiently, I recommend the third policy alternative be implemented. The policy set to replace Proposition K channels funding toward

park projects that are equity based, community oriented, and responsive to climate change. This policy effectively restructures Los Angeles' park funding system to prioritize neighborhoods with the highest need. The policy establishes long-term, stable funding sources through property taxes, meaning investments are made to create large measurable change to neighborhoods that most need it. Community oriented projects help avoid gentrification, and increase effectiveness. Finally, the long term investments that this policy alternative can make effectively help to reduce the impacts of climate change on overburned communities. Though it is the least feasible, modernizing and replacing Proposition K serves as the most effective pathway to improve park access and build a more equitable park system for future generations.

Conclusion

Los Angeles faces a defining opportunity, as well as a looming threat. For decades, low-income neighborhoods and communities of color have held significantly less access to safe, high-quality park space than wealthier, predominantly white communities. This inequitable distribution of park space is no coincidence, being the result of structural racism, redlining, and market forces that consistently favor privileged, high-income neighborhoods. Proposition K, the city's most substantial park investment program, is set to expire in 2026-2027. Los Angeles stands at a crossroads. As the city confronts intensifying climate threats, extreme heat, and growing inequity, political intervention is needed now more than ever. The city must act boldly to change longstanding patterns of exclusion, and take the steps necessary to combat a worsening climate.

In order to take effective action, The City of Los Angeles must implement transformative policy to replace Proposition K; a new, equity-focused, long-term citywide measure that effectively

administers capital investment programs to the most urban, densely populated, and underserved communities of the city. Only radical change in policy addresses the scale and urgency of this inequity crisis. By incorporating community involvement, coordinating city agencies, and establishing a stable revenue stream dedicated to park implementation and improvement, Los Angeles can transform its public park landscape and bring improved health outcomes to all residents.

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