Wasteland to Wonderland: Sustainable Brownfield Redevelopment Projects in Low-Income Areas of Los Angeles

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Wasteland to Wonderland:
Sustainable Brownfield Redevelopment Projects in
Low-Income Areas of Los Angeles

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Introduction

Entering the South Los Angeles Wetlands Park, I immediately feel welcome. In addition to free parking -- a rare commodity in Los Angeles -- I am greeted by colorful signs explaining what I am about to experience. Upon reading about the benefits of this “ecologically rehabilitative wetland park” within the context of the L.A. megalopolis, I walk a lap around the park’s loop trail. Taking notes on this railyard-turned-park, I notice an imbalance. Every conversation I overhear is in Spanish, yet all of the signage is in English. The billboards around the park are all in Spanish. The laundry across the street is not a laundromat but a lavanderia; the local store a supermercado. South Central Los Angeles has one of the highest concentrations of Latinos within the city of Los Angeles, so the Spanish written and spoken in this neighborhood comes as no surprise. What does surprise me is the absence of Spanish on the park’s signage. While this park is designed to be a wetlands preserve, the signs about the environmental importance of the park, all in English, left me utterly confused. Indeed, the only Spanish language signage within the park is the one that reads No Trespasar; No Trespassing. How effective could this park, repurposed from a brownfield for environmental and community benefits, be if the immediate community cannot feel welcome or understand its importance? If this park is not designed to benefit the local community, then for whom?

Brownfield to public open space

The revitalization and re-use of brownfields into urban and suburban green space, such as the example mentioned above demonstrates a recent pattern of sustainable land
reclamation. These projects are designed to provide process models for multiple kinds of cultural, infrastructural and ecosystem land conversions. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines brownfields as “real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant”.

Brownfields are located in virtually every industrialized country, their existence mainly attributed to suburban sprawl, globalization of capital to countries that tend to charge less for labor such as China and India, and ill-planned development to begin with. Although the majority of brownfields within the U.S are located in the Northeast and Midwest, where much of the manufacturing hubs once were, California, and more specifically Los Angeles, have their fair share of brownfields especially in the rail yard and automotive hub, which is located throughout South Los Angeles to Downtown, lining a portion of the Los Angeles River (Figure 1).

Though the trend of reclaiming brownfields is beginning to take shape in the United States, Europe has led the way in successful and sustainable brownfield revitalization projects for over half a century. After World War II many European cities created new design plans and some integrated brownfield revitalization projects into the new cityscape. Germany especially continues to successfully redevelop sites ranging from derelict rail yards to former chemical plants into spaces for the greater community.

One well-known example in Germany is Duisburg-Nord, a 570-acre landscape park in the Emscher Valley, which lies in the rapidly changing northern Ruhr district of

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1 The definition of land reclamation in this sense is the definition used in Alberta, Canada as “The process of reconverting disturbed land to its former or other productive uses”; Powter, Chris (2002). “Glossary of Reclamation and Remediation Terms used in Alberta”. Government of Alberta. Retrieved 2012-04-0
This district was (and is) home to the downsized steel, coal and iron industries. After the Thyssen Steel plant ceased operation in 1985, the land was left contaminated with heavy metals, sprinkled with deteriorating buildings and smoke stacks, and used as a dumping ground for the area’s trash and spare auto parts. The main goal of the planning and design for the space was to juxtapose the industrial history of the buildings’ metallic ruins and reemerge an organic landscape while providing a place of recreation, utilization and beauty for the nearby residents (Figure 2). The structural system of catwalks and structural armature of the plant remained and new park space was created in between (Figure 3). Development of this park was a key project of the International Building Exhibition and the regional Economic Redevelopment Strategy and was also meant to introduce new concepts about landscape and nature. The shells of several of the principal processing buildings were repurposed as concert and convening venues. The large ore bunker walls, riddled with cracks and scars from the rock storage are now used for free climbers to practice their sport (Figure 4). Trails were developed throughout the park, and rooftop gardens and water features for aesthetic pleasure and remediation purposes have been reused and constructed. Despite the fact the project was initiated by the International Building Exhibition and the main clients were developers instead of the community, the park was intended to benefit many different demographics within the area and provide space for recreation, leisure and events for all in an ecologically and economically sound manner.

Following Germany’s footsteps, cities across the United States have been renovating derelict industrial sites in a manner similar to Duisburg-Nord for the past two

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decades. Brownfield-to-green-space projects only represent a mere 4% of the total brownfield projects in the United States. However, this number is slowly beginning to elevate due to increased awareness of the importance of green space for inner-city residents along with a general movement to revitalize urban space.

In 2005, leaders from around the world signed the Green Cities Declaration, which was designed to “ensure that there is an accessible public or recreational open space within a half kilometer of every city resident by 2015”. Of the 50 signatory cities, 12 were in the United States -- the most from any country -- and a third of these 12 were California cities.

**Los Angeles and the brownfield to park process**

Although it was not one of these cities, Los Angeles has taken other recent green initiatives. Notwithstanding the metropolis’ reputation as a concrete jungle, defined by a discombobulated urban plan and loosely connected with a vast system of freeways, it is working on re-identifying itself with sustainability, connectivity and accessibility in mind. Plans such as GreenLA, the Los Angeles River Revitalization Project, and various public transportation improvement plans demonstrate this commitment.

One of the larger initiatives, the GreenLA Plan, created in 2007 by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in partnership with the Los Angeles City Council, is framed as “an action plan to lead the nation in fighting global warming”. In the opening letter introducing the plan, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa writes to the members of City Council that “We [citizens of Los Angeles] must also redesign our city to increase parks and open

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5 A small number in comparison to conversions into warehouses and industrial parks which accounts for 40% of the projects nationally.


7 Berkeley, San Francisco, Oakland and Santa Monica

space, use water more efficiently, set smart new standards for “green building” and land use planning”. The document specifies the need to clean up brownfield sites for community economic revitalization projects and open space while simultaneously regenerating the Los Angeles River to create open space opportunities and identifying and developing promising locations for storm water infiltration.

Through the efforts of the government, non-profit organizations, and passionate citizens, the results are visible. For example, each year the Trust for Public Land surveys the acreage in America’s 40 largest cities dedicated to green space and parks, and from 2011 to 2012 alone, the green park acreage in Los Angeles increased by nearly 20,000 acres.

However, the distribution of this park acreage is inherently disproportionate. An equity map created by the University of Southern California’s Sustainable Cities Program found that the areas with the highest concentrations of brownfields or vacant lots in Los Angeles were also the areas with the lowest concentration of parks, social amenities, economic opportunities, or ecological benefits (Figure 5). The answer to both of these issues should be simple; utilize the brownfield, de-contaminate it and turn it into a green space which would be viable for recreation while also having economic potential. Unfortunately, if it were that easy there wouldn’t still be 650,000 children in Los Angeles without access to a park.

However, due to economic and political barriers, along with the general stigma related to brownfields, the process is much more complex than straightforward. Research

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shows that the four most frequently identified obstacles to these projects are, in descending order; high costs and lack of funding for conversions, remediation issues, land acquisition problems, and redevelopment and long-term maintenance issues. These barriers are present in nearly every brownfield conversion project, but the incentives that also come with a majority of the projects can help in alleviating these concerns. Incentives range from property value increase in the surrounding neighborhoods to cleaner groundwater for the residents and lower childhood obesity rates due to park access, as observed by Christopher DeSousa. Incentives like these help to create a silver lining during the long, arduous process of sustainable brownfield-to-green space conversion while helping to involve more stakeholders and investors who may be interested in the positive outcome.

But what exactly is the process of sustainable brownfield-to-green space conversion, specifically within the lower income areas of Los Angeles? How does the diversity of stakeholders and beneficiaries affect the project? And what implications do projects have on their surrounding community, specifically given the context of the site’s history? In this thesis, I address these questions through a critical presentation of three case studies within Los Angeles proper: the Pacoima Wash Greenway, the South Los Angeles Wetlands Park, and the Los Angeles Historic Park, also known as The Cornfield. Though these three sites are geographically distinct and have diverse histories, they have a few things in common (Figure 6). Primarily, all of these sites are in low-income areas where many brownfields still remain in comparison to wealthier pockets of the city. They are also minority communities, though their demographics differ. Lastly, they all faced

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environmental injustices, mainly related to the exposure to toxins and contaminants emanated by the brownfields themselves. The main dissimilarities are the stakeholders involved in each project and the goals they are aiming to achieve.

I begin my cases with what is known as The Cornfield in Downtown Los Angeles. The site of an old rail yard, the land is now an interim park located in the center of three minority communities who had been forcibly relocated to this area in the early 1900s. In the 1990s a developer attempted to buy the land from Union Pacific Railway who had left the site early in the decade, and redevelop it into a warehouse, presenting it with the promise of jobs and economic revitalization for the city’s lowest income area. This case study is unique because it reveals the divide between what the local government thinks the community needs and what the community truly wants. The processes within this revitalization are complex and shine light to the many steps in the acquisition procedure along with the financial limitations many face while also demonstrating the power of community.

Second is the South LA Wetlands Park, which is situated at the site once owned by the Los Angeles Railway and currently by the Municipal Transportation Authority. Once seen as the one-stop location for any automobile need, for the last 20 years the derelict buildings sat idle waiting for revitalization. The main objective of this project as proposed by Councilwoman Jan Perry was to meet certain water quality requirements set by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, rather than to benefit the immediate community, though this was cited as one of the secondary intentions. The majority of the funding for the South LA Wetlands Park came from Proposition O, a

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16 The definition of “community” used throughout this thesis will be that of Kathleen MacQueen et al. as “a group of people with diverse characteristics linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical settings”; “What Is Community? An Evidence-Based Definition for Participatory Public Health”, n.d. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1446907/.
2004 bond meant to fund municipal water quality projects. Since the decision making process had little to do with the community most affected, the design decision may have been different with other actors such as community members advancing the project. This is seen with the lack of Spanish on the signs, along with a few other discrepancies I noted during my observational site visits. I will examine the process for the creation of this park in an attempt to explicate design possibilities that were overlooked because of the priorities for development.

The city of Pacoima, on the other hand, is facing brownfield revitalization headfirst as a community. The main organization promoting the various revitalization projects in the city is Pacoima Beautiful, a “bi-lingual, multi-cultural learning organization”\(^{17}\). The organization has evolving relationships with the federal, state and local governments along with various organizations in the area, which help to fund the many projects Pacoima is working on. Included among these is the Pacoima Wash; the re-development of a concrete-lined tributary into a multipurpose greenway for the Northern San Fernando Valley, an area with limited green or open space and an excess of brownfields. Though the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has granted Pacoima one of their pilot grants of $200,000, this funding is merely for site assessment and will not account for any of the physical costs\(^{18}\). This has left the Pacoima community in search of funding for this project within every sector possible, making the process extremely different from that of the Wetlands Park, where the granting of funding was the initial impetus behind the project, with the community coming as an afterthought.


By examining these three case studies, all located in low-income areas of the same city, I hope to articulate the elaborate measures needed to pursue sustainable brownfield reuse and show the effects these projects have on their communities. These studies will demonstrate that, if done correctly the sustainable reuse of brownfields, specifically in the context of conversion to green space, is the first step in returning our industrialized and overworked earth to a healthier state, while also allowing the communities to utilize their natural capital in a sustainable manner.19

Figure 1: Brownfields Lining Los Angeles River

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19 Using the definition of natural capital provided by the International Institute of Sustainable Development which is “the land, air, water, living organisms and all formations of the Earth's biosphere that provide us with ecosystem goods and services imperative for survival and well-being.” Natural Capital”, n.d. http://www.iisd.org/natres/agriculture/capital.asp.
Figures 2 and 3: Duisborg Nord

Figure 4: Climbing Garden of Duisborg Nord
Figure 5: Los Angeles Park Equity Map;
USC Sustainable Cities Program 2002

Fig. 6: Median income map of Los Angeles County with case sites depicted;
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature on sustainable brownfield redevelopment into green spaces covers a broad range of topics and is examined through many different lenses. Of these foci, the bulk of the research has been produced by environmental justice advocates, economists, designers and environmentalists.

One highly prioritized benefit of brownfield conversions is the de-contamination of hazardous toxins for improved human health. Environmental justice activists Bullard and Wright argue that the primary advantage of remediation is site-decontamination for prevention of risks posed on human health by contaminants in the ground and water system.\textsuperscript{20} Rowan and Fridgen also acknowledge the positive impacts of site decontamination, but oftentimes scholars such as these also present caution about the authenticity of cleanup efforts.\textsuperscript{21} Dennison and Shutkin argue that cleanup efforts tend to not be as thorough as they should be, and that this seen most commonly when the drive for remediation is a financial incentive instead of the creation of an ecologically healthy area.\textsuperscript{22} The authors also claim that limited liability tends to put more burden on the public sector than the private sectors, which are responsible for the actions in the first place.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to arguments against certain financial incentives, environmental justice scholars profess that brownfield sites should be geared solely towards supporting positive,

ecologically restorative projects such as parks or community space. Wong, for instance, insists that cleaning the site solely to create a Greenfield for future industrial use is no better for the community members than having a contaminated site in the area.

Another outlying issue addressed in environmental justice literature is the inequitable distribution of brownfields in predominately low-income sections of urban areas, such as the three cases I will present in Los Angeles. Simmons attributes this trend to the lack of economic potential low-income areas have in comparison to those with higher property values and income levels; this trend also makes it harder to find future investors. Intrinsically linked with this idea is the claim presented by Soltaire and Greenberg that because lower-income areas tend to be paired with less educated and at times non-English speaking communities, such as South Los Angeles or Pacoima, the amount of community activism surrounding the brownfield issue is lower than that of educated communities that tend to be more aware of the substantiated environmental injustices around them. This inequitable distribution theory was proven in 1987 by a study conducted by the United Church of Christ (UCC) that found race to be the single most important predicator of the location of hazardous waste facilities and factories in the United States.

The UCC study was one of many that led to the creation of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council in 1993 under the EPA. In 1995 the Council held

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open dialogues across the country that provided opportunities for environmental justice advocates and residents of contaminated communities to provide input on brownfield revitalization projects sponsored by the federal government. These dialogues raised issues from residents of nearby communities and addressed how these matters should be taken care of. The conclusion of this dialogue demonstrated that the main issues at hand were “substantial burdens placed on certain racial and socio-economic groups by environmental regulations; encouraging redevelopment without lowering environmental standards, and strengthening the community’s involvement within these projects.” These statements further backed the literature focused on the social justice implications of brownfield revitalization projects. One argument behind this, advanced by Lerner and Poole, is that redevelopment will not result in genuine environmental or economic improvements unless the process is community driven. Grounds for this argument are demonstrated throughout various case studies in urban areas that have been deemed unsuccessful due to either the lack of economic investment post-conversion or the lack of involvement from the community affected. As observed by McCarthy, these unsuccessful sites tend to align with outside stakeholders who have little to no interest in the community other than financial gain for themselves.

Despite the evidence supporting this theory, it conflicts the arguments raised by proponents of the economic benefits of conversion projects. Through an economic lens, which a large portion of brownfield literature focuses on, the federal and state government stakeholders are the most essential players in brownfield conversion projects. According to

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31 Ibid.
32 Lerner, S., & Poole, W., The Economic benefits of park and open space. Washington, D.C: The Trust for Public Land, 1999
economist Edith Pepper, in order to alleviate conditions of uncertainty surrounding liability, cleanup standards or regulatory requirements, public intervention in the form of a government entity is necessary.\textsuperscript{34} Within the economic emphasis framework, the literature ranges from economic gain through job creation, raised property values in the surrounding neighborhoods, lower funding for public health, heightened potential for future investors and increases to the “natural capital” of the area.\textsuperscript{35} The literature revolving around the economic aspect of brownfield conversions is heavily influenced by scholars such as Pepper and Kiss who recognize the economic prosperity these projects could have on the community and various stakeholders.

The more environmentally focused literature recognizes the positive benefits these projects could have on the community, various stakeholders and the natural environment. Within this environmentally driven literature some scholars emphasize the regenerative conceptual design that brownfield revitalization projects bring to life. William McDonough is the lead advocate for the “cradle-to-cradle” design concept.\textsuperscript{36} This holistic framework, created by McDonough himself, seeks to create systems that are not only efficient but also essentially waste free. This idea of integrative and ultimately sustainable design for the reuse of contaminated sites is most commonly supported by landscape architects and environmental designers because of the unprecedented design implementation it requires. One of the more recent innovative ecological design ideas is the use of plants to clean

environmental hazards, a process known as phytoremediation. Environmental engineer Steve Rock advocates for this procedure. He argues that, despite the longer timeline this natural remediation technique may require, it is an important strategy because it reveals the cyclical cradle-to-cradle idea while also preserving the site history, such as the case with Duisburg Nord. It is also a much more environmentally sound procedure than soil transport and incineration. Landscape architect Niall Kirkwood suggests that innovative use of sustainable design when revitalizing brownfields is imperative in order to create a site that will sustain itself and the natural environment.

While these authors do focus on the necessity of sustainable design features, some environmental perspectives are less framed around design and more on ecological health and sustainability. De Sousa is a lead author and argues that the reason for brownfields in the first place is the lack of an initial sustainable framework. He states that in order to make sure derelict sites don’t continue to increase we must work within a conscious and ecologically aware mindset. Biologist Cairns advances this perspective by stating “Humans are clearly part of ecosystems, not apart from them; therefore, changing attitude toward natural systems will be just as important as changing behaviors”.

De Sousa further explains that at the urban level, sustainable development is where the economic, environmental and social dimensions collide and vie for predominance, and as these urban areas continue to expand topographically, demographically and economically it is essential to stay within a sustainable framework to help deal with

38 Ibid.
40 Cairns, J., Ecosystem restoration: Reestablishing humanity’s relationship with natural systems. Environment. 4-9. 1995
poverty, social inequality and environmental degradation. The ultimate way of ensuring a sustainable framework for brownfield conversion projects, De Sousa argues, is to incorporate them into larger environmental programs, as Los Angeles did with the Green LA program. When these redevelopments are a part of a broader initiative they stand a better chance of being supported, funded, and maintained while also staying in line with it’s initial environmental emphasis.

As demonstrated by the myriad of topics that the literature covers, brownfield projects require much time and thought due to disputing opinions on prioritization schemes. With any design project there will be disputes, but discord tends to be amplified with these projects due to the potential health impacts associated with the sites and the potential opportunities these projects possess. Though all of these literary sources are essential in framing the process of redevelopment and the stance of varying stakeholders, there is a gap in the literature addressing social aspects of these projects and how the various implications change given different actors. For example, phytoremediation tactics are a great alternative to the normal remediation process of replacing contaminated soil with new earth, but they often involve a protracted process and require the implementation of certain plants, such as poplars and various lichens. From an ecological standpoint these tactics are great options, but what if the community affected by this site doesn’t want to wait more than a year or two for a park? What if they wanted soccer fields with turf instead of the all-absorbing lichens?

Oftentimes these projects are defined by the crux of urban issues including economic blight and environmental issues such as contaminated soil. In the end, it is the stakeholder’s

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
job to decide on which approach they wish to take—economic or environmental; but is there a way to meet in the middle? I examine this nexus at a closer level while simultaneously shedding light on how the social, environmental and economic implications change depending on the structural paradigms behind these projects.

The literature mentioned above is essential in framing brownfield revitalization projects. In order to fully understand the objectives, incentives and barriers of brownfield revitalization projects, it is important to be aware of the laws, policies and programs framing these projects on a federal, statewide and regional level.
Chapter 3: History of Brownfields Policies

I. Federal Policies

The evolution of United States brownfield policies over the last 25 years has generally followed an incrementalist path. The incrementalist theory, advanced by Charles Lindblom, is defined by brief stages within a process of mutual adjustment among a multiplicity of actors, each having different self-interests and divergent conceptions of the public interests. Notwithstanding this theory, many of the base acts and policies from the 1970s and 1980s, created from the growing fear of hazardous waste and its risks posed on surrounding communities, are still powerful outliners for environmental regulations and requirements involved with brownfield revitalization projects.

The incremenalist theory is exemplified in the many policies that shaped the American environmentalism movement, which began in the 1960s with concerns about air and water pollution and has more currently evolved into a movement toward sustainable development and environmental justice. Many of the original policies are still in effect today and must be acknowledged when working on a brownfield revitalization project. Below are brief descriptions of the laws and policies, which have shaped the federal environmental program. These acts and policies must also be taken into consideration for stakeholders participating brownfield conversion projects.

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45 Ibid.
National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA): Often described as the “environmental magna-carta”, this act set up procedural requirements for all federal government agencies to prepare environmental assessments and environmental impact statements; both of which are required to contain statements of environmental effects of proposed federal agency actions.\(^47\) This Act established a U.S national policy promoting the enhancement of the environment.

Clean Air Act of 1970: Regulates air emission from stationary and mobile sources. The Act authorizes the EPA to establish National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to protect public health and welfare and to regulate hazardous air pollutant emissions.\(^48\)

Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (RCRA): Gives the EPA the authority to control hazardous waste from the “cradle-to-grave”. It includes the generation, transportation, treatment, storage and disposal of hazardous waste. Focuses on underground tanks storing petroleum.\(^49\)

Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 (TSCA): Provides the EPA with authority to require reporting, record keeping, testing, and restrictions relating to chemical substances. It addresses production, importation, use and disposal of PCBs, asbestos, radon and lead based paint.\(^50\)

Community Reinvestment Act of 1977: Intended to require lenders to provide capital to the low and middle-income borrowers who lived proximally to contaminated sites. The


\(^{48}\) Op cit. “Summary of the Clean Air Act.”


\(^{50}\) Op cit., “Summary of the Toxic Substances Control Act.”
central idea was that urban inhabitants could borrow money and invest in their neighborhoods, thus leading to the remediation of local brownfields.51

Overall, regulation has evolved considerably since the late 1970s when contaminated sites in residential areas first came to light in the Love Canal and Valley of Drums sagas.52 Arguably the largest of these initial brownfields acts is the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) more commonly known as Superfund.53 This Act was created in 1980 in response to two disasters associated with improper cleanup of hazardous waste. The first being that of Love Canal, where members of the Niagara Falls neighborhood began to get very sick from an improper cleanup of a past chemical company, and the second being the case of the Valley of Drums in Bullitt County, Kentucky, where a waste site full of thousands of waste-filled drums was left burning for an entire week in the residential area due to a lack of regulation.

CERCLA authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to “respond to releases, or threatened releases, of hazardous substances that may endanger public health, welfare or the environment” while also enabling the agency to “force parties responsible for environmental contamination to clean it up or to reimburse the Superfund for response or remediation costs incurred by the Environmental Protection Agency”.54 Under CERCLA the EPA focuses primarily on the most-contaminated sites first, leaving little to no attention for the less contaminated sites. Though these less contaminated sites

53 Op cit. Summary of CERCLA.
are not as threatening on the community’s health or general well-being as those with high contamination levels, they still need to be addressed and remediated due to their potential harm.

This need was eventually addressed in a field hearing hosted by the Northeast Midwest Congressional Coalition in 1992. During this hearing the word “brownfield” was introduced by Charles Bartsch in order to help better describe a derelict industrial waste site that was neither a case of high-priority contamination nor a Greenfield. The term was soon adopted by both the private and public sector and officially defined by the United States EPA as: “abandoned, idled or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination”.

This definition was created under the Brownfields Action Agenda (BAA) of 1995, which was created to ignite interest in the redevelopment of brownfields. This agenda contained four main components: (i) the provision of funds for pilot programs to test redevelopment models and facilitate stakeholder cooperation (ii) the clarification of liability for prospective purchasers, lenders, property owners and others regarding their association with a site, (iii) the incorporation of job development and training opportunities into brownfields efforts and (iv) the encouragement of partnerships among the different levels of government and community representatives aimed at developing strategies for promoting public participation and community involvement in brownfield decision making. The agenda also led to the creation of the more formal EPA

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57 Ibid.
Brownfields Program in 1995. This program’s main function was to “empower states, communities and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields”. The EPA maintains this function by creating and distributing various grants for the beginning phases of brownfield redevelopment. The two largest grants are Assessment Grants under the EPA Brownfield Pilot Program, which awards up to $200,000 for site assessment, and the Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant which provides up to $200,000 to communities facilitating community involvement by developing an area-wide plan for brownfields assessment with a catalytic site in mind. The latter grant is in association with the Sustainable Cities Partnership; a collaboration between the EPA and U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Department of Transportation (DOT), which strives to make urban areas of the United States more ‘livable’ by aiding in transportation, public space and sustainability projects. Though these grants are helpful, it is important to note how little of an amount $200,000 actually is in context. In comparative terms, the remediation of The Cornfield, a 32-acre site, was over $1.3 million dollars in 2005. The small amounts put forth for these projects highlights the lack of prioritization from the federal government towards this issue.

By creating partnerships with entities such as DOT and HUD, the Brownfield Program put into place the administrative structures for linking brownfield redevelopment with other relevant socioeconomic issues and allowed the EPA to

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59 Ibid.
60 http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/areawide_grants.htm
61 Ibid
concentrate on the management of high-risk contaminated properties, especially considering the projects must meet both federal and state-wide remediation requirements.

As a result of this federal program, all brownfields were taken off the national priority list by 1997, thus eliminating over 24,000 sites from Superfund.\(^\text{62}\) By June 2000, all 50 states had participated in this program and 45 state legislations had created their own mini-Superfund statutes. Included in these “mini-superfunds” were Voluntary Cleanup Programs to help loosen the prescriptive structures both federal and statewide policies had imposed. These state-wide programs have implemented policies offering more flexible cleanup options and affording the private sector with more leeway to work on it’s own terms, while at the same time providing technical assistance, liability protection and financial aid to the various stakeholders.\(^\text{63}\) Despite the improvements in feasibility these “mini-Superfunds” add, projects must still meet statewide and federal regulations thus creating a two-edged sword.

Generally speaking, once the risk of federal liability is removed, developers become more interested in brownfield redevelopment projects.\(^\text{64}\) To help aid with liability, the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act of 2002 was created in order to clarify the process by which new purchasers and users of brownfield properties can reduce their liability exposures.\(^\text{65}\) The Act limits the liability for contiguous property owners and prospective purchasers while expediting settlements.

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\(^\text{63}\) *Ibid.*
with responsible parties who prove they cannot pay the full remediation cost. This Act helps both the new and old owner while also helping to move the process along. Unlike Superfund’s highly criticized “top-down” approach, the Act evolved in a more “bottom up” fashion whereby information from pilot programs on what was successful and what was not trickled up and was then set into regulation.

Because brownfield redevelopment projects often trigger ripple effects of revitalization throughout an economically or ecologically defeated area, many federal agencies and policies can help to aid in the process of the revitalization, even if the policy or agency does not typically address brownfields. For example, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 was created as a response to the late-2000s recession. The primary objectives of ARRA were to create new jobs and save existing ones, spur economic activity, invest in long-term economic growth and foster unprecedented levels of accountability and transparency in government spending. Although none of these relate directly to brownfields, ARRA has provided the EPA Brownfields Program with $100 million for clean up, revitalization and sustainable reuse of contaminated properties. Similar in thought to the EPA Brownfields Program funding amount, this amount is surprisingly low. For example, the price for reclamation of Duisborg Nord was $15.5 million in 1995, since then projects have only gotten more costly, especially considering the various regulations they must abide by. This lack of

67 Though these acts are helpful, funding during the Bush legislation was cut tremendously for these projects and is just now beginning to take off again.
prioritization dovetails with the lack of prioritization of job creation and economic
redevelopment of inner city and low-income areas.\textsuperscript{69}

Current regulations address several fundamental issues including cleanup levels,
liability and funding while also aiming to establish a stable and secure environment in
which the private market can operate. There are also more ways for stakeholders and
interested parties to receive funding and financial assistance when purchasing
brownfields. Aside from EPA grants and leveraging from other federal partners such as
the Department of Housing and Urban Development, every state offers a range of
financial incentives for brownfields remediation and redevelopment in the form of grants,
bonds, loans, tax abatements and tax credits.

\textit{II. California Policies}

California is one of the 45 states that has installed a variety of programs
incentivizing the remediation and the revitalization of brownfields. According to the
California Department of Toxic Substances Control (CDTSC) “all [brownfield] sites are
subjects to the same standards; these standards were developed to protect human health
and the environment as set forth in state and federal laws, regulations and policies”.\textsuperscript{70}

The CDTSC is the leading Department of California brownfield policies and has
implemented many policies that attempt to alleviate the financial strains stakeholders
associate with brownfield projects. One of these policies is the Prospective Purchases,
Agreements and Liability Relief Act created in 2001.\textsuperscript{71} Like CERCLA, this Act creates
an understanding between a prospective purchaser, the CDTSC and the responsible party

upon the purchase of a site and releases an environmental liability from the purchasers when the site is cleaned.\textsuperscript{72}

To further expand on this agreement, the California Land Reuse and Revitalization Act of 2004 provides liability protection to bona fide purchasers, innocent landowners, and contiguous property owners in an effort to promote the cleanup and redevelopment of blighted and contaminated properties.\textsuperscript{73} The bill established a process for eligible owners to maintain the immunities, conduct a site assessment and implement a response action in order to ensure the property is ready to use.\textsuperscript{74}

Long before either of these statutes came into play, however, former Governor Reagan signed the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in 1970. CEQA, an offshoot of NEPA, is a decree that requires state and local agencies to identify the significant environmental impacts of their actions and to avoid or mitigate those impacts, if feasible.\textsuperscript{75} The epicenter of this law is an assessment known as the Environmental Impact Report (EIR).\textsuperscript{76} An EIR serves to inform governmental agencies and the public of a project’s environmental impacts. The report also proposes mitigations and alternatives, which may reduce or avoid the environmental impacts.\textsuperscript{77} Each brownfield revitalization project is required to have an EIR released. This document is similar to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) required under NEPA. In California, both documents are necessary for projects and can be combined into one. CEQA, however, is much broader than NEPA and tends to require less revisions than the latter. For example,

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
under CEQA the lead agency can approve a project without mitigations or alternatives under the Statements of Overriding Considerations, while projects under NEPA are not allowed this option and must consistently list mitigations and alternatives. For this reason, CEQA receives critiques from community and environmental groups on the grounds that EIRs are often too brief or overlook possible impacts, as there are no guidelines for the length or content of the EIRs.

Another older California Act that often receives criticism from environmental justice advocates is the Quimby Act of 1965. This Act mandates that developers of new areas must account for at least five acres of open green or park space per every 1,000 residents they are accounting for within the development strategy. If developers fail to meet this requirement, they must pay “Quimby Fees,” which increase each year. The main criticism of this Act is that the majority of new development occurs in wealthier areas, versus the less economically thriving pockets where most brownfields are located. This leads to an unsatisfactory distribution of park space in California’s larger metropolitan areas, especially the ever-expanding Los Angeles.

Fortunately, since the Quimby Act’s inception many decades past, California voters have realized this trend of environmental injustice in the means of park distribution and have relentlessly put forth propositions aiming to aid in equality and equity. An example of this is California’s Proposition 40, also known as The California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002. The Act covers many issues, but one section of it hones in on the need for urban parks in

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80 Ibid.
the State of California, and more specifically in low-income areas within the state. The proposition was passed with the support of 74% of Latino voters, 77% of Black, 60% of Asian voters and 56% non-Hispanic white voters.\textsuperscript{83} It was also in support of 75% of the voters with an annual family income below $20,000 and received the largest amount of votes for any proposition on the ballot from voters with nothing more than a high-school diploma.\textsuperscript{84} These statistics further demonstrate the need for park and public space in low-income and minority areas throughout California.

The above California statutes have all helped to aid in proficient brownfield conversion projects. As greenfield land becomes more of a rare commodity, specifically within urban areas, more dictums will need to be created for the increasing amount of brownfield revitalization projects. Fortunately, most metropolitan areas faced with the issue of brownfields have citywide plans and statutes in addition to statewide and federal enactments. In terms of Los Angeles, the brownfield program is one with national recognition.\textsuperscript{85}

**III. Los Angeles Policies**

One of the largest issues in Los Angeles, the second most populated city in the United States is the equitable provision of park space throughout its automobile-centric cityscape. Out of the forty largest cities in the United States, Los Angeles is 23\textsuperscript{rd} for “most walkable city”. According to the National Parkland Access Standards, the number of park acres per 1,000 residents should be 6.25; Los Angeles falls short of this with an average of 4 acres per 1,000.\textsuperscript{86} This is a remarkably low number to begin with, but when looking more closely at the park acreage for minority communities the number is lowered


\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.


substantially. Latino communities, highly concentrated in South and Northeast Los Angeles census tracts, have only .6 acres per 1,000 population, which is by far the lowest number, even compared to other minority areas. 87 Statistics such as these, paired with lack of open space to build new parks within these low-income areas, have led Los Angeles politicians and residents to create new outlets for park and recreational space. Reuse of brownfields in the areas has proven to be one of the more economic and sustainable ways in doing so.

Supported by the Los Angeles Brownfields Revitalization Fund, the Los Angeles Brownfields Program is housed in the City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works and Bureau of Sanitation. 88 The goal of this program is to “redevelop brownfields throughout Los Angeles but particularly in disadvantaged communities and in the process incorporate more effective brownfields development strategies into the city’s normal redevelopment process”. 89 Brownfields program staff work directly with property owners, community organizers, and city agencies to help them all assess, cleanup, and redevelop brownfield sites.

Aside from the endowment from the LA Brownfields Revitalization Fund, the program relies heavily on federal and state grants. 90 In 1998 LA was selected to be one of only 16 communities nationally designated Federal Brownfields Showcase Communities 91. Since then, the program has received over $3 million dollars in federal

87 African American minority areas: 1.7 per 1000, Asian tracts: 1.2 per 1,000
88 Again, this fund has a rather small budget of $3.65 million
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
and regional funding in the form of grants and loans. Although this is a high number, it is relatively small considering it has spanned over 15 years.

The program has been awarded several US EPA grants to conduct site inventories to help identify brownfields sites in specific neighborhoods. The two areas the program has focused on are East and Central Los Angeles. Within Central LA the analysts zoomed in on the Los Angeles River and the plethora of brownfields lining its concrete frame, including The Cornfield. The program is also working on several derelict landfills within the city limits and sites with major economic development potential.

Another well-regarded program is the Sustainable Neighborhood Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides funding for non-profit and private entities along with public agencies, though the sites must be in Community Development Block Grant Eligible areas. It does not, however, provide funding for remediation. The CAL REUSE program is where stakeholders can go for remediation requests; this program not only provides loans for site assessment but also distributes cleanup loans and grants for infill projects with housing elements.

Comparatively speaking, Los Angeles’ Brownfield Program is a trailblazer for other Western cities. Funded by EPA Pilot grants, Department of Urban Housing grants and the Brownfield Revitalization fund, the Program attempts to meet the financial needs of projects as much as possible. Unfortunately, the funding, as seen in many other instances, is lacking, and therefore no more than $300,000 has been given towards any

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93 Ibid.
94 Community Development Block Grants are given to aid in affordable housing, suitable living opportunities and economic opportunities in low-income urban area throughout the United States.
96 Ibid.
one project thus far.\textsuperscript{97} It does, however, provides resources outside of financial means such as on-call technical assistance, occasional site assessment and assistance to understanding the complex process.\textsuperscript{98}

The perks of brownfield assistance programs local to the site include the connection the local government has to the property, either historically or economically, along with the ability to work in close proximity with those in charge of the programs, while the perks of statewide programs are fiscally based.

Overall, the reuse of brownfields, specifically into green spaces within low-income urban areas, has increased within the last few decades, though it still needs to be prioritized at a higher scale in order for these projects to truly take off. It is my assessment that the number of conversion projects will continue to increase as land becomes scarcer and park and recreation space is proven to have positive impacts on these areas in an economic, social and ecological manner.

\textit{IV. The Stakeholders}

Despite the many programs and statutes aiming to promote these conversions, none of the projects would be possible without the input of stakeholders. Stakeholders in the brownfield conversion process are those directly or indirectly affected by, have an interest in, or see an opportunity for a brownfield.\textsuperscript{99} In projects as multi-faceted as brownfield conversions, stakeholders come from many different backgrounds. Typically in the forefront are the economic stakeholders, or those who have either an economic

\hspace{1cm}


vision for the project or could be affected economically by the project. The most prominent of these stakeholders are developers. Developers tend to be larger corporations whose primary objective is to make a profit and maximize their financial returns. For the development process, all costs and risks must be considered in calculating a project’s return. For developers the majority of time delays come from the aggregate cost of assessment, cleanup, demolition, legal advice, and interest. Another typical economic stakeholder is the landowner. Landowners can range from being a singular person to a large corporation; the latter option was the case for all three case studies conducted. Oftentimes they are hesitant to sell their land due to either the stigmatization of contaminated land, the liability of the contaminated land or the potential of land value increase in the future, this was also an occurrence in all three case studies. Lenders also tend to be integral forces in brownfield conversion projects. Banks and other types of lenders play an important role in regulating redevelopment both directly and indirectly by scrutinizing the methods used. These stakeholders particularly are interested in making sure that brownfields are properly appraised to reflect the cost implications related to contamination so that they can be reflected in the lending package. Lastly, various government agencies, such as the Brownfield Economic Development Initiative grant program, promote brownfield projects in order to help stimulate economic development throughout the area, mainly through employment generation and tax growth. Government agencies as economic stakeholders can come from a federal, statewide or local level. It is also normal to have all three governmental levels engaged in a single project, as was the case for each of the three examples in Los Angeles.

Another type of stakeholder for these projects come from the environmental realm, with the most powerful stakeholder being environmental government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency. These agencies have interest in brownfield projects out of concern for public health and natural environmental risk management, along with the potential for ecological restoration these sites present. On the federal level, the environmental and natural resource agencies are primarily responsible for brownfield regulation given initial focus on contamination issues. On a local scale the departments that tend to be most engaged are environmental health departments with an interest in restoring habitat and generating open space for the public. Other typical environmental stakeholders include environmental consultants who are responsible for assessing pollution levels and risks, along with oversight of cleanup strategies.

Consultants may vary professionally, ranging from environmental engineers, public health professionals scientists, geologists, hydrologists, chemists, toxicologists, and non-governmental organizations such as the Trust for Public Land and the Nature Conservancy.

Brownfield conversion projects also have many social implications, such as potential health impacts and reconfiguration of the social dynamics of the area. For this reason, members of the community tend to be at the epicenter of the social sphere due to their proximity to the brownfield and the effect it may have on their community. Some may be interested in the economic prospect of redevelopment projects, while others may be more interested on aesthetic or health improvement.

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Community development corporations, which are local non-profit groups that advocate for and fund development projects, can also be seen as social stakeholders on the account these corporations and agencies tend to be more concerned with the social implications of redevelopment projects and how such projects contribute to quality of life for the surrounding areas. Because the word “community” is lost in a country that fosters individualism such as the United States, it should be understood that the definition used throughout this thesis will be that of Kathleen MacQueen et al as “a group of people with diverse characteristics linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical settings”.102

Outside of these three main categories lie other stakeholders. These include lawyers, non-profit organizations, and brownfields associations and networks. Lawyers often work with some of the stakeholders mentioned above to provide representation and advice to their clients regarding liability, remediation, reuse and financing. Brownfields associations and networks are groups involved in the education and advocacy aimed at stimulating the redevelopment of brownfields. These organizations are typically involved in outreach and education-based initiatives aimed to raise awareness of the issues and policies. Finally, non-profit organizations, environmental groups, and neighborhood organizations can be involved in economic, environmental or social aspects of brownfield conversion projects. They are oftentimes community-based groups involved in rehabilitating the area. Although these last three are not typical stakeholders, it is important to note them because they, among the other stakeholders mentioned above, all played key roles in the three cases examined for this thesis.

VI. Conclusion

As helpful as many of these policies and programs are, the small amount of funding put towards them is an issue that must be further researched and assessed. In order to promote more of these sustainable projects funding must be readjusted and more aid should be give to those wanting to create something positive from the derelict site rather than the landowner who contaminated the site in the first place.

Nevertheless the policies and programs laid out above do aid in the sustainable repurposing of brownfields into spaces for the community while also making the process more thorough and effective to ensure the health and well-being of those who may utilize the revitalized site. Due to the thoroughness these policies require, the process of these projects can span throughout decades. The first case study of The Cornfield in downtown Los Angeles has spanned nearly two decades and has still yet to reach completion due to a combination of policies and other issues at large.
Methodology

Before delving into the case studies I will give a brief justification and understanding of why I chose these three sites specifically and how I conducted my research. I decided to focus on Los Angeles for two reasons: my current physical proximity to the city, and my interest in the sustainable measures currently taking place there. Having gone to college for the past four years in Los Angeles County, I have seen small movements growing larger in efforts to turn the smog filled, concrete metropolis into a more civil and sustainable city. Once I began researching these various movements, such as Green LA and the Los Angeles River Revitalization Project, I knew I wanted to focus on sustainable initiatives. More specifically I wanted to focus on more recent or currently occurring projects so that the process was still fresh on the mind of the stakeholders.

My three sites were chosen by research via journals, articles and books on brownfield conversion projects in Los Angeles. I was surprised by how little research this actually was and wanted to fill the gap as much as I could.

The first case study, The Cornfield, was also the location of a 5k run that I was a participant in last year. That is where I initially learned about the site and experienced the interim park first hand. After choosing this site I read many law articles and went through various archives to find out the core of the dispute. After archival research I visited the park on four separate occasions. During these visits I would walk around, sit at the different benches or tables, and observe. Occasionally I would talk to someone walking his or her dog or weeding. Later in the semester I had the privilege of conducting an in-person interview with Lewis McAdams, founder of Friends of the Los Angeles River and
integral player in the Cornfield saga. This interview shed light on the issue from a more personal scale and came from an extremely passionate Los Angeles native who was extremely educated on the subject matter. Quotes, anecdotes and facts are weaved throughout my analysis.

I found the second site, The South Los Angeles Wetlands Park, by researching different parks in Historic South Central, a historically low-income Latino community. Through this research I found both Augustus Hawkings Park and the South Los Angeles Wetlands Park which both had a large wetlands component to them. I found this very interesting, especially since parks in more affluent areas of the city, such as Griffith Park or Grand Park, don’t have wetlands, but do have ponds or lakes. The difference between these wetlands and the lakes at the more affluent parks, however, was that the wetlands serve primarily as storm water infiltration systems instead of aesthetic features to the park. I found this very intriguing and wanted to research more. Similar to my research at the Cornfield, I observed the social dynamics of the Wetlands Park by observational walking, sitting and talking to users of the parks and nearby residents in an informal setting. I also contacted councilwoman Jan Perry and received a response for an interview with one of her assistants. Unfortunately due to scheduling conflicts the interview never occurred. One of Perry’s assistants, Marie Rumsey, did respond with a small paragraph explaining the site via email in April of 2013.

I found my last case study, the Pacoima Wash Greenway through the EPA website. I had read about the Brownfields Grants given to Wilmington and Pacoima. I focused on Pacoima alone, however, because of the interesting history of the area. I also think that the Wash project is so expansive it warrants a case study of it’s own. Though
the Wash is not a typical brownfield, many brownfields border it and it has been known to be the site of illegal dumping for years. Much of my research on this case study came from Pacoima Beautiful, the leading stakeholder running the project. I also had the privilege of meeting with Landscape Architect and project leader Ken Frederick for an in-person interview discussing the project and it’s impact on the community.

In order to minimize variables in my study, I chose neighborhoods with similar amenities. Each neighborhood is within Los Angeles proper, all fall substantially under the median U.S income of $52,762 and all three communities are majority-minority. Additionally, all three areas fall short of the L.A general rule of 4 park acres per 1000 people. Below is a table I have created to show the similarities of all three areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Downtown LA</th>
<th>South LA</th>
<th>Pacoima</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td>34,811</td>
<td>52,509</td>
<td>75,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Makeup</strong></td>
<td>37% Latino, 22% Black, 21.3% Asian, 16.2% White</td>
<td>85% Latino, 10.1% Black, 1.0% Asian, 1.2% White</td>
<td>86% Latino, 7.2% Black, 1.9% Asian, 4.6% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median Income (2010 Census)</strong></td>
<td>$15,003</td>
<td>$30,882</td>
<td>$49,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size &amp; Location within Los Angeles</strong></td>
<td>5.84 square miles, East</td>
<td>2.55 square miles, Southeast</td>
<td>7.14 square miles, Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Park acres</strong></td>
<td>3.5 park acres/1000 residents</td>
<td>1.2 park acres/1000 residents</td>
<td>3.2 park acres/1000 residents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case Study #1: The Cornfield

Lewis McAdams, Los Angeles native, renowned poet and founder of Friends of the Los Angeles River noted in his poem *To Artesia* about the Los Angeles River that “you can hear laughter from beneath her concrete corset”. Although he was referring to the river, this notion rings true for much of Downtown Los Angeles, a downtown unlike those of most metropolises due to its decentralized location and withering cityscape. Aside from it’s skyscrapers and recent cultural center improvements, Downtown L.A presents itself as an ephemeral area; with not much to offer than transportation to another part of the expansive city via the Greyhound, Metro or Amtrak; all of which are stationed around the area. The dichotomy of the area is described by author Mike Davis in his book *City of Quartz* when he states, “Downtown Los Angeles’ redevelopers considered property values in the old Broadway core are irreversibly eroded by the area’s status as the hub of public transportation”.

As for its landscape, Downtown L.A. is home to several parks, plazas, gardens and other open spaces. The most well known parks include Pershing Square, the newly renovated Grand Park and The Los Angeles State Historic Park.

The Los Angeles State Historic Park is commonly referred to as The Cornfield. The reasoning behind this epithet is unclear, though historians have conjured up a few theories. The most well known conjectures are either that corn seeds used to spill off the

rail cars and flourish in the area, or because corn used to migrate from the nearby mill south of the site.

The teardrop shaped park is framed by three interstate freeways and located half a mile from the original city center, less than 200 feet from the concrete lined Los Angeles River. It is best known for being home to the Southern Pacific Railway station between 1876 and 2000, though the majority of the rail yard’s physical features, including tracks and train platforms were removed in the 1990s when the transition from rail to automobiles and buses had completely taken over the city.105

The parcel, roughly located between N. Broadway and N. Spring Street, two of the most utilized downtown thoroughfares, neighbors three different minority communities of African Americans, Hispanic and Asian Americans.106 Despite its historical and cultural richness, the area is poor in community resources and hosts a large homeless population, second only to Skid Row. The census tract around it has the lowest median income of all Los Angeles census tracts, at roughly $15,003 annually.107

Depending on whom you talk to, the lot may be referred to as one of the following: The Cornfield, Los Angeles State Historic Park, Chinatown Cornfields or the Chinatown Yards. Though corn has not grown in this area, or any surrounding area for that matter, for centuries, it was an agricultural region before California became a state in 1869 and was irrigated by the “concrete corset” of the LA River.108

106 68% community latino, 14% Asian and 4% African American within 5 mile radius of site; Barnett, H., Chinatown Cornfields: Including Environmental Benefits in Environmental Justice Struggles. UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, 2001
I. History

The story of The Cornfield begins, as most American tales do, with an indigenous tribe. This particular tribe is recognized by some historians as the Tongva or more commonly the Gabrielinos, named for Mission San Gabriel, a Spanish mission established in the late eighteenth century.\footnote{109}

Fueled by the trout and fresh water from the flowing nearby river, the Gabrielinos occupied various pockets of Los Angeles for many years until Spanish conquistadors “discovered” the LA River and its lush surroundings while on an expedition in 1769 set forth from Baja California to the port in Monterey Bay and decided to settle.\footnote{110} In 1781 the first Governor of California, Felipe de Neve, established this site and its surroundings as El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles, which has remained a historical feature in the city.\footnote{111}

Later that year the Zanja Madre, or “mother ditch” was created to transport water from the river for agricultural and personal needs.\footnote{112} It was this system that formed the basis for Pueblo Los Angeles’ development.\footnote{113} It wasn’t until 1848, following the Mexican-American War when the United States seized possession of California and began to turn the Spaniards beloved Zanja Madre into a concrete-lined underground pipe system. This led to renaming the “Rio de Porciúncula”, named after the explorer who helped to discover the river, to the “Los Angeles River”.\footnote{114} After this occurrence it wasn’t long until the Pueblo of Los Angeles soon became the town of Los Angeles, which would later become the modern day mega-city.

\footnote{110} Ibid.
\footnote{111} Ibid.
\footnote{112} Ibid
\footnote{113} Ibid
\footnote{114} Morrison, P., Lamonica, M., *Rio LA: Tales from the Los Angeles River*. 2001
The transition began with the arrival of the railroads. Southern Pacific came to Los Angeles in 1876, with its main line running from downtown through the Glendale Narrows, paralleling the east bank of the river. With the arrival of the railway came the arrival of several grand bridges, one that still remains on the site of the Cornfield—the North Broadway Bridge, elegantly designed by renowned Los Angeles architect Alfred F. Rosenheim.

As the transportation variations began to increase, the population, especially of immigrants looking for work, followed the trend. Chinatown was one of the first immigrant population to form its own area comprised of one ethnic demographic within the city limits.

Founded in 1880, the original location of Chinatown grew large enough in the late 18th and early 19th century to house a Chinese Opera theatre, three temples, its own newspaper and a telephone exchange. It began to slowly diminish in the early 20th century due to strict laws prohibiting most Chinese from citizenship. This decrease, combined with the increasing need for more transportation methods led to the relocation of “Old Chinatown” in order to build the transport hub Union Station. Ironically, many of the workers for Union Station and the Southern Pacific Railway were Chinese immigrants.

Chinese immigrants protested their relocation in the beginning, heartlessly forced by the city, but eventually accepted their defeat and moved to the designated relocation site, which neighbored The Cornfield.

115 Morrison, P., Lamonica, M., Rio LA: Tales from the Los Angeles River. 2001
118 Ibid
Unfortunately the Chinese immigrants are not the only low-income minorities that have been relocated to the Cornfield area. The Chavez Ravine, a Hispanic neighborhood located north of present-day Chinatown was a working-class, residential community until the residents were forced to move in the 1950s in order for the Brooklyn Dodgers, now known as the Los Angeles Dodgers, to have a new stadium in the city.\textsuperscript{119}

The last puzzle piece to the Cornfield neighborhood is the African American population. African Americans were concentrated in four areas of the city from 1910 to as late as 1920, a decade when the African American population nearly doubled.\textsuperscript{120} Even after the release of some covenants, during the 1920s 95\% of the city’s housing stock was off limits to Blacks and Asians.\textsuperscript{121} The dynamic was eloquently explained in the book \textit{Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles} as “while the expanding white populations fanned out throughout the Los Angeles Basin, blacks were forced to move into the existing communities. Black renters and homeowners were increasingly met by walls of white resistance”.\textsuperscript{122} One of the existing communities was Downtown Los Angeles.

These accounts help to understand why the surrounding community was so defiant when the City of Los Angeles once again tried to take over their community without their permission; this time in the form of the vacant lot known as the Cornfield.

\textit{II. Process}

With the closure of the rail yard in the early 1990s the core of its building facilities and physical presence disappeared with its departure. Left behind were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] Don Normak, Chavez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story (1999)
\item[121] \textit{Ibid}
\item[122] Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles 7, Bryant, C., 1998
\end{footnotes}
hazardous substances in the soil. One area in particular had housed barrels of diesel and other heavy-metal fuels and was proven through a soil test to contain petroleum hydrocarbons. The environmental remediation component played a large role that potentially could have lead to the demise of the historically and culturally rich area into another warehouse (Figure 1).

In 1999, a few years after the Southern Pacific Railyard depot closed, then Mayor Richard Riordan introduced his “Genesis LA” economic incentive program, a program to revive blighted industrial sites throughout the city. Within months of this announcement, Majestic Realty Co., one of the nation’s leading privately owned developers of business, industrial and warehouse parks came out saying they would be purchasing The Cornfield in order to build a manufacturing and warehouse complex, to be named River Station. Their proposed plan consisted of four buildings made for light manufacturing and industrial space, totaling in 909,200 sq. feet.

With their plan, the 32 acres of the Cornfield would be paved over and eight acres would remain pavement free along N. Broadway to be converted into a community park. This extensive plan, however, had been formulated without an understanding of the communities and politics surrounding the site. Majestic Realty’s plan completely neglected the fact that over the decade leading up to the demise of the rail yard, there had been a growing movement to reclaim downtown lands adjacent to the LA River as open space to benefit both the river’s ecology and nearby communities alike, specifically the communities who had been displaced to this area originally. This signifies the break

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125 River Station was the name of the past Southern Pacific Station
between the desires of the developers and the community that is inherently seen in most brownfield redevelopment projects.

Just a year before Majestic Realty’s master plan came to surface, Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR), The Sierra Club and the Urban Resources Partnership organized the River Through Downtown conference. During the conference a report containing various land-use proposals for several downtown areas located adjacent to the LA River, including the Cornfield, was distributed. The report was the result of a series of meetings, workshops and community initiatives held in downtown neighborhoods. The lead authors for this report were Lewis McAdams, founder of FoLAR; Chi Mui, a native Chinese activist and political staffer; and Arthur Golding, an esteemed architect with plans for an urban park.127 These three came from very different backgrounds but were united in the decision to fight for this land to be made as a community asset instead of an additional eyesore and health risk.

An excerpt from the vision presented at the conference is revealing:

“Envision a new urban neighborhood linking Chinatown and the Los Angeles River where residential, office and retail uses overlook a large park. Picnic areas under the trees, soccer fields, softball diamonds, and a new middle school serve Chinatown, Lincoln Heights, and a new neighborhood called River Park. Along the edge of the park, the Zanja Madre, or “Mother Canal” follows the alignment closely parallel to the historic canal…the canal runs along to the slop below North Broadway. A bikeway follows the canal, and new housing, climbing up the slope, overlooks the park. The park and the

127 In-person interview with Lewis McAdams, March 30th, 2013
adjoining residential development have replaced abandoned railroad yards, while the Blue Line to Pasadena runs behind housing”. 128

This community narrative is clearly unaligned with that of the developers. While the developers saw the site as solely another parcel of private, former industrialized land on which to develop, environmentalists and community members saw the potential for reclamation and reuse for a variety of public purposes—including parkland, river restoration and educational opportunities. Though the community’s vision was not created with job creation at the forefront, it allowed for flexibility; relying on the idea that if the community identity was improved, the economy would soon follow suit. This vision instigated the need for a broader public dialogue, which would span across the next five years.

By 2000 both initiatives had been clearly laid out to the community and the site’s soon-to-be owner, Union Pacific. 129 Mayor Riordan openly supported Majestic’s plan and began pushing for it ardently. He saw the weed-filled blanket of land, ridden with building debris, rusting metal and makeshift homeless encampments as a site with economic potential in line with Genesis LA.

From an economic standpoint the developer’s proposed site offered several advantages. Primarily, the site was already zoned for industrial use. Los Angeles has one of the oldest and most controversial zoning plans drafted for a city with growing industrial cores to be kept separate from residential uses, created in 1909 and adapted post WWII. 130 This zoning code receives multitudes of criticisms on the grounds that it was created to protect the affluent western parts of the city while there were little

129 The site was being passed from Southern Pacific to Union Pacific; In-person interview with Lewis McAdams, March 29th, 2013
130 http://cityplanning.lacity.org/zoningcodes
restrictions on industrial and commercial building in the southern and eastern parts of the city, which are mainly comprised of low-income, minority communities.

Since Majestic’s plan was for industrial use, however, there would be no need for land-use variances or zoning changes; both of which add much time and financial burden to the process. The only discretionary requisite would thus be the city’s review of the site plan. If the site, however, were to be reused for a park, housing or schools, many more additional planning department reports and public hearings would be needed, resulting in prolonged delays and uncertainty. For the same reason, the cleanup process would be much easier for industrial reuse than schools, housing or parklands due to the higher standards for the latter sites.

In addition to the significant financial assets Majestic Realty was bringing to the table, The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) committed $11.75 million dollars to the River Station Project, with $1.25 million to help in cleanup costs under HUD’s Brownfield Economic Development Initiative and the remaining $10.5 million in loan guarantees for the rest of the process. According to Lewis McAdams, this grant was substantial because it was essentially paying to clean up the contaminated site for Majestic Realty and therefore not have issues of liability act as deterrents. Blinded by these economic incentives, the Los Angeles government, led by Mayor Riordan, moved quickly to expedite this process for the River Station.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, all state and local agencies must comply with CEQA requirements when granting discretionary approval of a project, where a fair argument must be provided that the proposed project may result in a significant adverse

132 http://cityplanning.lacity.org/zoningcodes
133 In-person interview with Lewis McAdams, March 29th, 2013
impact on the environment. After this is presented with evidence, an EIR must be prepared by the agency granting authorization. If there are no means for a fair argument, the agency can avoid preparing an EIR and instead adopt a Negative Declaration document, which covers mitigation measures that reduce the environmental impacts. On May 23, 2000 the Director of the City of Los Angeles Planning Department approved Majestic Realty’s site plan and adopted an accompanying Mitigated Negative Declaration, thus expediting the process exponentially. This decision made it evident that, because Majestic Realty presented economic prosperity, it was the winning proposal in the local and federal governments eyes, disregarding the dissatisfaction of the community. Lewis McAdams pointed this out in our interview.

What the community members and environmentalists did present, however, was solidarity, passion, knowledge of the site’s past and hopes for a prosperous future, all of which resulted in community action, unprecedented in comparison to the short-term economic benefits Majestic Realty would provide.

On June 6th, 2000, a Mitigated Negative Declaration was appealed by Friends of the Los Angeles River and other groups to Los Angeles’ Central Area Planning Commission. One month later the appeal was denied and on August 15th, 2000 the Los Angeles City Council voted to approve adoption of a Mitigation Negative Declaration that contained some minor additional mitigation measures. This measure resulted in more community groups, including, Latino Urban Forum, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Los Angeles, Concerned Citizens of South Central Los

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135 Mitigated Negative Declaration definition: when the initial study has identified potentially significant effects on the environment, but (1) revisions in the project plans or proposals made by, or agreed to by, the applicant before the proposed negative declaration and initial study are released for public review would avoid the effects or mitigate the effects to a point where clearly no significant effect on the environment would occur, and (2) there is no substantial evidence in light of the whole record before the public agency that the project, as revised, may have a significant effect on the environment’ (Section 21064.5);
Angeles, Lincoln Heights Neighborhood Preservation Association, Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, Mothers of East Los Angeles-Santa Isabel, and William Mead Homes Residents Associations, to consolidate with the already-protesting organizations and create one main body they named Chinatown Yards Alliance (CYA), to protest the newly approved project in their neighborhood.\(^{136}\)

Joel Reynolds, lawyer for the National Resource Defense Council, an organization that soon joined in the fight against the real-estate company, stated to the LA times “The [coalition’s] unifying issue was the idea to save the land and stop the industrial development”.\(^{137}\) As the issue began to gain public attention, more and more organizations joined the community’s side while more and more politicians and government officials, including Governor Cuomo, and LA City Councilman Hernandez, were pushing for Majestic Realty and their promise of economic success.

Within just a few months Chinatown Yards Alliance consisted of more than 30 groups, a Cardinal from the Catholic Church and a top official from the Clinton Administration. In addition to setting up an e-mail network amongst themselves, the group met frequently over dim sum at a local Chinese restaurant.\(^{138}\) It was events like those that reminded the alliance how important having a sense of community was and how much it was worth fighting for. In an interview with McAdams, he noted that Chi Mui was a vital presence in the debate. Because of his strong connection as a field deputy to the Chinese community, he made sure that those helping with their efforts didn’t feel like “outsiders” and that all groups involved understood that if they won this battle it


\(^{137}\) In-person interview with Lewis McAdams, March 29th, 2013

wouldn’t be a gain for the Chinese community, but for anyone who wanted to be a part of the community this dispute was creating. The substantial amount of community support, coming from organizations with every different type of interest, shines light on how important having a community green space was to each different cohort. These different organizations could have easily been swayed by the thousands of jobs being promised by Majestic Realty, but according to Lewis McAdams those weren’t the jobs the community wanted, and a warehouse wasn’t the feature the community wanted for the site. Although the park would bring less jobs, it would bring more potential for further economic growth if it set a positive example for the area.

Chinatown Yards Alliance was soon administering acts on a near bi-monthly basis to push the efforts against Majestic Realty. One of the first acts administered was to issue a declaration signed and endorsed by all of its members, making their position on the River Station project clear to all. The concise, four-paragraph declaration served as a cornerstone of CYA’s efforts to generate political support and media attention. Below are some of the statements provided in the declaration:

“We urge the City of Los Angeles to take advantage of the once-in-a-century opportunity the closing of the rail-yard offers to support a plan to build a middle and high school, sports fields, a park, and a bikeway in a community where are none….We believe the award, without public discussion, of nearly 14 million dollars in Federal HUD brownfields cleanup funds to help one of the largest developers in Southern California buy the property is an unwise, inappropriate and unfair misuse of public funds.”

The main objective of this administrative complaint was to prove that the federal government’s financial support for the River Station Project violated federal civil rights.

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and environmental justice laws. The arguments supporting this complaint included the negative aesthetic impact the warehouse would have on the community, the increased amount of traffic and safety risks specifically for the children of nearby schools and the fact the warehouse would only further perpetuate the historical pattern of inequitable industrial site distribution in low-income areas of Los Angeles.

In response to the complaint, the former Housing and Urban Development Secretary and known supporter of the River Station project, Andrew Cuomo announced in September 2000 that he would not release the multi-million dollar package until an EIS was prepared pursuant to NEPA, thus postponing the process at least another year. The Chinatown Yard’s Alliance ability to gain access and results at this high political level caught both Majestic Realty and the greater political sphere off-guard and little by little more politicians joined the fight. Although former Mayor Riordan remained steadfast in his support for the developer’s plan, subsequent mayoral candidate (and at the time of this writing, the current mayor) Antonio Villaraigosa and influential State Senator Richard Polanco were in favor of the park alternative. The Los Angeles Times was soon running frequent articles and editorials on the dispute that were sympathetic to the concerns of The Chinatown Yards Alliance. Meanwhile, Majestic Realty and it’s supporters continued to petition for their plan, running off the platform that it would be best for the city economically and would be much more efficient than any other option because of the lack of zoning changes necessary.

A hearing was scheduled for November of 2000, but during the pre-hearing period Majestic Realty’s counsel William Delvac began to conjure up an innovative

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141 Ibid.
settlement process with his clients and opposing side. The original proposal amounted essentially to a coin toss with a “winner-takes-all” outcome. In this settlement, the litigation would be stayed before the hearing and CYA would have one-year to pull together the funds for the purchase of the site. If unable, CYA would dismiss their petition and cease all legal opposition to Majestic Realty’s project.143

Hesitant at first, the members of CYA realized the odds were in their favor based on two facts. First, earlier that year in March 2000 Proposition 12 had passed in California. This proposition set aside $100 millions in state funds for the creation of a Los Angeles River Parkway.144 Petitioners soon discussed this with state-officials who indicated that the site’s proximity to the river was sufficient enough to make it a potential recipient of such funds. Second, since the land was a public commodity, Trust for Public Land (TPL), a non-profit land conservation group, offered to serve as the initial purchaser of the site.145 For these reasons the opposing parties simultaneously created a settlement days before the hearing date occurred.

A few months after the settlement was announced, the Attorney General Bill Lockyer filed a brief in support of the petitioner’s position, stating an EIR was required due to the potential impacts the site would have on the air quality from traffic, on the soil quality from subsurface contamination and building chemicals, and on the historic resources including the Zanja Madre remains.

After this brief was filed both parties agreed on a bi-partisan land appraiser who found the area to be worth $33.5 million dollars, an amount too high for TPL to purchase alone. Once the organization did find the funds, via various non-profits and state

144 Settlement Agreement Between City of Los Angeles, Majestic Realty Parties and Chinatown Yards Alliance. November 2000.
145 Ibid.
programs, they would need assurance that after the inquisition the State of California would buy the property from Trust for Public Land.  

This presented yet another obstacle because, although the State of California, backed by Governor Gray Davis and California State Parks, was in support of the community’s gain of the land as a park, California State Parks had a general policy of not acquiring property that requires additional subsurface remediation before it can be used as a parkland. Given that previous environmental investigations had identified the presence of subsurface contamination at the Cornfield, this turnkey requirement halted the plans to transfer the site to the state. Union Pacific still had complete ownership at this time and was openly unwilling to give TPL’s environmental consultant access to the Cornfield until the concerns of liability were addressed, leading to an overall standstill in the process.

At this point, Majestic Realty, the developer who had been seen by much of the city in a negative light throughout the entirety of this process, surprised everyone and bought the land for the sole purpose of additional testing. Essentially the developers bought the land to shed away from its negative reputation and allow the Trust for Public Land to complete the additional testing and characterization of the site’s subsurface conditions, thus setting up the non-profit for purchase of the land. As Nelson Matthews, TPL’s point-person for the Cornfield negotiations stated in the April 2002 California State Bar Conference: “The end result was Majestic stepped up and bought the property

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146 State of California would buy site instead of City of Los Angeles because of the city was not able to provide the funds and TPL could not carry the burden of mortgage payments for very long; Settlement Agreement Between City of Los Angeles, Majestic Realty Parties and Chinatown Yards Alliance. November 2000.
from Union Pacific which was an increase in their risk. I salute them for doing that because they provided us with the access to get out there and test the property”.  

The site assessment estimated the cleanup cost would be between $1 million to $3.5 million in order to get it clean enough to become a park, a typical remediation cost. 

The following year, December of 2001, California Governor Gray Davis held a press conference on the future of the Cornfield in accordance with new Los Angeles Mayor James Hahn. Both politicians were in full support of the park conversion project. Also present were a handful of children from nearby schools and a majority of the members from CYA. In this press conference Davis announced the financial acquisition was made possible by the passage of Proposition 12 and additional funding by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Mayor Hahn ended the press conference by saying “It is a great day for the people of Los Angeles because an old rail yard that has been an eyesore for many years is now going to provide open space and green land in the heart of downtown.” This feat demonstrated the power of community and was one of the largest public demonstrations in Los Angeles history.

Now that it was established that the land would become a park, the next debate ensued over what type of park it would become.

IV. The Product

The shift between debates began in April 2002. Despite the lack of political drama or court occurrences, the next step was just as drawn out due to the diverse nature of the Chinatown Yards Alliance. Though united in opposition to Majestic Realty’s project, the

150 Ibid
members had contrasting ideas of the outcome of the park, mainly based off different cultural preferences and historical backgrounds.

Between the proximity to Native American settlements, historical artifacts of the Spanish conquistadors such as the Zanja Madre and linkage of Chinese, African-American and Latino citizens of Los Angeles, the area is a chalk full with cultural and historical heritage. The site, however, is only 40 acres and could hardly accommodate all aspects of its history, leaving the question of whose identity and what history should be reincorporated.

Architect Arthur Golding attempted to incorporate as many of these aspects as possible with a site plan that included a Zanja Madre Museum, Chinatown Pavilion Cultural Center, Shaolin Institute, soccer fields, a bicycle path, magnet school, an estuary leading to the LA River, a new Blue Line Light Rail Station and a “Great Meadow”. This site plan evoked a much-needed conversation that later took place on the priorities each neighboring community had in mind. The Latino Urban Forum, for example, was less interested in honoring the legacy or improving the ecology of the Los Angeles River and was more interested in recreational space for the Latino community, mainly in the form of soccer fields. Robert Garcia demonstrated this desire in a report titled Dream of Fields: Soccer, Community and Equal Justice. In the report, he stated “The history of the Cornfield is the history of struggle, hope and triumph for the community. Children who dream of soccer fields are entitled to equal access to playing fields in the parks they struggled to create…Fields for soccer squarely fulfill the State Parks Mission… Soccer is
among the most valued cultural and historical resources of Latino and other immigrant communities”.  

In contrast, FoLAR presented a plan with an emphasis on water elements and a desire for The Cornfield to be an integral part of the greater LA River revitalization plant. Meanwhile the Chinese immigrants neighboring the park urged for a Chinese Heritage Community Center. These three conceptual plans only represent a few of the more promising suggestions presented for the Cornfield conversion project.

The positive side of the many meetings revolved around the park design was that it was the first time Latino central-city politicians were working together with west-side environmentalists, a big feat in McAdams’ eyes.  

Jane Jacobs, an activist and advocate for urban public space, notes in her book *Life and Death of Great American Cities* that public parks should be diverse groups of people, in diverse ways and at diverse times in order for it to be a genuine community space so that there are constant “eyes on the park”. She also poses something that the park planners must take into consideration when she states “City Parks are not abstractions, or automatic repositories of virtue or uplift, any more than sidewalks are abstractions”. With this quote she indicates the importance of the surrounding community’s input and action.

Unfortunately, the combination of the long remediation process and the break in site plans and design allowed the lot to remain vacant from 2002 to 2005 until a living sculptor, Lauren Bon decided to take over the lot for one agricultural cycle (roughly one year) and create an actual corn field (Figure 2). The artist, funded by the Annenberg

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152 In-person interview with McAdams, March 29th, 2013
153 Jacobs, J., Death and Life of Great American Cities Print
Foundation, which she is on the board of, brought in fifteen hundred truckloads of soil and one million seeds, costing roughly $3 million dollars. The site was used for film screenings, community demonstrations, group tours and drum circles. Some community members criticized the art project, saying that the project delayed the construction of the actual park and that it was a waste of money. One city worker stated “Three million dollars? You could’ve bought a Van Gogh for that…You could’ve put something useful in there.” Proponents of the art project defended the art exhibit by saying it left the soil more fertile than it had been before and that there was no finalized site plans even consummated when the sculpture came to be. Bon also created an one hundred year endowment fund for irrigation of the site.

The corn was harvested in December of 2005 and left to dry for six months as a display in the nearby Capital Milling Company. It was then used for biodegradable containers, continuing the statement of reuse and revitalization that the Not A Cornfield project aimed to make.

No matter how fertile the project left the soil, it still left it bare. From 2006 until mid 2012 the city focused most of the attention on the Environmental Impact Report of the site, which was officially published April 2012. During those six years not much was done to the site. A small interim park has been created on 13 of the acres, equipped with trails for biking and walking and native tree plantings. Old freight boxes now re-assembled for edible plantings from the remains of South Central Farm; a Los Angeles

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155 Ibid.
156 In-person interview with McAdams, March 29th, 2013
land dispute with a less successful ending than that of the Cornfield.\textsuperscript{157} There are also inner-trails that lead to a small native herb garden.

Hargreaves Associates created the original plans for the proposed park in 2005. However, the state could not raise the necessary funds to keep the firm, and therefore the design team would be a group of state-employed consulting designers from San Diego. The project had already been designated for state Proposition 84 funds, which are enough to build the first of the three phases. (Figure 4).

In the project description, released by California Department of Parks and Recreation, it is stated that over the initial planning process, CDPR held over 50 public and stakeholder meetings to gain input on the guidance of the park’s development and use.\textsuperscript{158} Within the details of the master plan, created in 2006, it is noted that the emphasis on the park will be as an interpretive site and should therefore be designed to function as an interpretive and cultural facility, as well as an inviting open space and gathering place for the local community and visitors. It states that given the Cornfield’s proximity to the LA River presents a unique opportunity to create a riverfront community.\textsuperscript{159}

The benefits that the project would create, as stated in the Master Plan are as follows: increased access to open and green space in a park deprived area of Los Angeles, increased educational environment and outdoor educational opportunities, improvement of ecological habitat, display cultural, historical and public art resources, generate job and economic opportunities and increase human health recreational benefits while more

\textsuperscript{157} South Central Farm was a 14 acre plot in impoverished South LA. 2,000 directly benefited from the farm yet the city reclaimed the land for industrial uses; “Cultivating just planning and legal institutions: a critical assessment of the south central farm struggle in Los Angeles-Irazabal”. Journal of Urban Affairs. Wiley Online Library 2009


\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
broadly it would be providing benefits to help alleviate disparities in park access and health for residents in the surrounding communities.\footnote{The master plan acknowledges a recently published report released by the National Park Service on the recognition of people of color and low income populations facing disparities regarding health and access to parks.}

As for the current interim park, the 13-acres are landscaped with native and urban-adaptable plants. Over three hundred sycamore, poplar, willow and other native trees line the walking paths. Occasionally a local event, such as 5ks or neighborhood meetings will be held there. Unfortunately it has also been the venue for loud outdoor concerts, which last throughout the night. This itself brings the question of environmental justice—noise pollution can be a form within this.

The planners propose that all three phases will be complete by 2035, regardless of the fact they only have funding covered for phase I, which they plan to have complete by Winter 2014. As mentioned above, phase I will be covered by Proposition 84, a measure passed in 2006.

Phase I has by far the most developed design plan. Within it, many amenities are laid out for both community members and visitors of the park. In social terms, the park plan has included hardscaped walkways, plazas, and promenades for interacting. The CDPR also wishes to have a children’s interpretive play area and exploration zone, equipped with a “story-telling amphitheater” and campfire ring. The planners took into consideration areas for group-gathering events and have designated them within the rendering. In recreational terms, the plan is equipped with unstructured play and workout areas throughout, along with the many pathways, which are to be versatile to allow for running, walking or biking. In economic terms, the plan has three event spaces included with the following capacities: 1,000-1,5000 people, 4,000-5,000 people and 10,000-
12,000 people. It also will house an outdoor amphitheater, similar to what the interim park has now, made from recycled rail yard equipment for sustainable purposes. In educational terms, the park will have a welcome center and operations building offering public restrooms, an important amenity in itself. The planners also wish for a 14 foot-elevated walkway including roundhouse observation deck that would rise above “exposed archeological reveal space” of the Zanja Madre.

Lastly, in terms of physical sustainability, the plan has included the incorporation of bioswales for storm water retention, recharge and reuse along with storm water basins that function as constructed demonstration wetlands and habitat area. There will also be 550 trees planted, including native oaks and soil-remediation poplars, and an additional 213,000 sq. ft. of non-irrigated naturalized plantings. Safety features such as lit pathways, security cameras and lighting that meets dark sky requirements to reduce light pollution will also be implemented.

As for Phases II and III the planners have few concrete visions due to the current lack of funding, but they make note in the EIR that “little to no environmental impact” will come from those phases. They also will use Phases II and III as fillers to meet the objectives, such as cultural preservation or ecological restoration, that Phase I did not meet as much as expected.

IV. Conclusion

Overall, the process was as successful as it was due to community involvement and the majority of stakeholders having a chance to speak up after having been voiceless.

In terms of the design for the park, the social aspects of the park are among the strongest driving forces for the design. This is made clear by the small niches used for group gathering, the well-thought of plan for areas of all ages to play or work in and the many event venues aimed to accommodate varying numbers of attendees.

The break between the cultural interests, however, caused the loss of one concrete vision inspired by the community as a whole. As discussed above, the Latino community who fought just as ardently for the space to become a park as the Asian or African American community, had a vision of soccer fields. The design plan of some organizations in CYA however, had a strong emphasis on recreation and health while that of the Asian community had a strong emphasis on culture and heritage. Because of the many different plans and goals for the site, all backed by substantial research and meaningful pleas, the momentum and the process as a whole was slowed. Since it was impossible to meet all the needs presented, the design team went their own direction with it and in the end incorporated little to no desires presented by any of the organizations.

While the current design plan does intend to incorporate culture and recreation into the final design, there are no soccer fields; there is no Chinese Heritage Museum; there is no river extension. There are, however, many venues for concerts, which begs the questions—whose vision is this, and is this a long-term, sustainable outcome, or one that is politically expedient? These questions bring up one issue with such projects that have so many primary and powerful stakeholders with clear and dominating needs. Oftentimes it is these varying needs that forestall other considerations—even obvious ones like soccer fields.
Despite the fact that this will be a community space and currently is as an interim park, the ability to host large quantities of people for one concert was nowhere in CYA’s vision plan. The interim park, which occupies only a small portion of the proposed park site, holds outdoor concerts and has most recently been the venue for a series of HARD music festivals such as HARD Haunted on Halloween and HARD Summer. These music festivals are outdoor raves that typically begin at 9pm and go until at least two three in the morning. The culture associated with raves tends to be affiliated with loud “house music”, all-night dancing, light-up shows and variants of drugs. In early March 2013, the venue hosted Swedish House Mafia, a rave dj-set. According to McAdams, over 35,000 people attended the show.\textsuperscript{162}

The Cornfield has become the new home to these raves since it offers an open-air venue and can accommodate the masses. Although a concert venue may not seem like an environmental injustice, in this form it most definitely is. No other area in Los Angeles has an outdoor venue hosting festivals of this caliber in size or noise level going until the early morning; especially within a residential area. There has also been talk of adding a 660-acre LEED certified affordable housing project constructed by William H. Mead Homes near the Cornfield in efforts to promote a more livable downtown.\textsuperscript{163}

\textbf{Analysis of processes}

This case illustrates that, although the overall vision for the Cornfield was agreed upon by all stakeholders at the end of the long saga, it is important to keep in mind who the end product will most affect. The concert venue will indubitably benefit the area

\textsuperscript{162} It should be noted that I was 3 miles north of The Cornfield in Silverlake on a night when this rave was occurring there and the windows of the home I was in were shaking from the sound waves coming from the site.

economically, but will most likely not have a lasting affect on it. Yes, it will bring hoards of people from other areas of the city together for one night, but how will it keep those same outsiders coming back to use the park? Lewis McAdams also brought up the effects that many people have on the parkscape and stated concerns for the “receding grass line” it could create.\textsuperscript{164}

Critically, the community vision, as disassembled as it may have been by the numerous opinions being put into it, had more of a focus on bringing the communities surrounding the park together than bringing in outsiders to the space. They saw it as a resource that downtown Los Angeles is currently lacking: green space for recreation and leisure in a safe environment for all. The majority of the vision most certainly aims to achieve this goal, but the lack of community suggestions in the final design (i.e. no fields, no connection to LA River, few sustainable elements) shows that economic factors may be driving the developers and planners more than environmental or social. This outcome may have to do with a diminished momentum that corresponds to process-fatigue, increased in this and other complex projects by near-irreconcilable objectives and positions; and a resulting desire to create a simple amenity. It may also have to do with the collapse of the complexities of the public process and the parallel legal processes into a resolution in the form of the state-employed design team’s contract. The design demonstrated their lack of local engagement and knowledge.

That being said, the park’s completion was a big feat for the multitude of social and environmental stakeholders, and the Cornfield case should be exalted for proving the power of community. In the end, if the surrounding neighborhoods do find harm in the concert venues, they have the resources and tools to defend their beloved brownfield,

\textsuperscript{164} In-person interview with McAdams, March 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2013
once again. Mcadams reiterated this in our interview when he stated “A lot of things were probably not done correctly, but at least it’s not a million square feet of warehouses.”

In conclusion, the long and arduous road, full of stakeholders from nearly every department, representatives from nearly every agency, covering environmental justice to urban greening coalitions, is finally coming to an end. The site will eventually have yet another conversion into a field of flowers, planted by the seeds of the surrounding community.

Fig. 1. The site as a rail yard; 1901
Fig 2. The site before use in Not-A-Cornfield Project; 2005

Figure 3. Aerial view of the site during the Not-A-Cornfield Project, 2006
Figure 4. Park design State Employed Design Team, 2011
“Full Cornfield Park Project Finally Moving Forward.” Curbed LA, n.d.
Case Study #2: South Los Angeles Wetland Park

The South Los Angeles Wetland Park, mentioned in the introductory chapter, is the second case study analyzed. Formed around the establishment of the University of Southern California in 1880, South LA is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city. During the early 1900s the West Adams neighborhood, located within South L.A, become one the most desirable pockets in the city for the elite white affiliated with the university. However, due to expansion of Wiltshire Boulevard in the 1920s, Los Angeles development moved westward. Because of this, the affluent white population of the neighborhood slowly turned to an affluent black population and the district became a hub for the beginnings of jazz in the city. In other parts of the area less affluent African American populations began to increase due to the same racially restrictive covenants that brought the African American population towards The Cornfield.

Slowly, freeways began to separate the area even more and as a result of the Watts Riots in 1965 much of south LA was abandoned by white residents and merchants. Shortly after, a precipitous decline of the area’s manufacturing base began to take place, resulting in a loss of many middle class union jobs. The service sector, which had been dominated by unionized African Americans, was slowly being replaced by newly arrived immigrants from Mexico and Central America. This transition began

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167 The Watts Riots took place in the Watts neighborhood in South LA and were a seriously riots lasting over 6 days, mainly in response to residential racial segregation. The results were 34 deaths, over 1,000 injuries, nearly 4,000 arrests and $40 million dollars in property damage; Cohen, Jerry, Murphy, W., Burn, Baby, Burn! The Los Angeles Race Riot. New York. August 1965
with only the jobs, but soon a slight ethnic succession occurred, changing the area’s demographics.

The economic blight and mixed identity of the area led to widespread unemployment and a heightened poverty rate. Crime rates began to rise as well which eventually led to the intensification of street gangs such as the Crips and Bloods that “South Central Los Angeles” is often associated with.¹⁶⁹

By the early 1990s South Los Angeles had become a national byword for urban deterioration and in 1992 those in the area instigated the Los Angeles Riots that soon spread through the city like wildfire. During the riots widespread looting, assault, and arson took place and left South Los Angeles in even more of a state.¹⁷⁰

Little by little the area has been building itself back up. Many efforts have taken place by the local and federal government in terms of rebuilding infrastructure, but the area is still one of the city’s poorest. In 2003 the city of Los Angeles even changed the area’s name from South Central to South Los Angeles in hopes of removing the negative connotations associated with the former title.¹⁷¹

A few other efforts that have occurred within the area are towards the creation of more green space. South Los Angeles is one of the more “park poor” areas within the city and members of Council District 9, especially Jan Perry the councilwoman and past mayoral candidate, have put much emphasis on the creation of parks and green spaces in the area.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.
¹⁷¹ Gold, M., Braxton, G., Considering South Central Another Name  Los Angeles Times. Page 3. April 2003
In 2003 the Augustus Hawkings Wetland Park was created and just a few years after it’s inception the South Los Angeles Wetlands Park was proposed under Proposition O, a bond created in 2004, by Council Woman Jan Perry.\textsuperscript{172} The timeline for this project is much shorter than that of the Pacoima Wash Greenway or the Cornfield because it was proposed by a government official and was proposed with the initial purpose of meeting the Total Maximum Daily Load requirements set by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. By proposing it with this as the initial purpose, the project team, comprised of members of the City Council, employees of the Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation, and a design team from the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, were able to gain money from Proposition O.\textsuperscript{173} The bond’s initial purpose is to authorize the City of Los Angeles to issue a series of general obligation bonds for up to $500 million for projects to protect public health by cleaning up pollution in the City’s water courses and beaches in order to meet Federal Clean Water Act Requirements.\textsuperscript{174}

\textit{I. History}

The 9-acre lot, which is adjacent to an 80,000 square foot vacant building, was originally built in 1901 by the Los Angeles Railway.\textsuperscript{175} From 1901 to the 1950s the site was the hub for all streetcar and train needs. Inside of the large building was a blacksmith, machine shop, carpentry and upholstery specialist, electrical and motor repair shop, oil house, general repair ship, paint shop, and storage room. Each place was utilized with fixing and maintaining the streetcars that ran through the yard neighboring it. In

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
1955, however, GM perfected the 45-seat diesel motorbus and the streetcar era began to wane.\textsuperscript{176} By 1958 streetcars were almost fully out of the picture and the Municipal Transit Authority bought out and refurbished the site, removing the overhead wires and transfer tables and paving over the pits.\textsuperscript{177} Shortly after, in 1964, the Southern California Rapid Transit District took over and the site became a facility for 2,400 diesel, gas and propane fueled buses. The site was used for these vehicles up until 1993 when Municipal Transit Authority bought back the site and used it for vehicular maintenance and storage for parts and equipment.\textsuperscript{178}

At the same time, during the late 1990s, a lawsuit between the United States and the City of Los Angeles was taking place over sewage spills in the area surrounding the MTA facility.\textsuperscript{179} Despite the past attempts by environmental justice advocates such as Concerned Citizens of Los Angeles to bring this issue to the federal platform the City stated that there was no systemic sewage problem because the overflows were concentrated in Baldwin Hills and South Central—two predominantly poor and African American communities.\textsuperscript{180} This statement brought much attention to the environmental injustices the area was facing, specifically with inequitable infrastructure investments, and soon the EPA and California Regional Water Quality Control Board filed another suit against the City and won.\textsuperscript{181} The $2 billion dollar settlement was meant to aid in reinvesting in South Central’s infrastructure. This was one of the reasons the 9\textsuperscript{th} Council

\textsuperscript{178} Email interview with Maria Rumsey of City Council District 9
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
District wanted to create a Wetlands Park in South Central—to prove that efforts were being made in improving the area.182

II. Process

Jan Perry brought the park proposal to the attention of the Los Angeles Brownfields Program in 2002.183 At the time the building on site was still being used by the Municipal Transit Authority for vehicle maintenance but the paved lot lay vacant and was an eyesore to the community. Perry also brought to attention the fact that an elementary school was adjacent to the site and a wetland park could serve as an educational area.

For these reasons the Los Angeles Brownfield Program funded and supervised a Phase I site assessment, which took a year to conduct. In 2004 a Preliminary Endangerment Assessment (PEA) was funded by a Targeted Site Investigation Grant obtained from the California Department of Toxic Substances Control.184 PEAs are performed to determine whether current or past waste management practices have resulted in the release or threatened release of hazardous substances, which pose a threat to public health or the environment.185 Between this assessment and the Supplemental Site Assessment funded by the EPA in 2005, small amounts of Volatile Organic Chemicals were found but since they were less than 1 part per million no vapor soil tests needed to be done.

After all the various site assessments and quotes for remediation costs were conducted, the Los Angeles Brownfield Program applied and was granted a $200,000 US EPA cleanup grant to help pay for site remediation. The Municipal Transit Authority agreed to cover the cost to remediate the site up to industrial standards, and the EPA grant would then cover the rest to reach park standards. The fact that it is cheaper and easier to create a site for industrial use is a detail that should be further researched and one that calls for a re-prioritization within the federal government. Despite the fact that it is more arduous of a process to remediate for community spaces due to health reasons, the process should be more difficult in residential areas for any type of repurposing; especially industrial. For environmental and social purposes the federal government should not be aiding in the creation of industrial spaces in residential neighborhoods.

On the account that EPA Brownfields Program grants can only provide for assessment and remediation costs, the funds for further cleaning were available. All of these grants were helpful, but it wasn’t until the program was awarded $26 million dollars from Proposition O, a bond passed two years prior to aid in the rehabilitation of the city’s watercourses. The bond’s $500 million dollars in measure funds and projects are monitored by a nine-member committee, four or which are appointed by the mayor and five by the Council President. These members range from environmental analysts, lawyers, environmental activists and community organizers. To meet the necessary criteria, projects must have a water quality improvement component, achieve multiple objectives and be financially feasible. The funding for the Wetlands Park was made possible under the pretenses that the Wetlands Park would serve as both an educational

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and ecological space while utilizing a series of storm water pre-treatment best
management practices measured. It would do this by purifying a portion of the urban
runoff from a 525- acre tributary watershed near the park by removing pollutants such as
trash, bacteria, metals and nutrients. In terms of feasibility, the project proposal originally
listed the timeline as just short of ten years, with completion planned for May 2011.
Although it ended up taking an extra year for the first phase to be complete, this was a
realistic timeline and the funding total was reasonable considering the park would duly
serve as a storm water infiltration system.

Given the rehabilitation efforts the planners and developers of this project have
for the neighboring watershed, the park was added in 2011 to be one of Los Angeles’
exemplary sites for their participation in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership program.
Los Angeles was one of the seven cities in the United States, chosen by the EPA, to take
part in this pilot program and within the city there are a few pilot sites—the Pacoima
Wash Greenway, the next case study, is also a selected site. The main goals of this
partnership between many federal departments such as the EPA and the USDA Forest
Service, are “to reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or
economically distressed, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal
agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts”.

More specifically the partnership will “break down federal program silos to promote more
efficient and effective use of federal resources; learn from early and visible victories to
fuel long-term action; and work with local officials and effective community-based
organizations to leverage area resources and stimulate local economies to create local

jobs”. The involved partners for the South LA Wetlands Park, however, are the City of LA, the U.S EPA and LA Regional Water Quality Control Board. The missing link in this project is the “community-based organizations” but despite this detail, the fact that this relatively small park was chosen as a model for this elite partnership is a positive endeavor that will hopefully boost the area’s ecological and economic capital. Although participation in this partnership does not aid in funding, it brings national attention to this site and the absence of parks in South Los Angeles, which could spark other positive initiatives for the area.

III. The Product

Because the majority of the park’s funding came from Proposition O, water was the largest driving force. Therefore the first phase of the project covered only the amenities associated with the wetlands component and the various safety necessities. The plans for the first phase included the creation of the wetlands, which covered roughly half of the nine acres along with the signs explaining the importance of wetlands, an observation deck located on a boardwalk between the figure eight shaped water bodies and three tables near the southern end of the park. All of these components were completed by the opening in March 2012. (Figures 1 & 2) The wetlands themselves are meant to treat up to 680,000 gallons of storm water per day, which is roughly enough to fill up an Olympic size pool. Bureau of Sanitation Director Enrique Zaldivar emphasized these water benefits at the park’s opening ceremony by saying “Our Bureau’s

190 “City of Los Angeles Opens South LA Wetlands Park” City of Los Angeles Storm Water Program City of Los Angeles Stormwater Program, n.d. http://www.lastormwater.org/blog/2012/02/southlawetlandsparkopening/ February 12th 2013
Watershed Protection Program is responsible for ensuring that LA’s urban runoff meets state and federal standards for water quality”. 191

City Engineer Gary Lee also spoke at the opening ceremony and further emphasized the importance of this park with the statement “ [The South Los Angeles Wetland Park] exemplifies Public Works’ commitment to transform Los Angeles into the most livable City by replacing nine acres of asphalt and buildings with 9,500 native plants and trees, providing open space and water quality benefits for all to enjoy”. 192 The majority of these 9,500 plants were small native grasses, sage, and other small native shrubs. Only 88 native trees were planted, providing a small amount of shade throughout the area. The little amount of shade was an issue brought up when journalist Sahra Sulaiman asked neighboring residents what their thoughts were on the space. 193 In addition to the 88 native trees, there are 40 “solar trees” which are posts that stand tall as the trees and collect solar energy, which then produces light to meet safety requirements. There is also a small rock garden at the entryway.

Phase II, if built, will include the conversion of the 80,000 square foot storage facility into a community space and would house the necessary amenities for public parks, such as water fountains and bathrooms. It would also be home to a Railyard Museum and a versatile area that would be used for various markets, meetings and community events. Phase II would certainly benefit the community in a positive manner. However, the planners and head figures in this project, mainly Jan Perry and staff from the Department of Recreation and Parks and the Bureau of Sanitation, have recently announced that due to funding shortages, the creation of Phase II may not occur.

191 *Ibid*
IV. Conclusion

The decision to put phase II on hold demonstrates one issue with this project because it makes evident the fact that the conversion was less about the creation of recreational space for the community and more about meeting Total Maximum Daily Requirements set by the city. If it had more of an emphasis on providing for the community, then perhaps Phase I would have provided essential amenities such as water fountains and public bathrooms or included more than three tables throughout the entirety of the space. One community member even asked Sulaiman the question “What are we supposed to do with three tables?” 194 Another community member and owner of the plant nursery across the street from the park told Sulaiman that although he preferred the park to the neglected and often trespassed vacant lot, the absence of bathrooms was an issue because many park-goers now come in to his shop only to use the restrooms. 195 Other responses she got to the park were “I thought it was going to be a water park, like with a pool and stuff” and “What are my kids supposed to do?” 196 These reactions further demonstrate the lack of community voice and involvement there was in the process.

Another bone of contention with this case study is the signs created in Phase I. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, all of the signs are in English except for the “No trespasar. Nadar o caminar por el agua son prohibidos” (Figures 3 & 4). These signs are discriminatory towards the populations they should be serving. Additionally, because

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195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
they are not in the predominant language spoken, the educational component of them is somewhat null and void.

Though I’m sure the creators, developers and planners had genuine intentions for the park, there are most definitely issues between the community desires of the space and the desires of the local government. This further highlights the need for the federal government to refocus brownfield initiatives within low-income areas.

The fact that the three largest wetland parks that act as storm water infiltration systems are in Latino-majority and low-income areas of Los Angeles (one in Sun Valley and two in South Los Angeles) raises the question of whether these parks are of genuine interest to the community or the Wetlands idea is a mere cover for yet another facility in the area. Why isn’t the city’s storm water, excess pollutants and oils, being taken to other, more affluent areas of the city? Could the wetlands be a mere façade for maintaining the status quo of intentionally placing facilities in low-income and non-English speaking communities? These questions are difficult to answer and require further research.

Overall, the intentions behind the Wetlands Park were genuine and true and in any case the reuse and revitalization of a potentially contaminated site will leave a more positive impact on the community than the original derelict site did.

However, if the project is going to go through so many loopholes and be as costly as this the planners and developers must ration out their funds and include the community in the design. If the surrounding community has little to no input on the park or community space, the initial drive to create a community space is ineffective. As the plants continue to grow and if Phase II does occur, I hope to see an increase in usage and appreciation of the park.
As for now, some possible suggestions for the planners and developers would be to add Spanish educational signs and continue to apply for grants in order for the storage facility to become a community space.

Figure 1: South Los Angeles Wetland Park Before (Above) and Rendering of Site (Below)

Figure 2: Close-up Rendering of Park Design
ViewfromLAloft.org
Figure 2: English Signs
Photographs by Author; March 22nd, 2013

Figure 3: Spanish Sign ("No Trespasar. Nadar o caminar son prohibidos")
Photograph by Author; March 22nd, 2013
Case Study III: Pacoima

“The important thing is to have a positive living environment no matter where you live” states Ana Alvarez, a native Pacoima resident and manager of one of the few parks in the area.\textsuperscript{197} This perspective may seem self-evident, but for one of the most blighted areas of Los Angeles, it is important that the residents maintain a positive disposition. Despite Pacoima’s reputation as one of the poorest areas of Los Angeles, the residents are proud of the amenities the community has to offer, regardless of their scarcity.\textsuperscript{198}

This attitude is exhibited by the many recent community efforts led by residents to combat poverty, homelessness and promote beautification within Pacoima. One of these efforts is the revitalization of a 10-acre derelict Pacoima Wash that currently not only serves as a physical barrier, bisecting the community in half, but also as a barrier to the various beautification efforts.

In contrast to the Cornfield case, where the majority of the process was absorbed by the lawsuit, for the Pacoima Wash Greenway, the majority of time for this project has been spent conducting surveys on what the community members of Pacoima wish for in terms of the greenway.

Similar to the Los Angeles River, The Wash is concrete lined in order to control its pathway and contain its floodwaters. Once recognized as a vital tributary to the Los Angeles River, it is most recently considered a site for illegal dumping, mosquito


\textsuperscript{198} With a median household income of $49,000, Pacoima ranks 195 out of 256 in Los Angeles; http://projects.latimes.com/mappingla/neighborhoods/income/median/neighborhood/list/
breeding and occasional flooding, despite its concrete core. The community of Pacoima, however, is working to change the site into a series of linear parks aimed at benefiting and supporting the city’s residents economically, ecologically and socially.

In the forefront of the fight for bettering the area is Pacoima Beautiful (PB), a non-profit whose mission is to “empower the Pacoima community through programs that provide environmental education, advocacy and local leadership in order to foster a healthy and safe environment”. Thanks to Pacoima Beautiful, this case exhibits the power of community by showcasing the importance of weighing the myriad differing wants and needs in order to come up with an end-product that can support or at least appease the current residents, preserve the area’s past and consider the future generations.

I. History

The first inhabitants of Pacoima were the indigenous people of Tongva and Tataviam tribes. In 1769, the same fleet of conquistadors that settled in the Cornfield area also made their way north to the San Fernando Valley. Two years later the area had been founded as the Mission San Fernando Rey. Soon after, the native people became converts and helped maintain the gardens that stretched over most of the valley.

In 1887 Charles Maclay, a California State Senator, purchased over 50,000 acres of land under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848. Maclay then subdivided the tract into agricultural parcels, using the majority for the staple foods of the time, which included citrus, nuts, beans, wheat and vegetables. This prosperous bounty, paired later

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200 “Pacoima Chamber of Commerce-Pacoima's History
201 ibid.
with the plentiful and cheap water from the LA Aqueduct drew in many farmers to the Pacoima lands.

While Pacoima remained largely an agricultural area, the Industrial Revolution led to a slow increase in manufacturing services and factories seeking land to build factories on. The expanse of the San Fernando Valley was seen as an ideal site for this development. This slow increase however, sped up exponentially during World War II due to the relocation of Lockheed Air Manufacturing Company’s main plant in the neighboring Burbank area. The need for worker housing led to the construction of the San Fernando Gardens Housing Project. This was the first step to the rapid suburbanization that soon turned Pacoima from a slow farming town to a housing community for the fast-growing industries blossoming around Los Angeles. Commuting for these workers was made possible by the Golden State Freeway, which surrounds the area.

Historically speaking this trend defined what Pacoima was; a place where transportation to and from work was easily accessible and living was affordable. According to one real-estate broker from the area “Pacoima is a transitory place where people have tended to stay only until they can afford to move someplace else”. Post-WWII African-Americans in particular were drawn to Pacoima because of the area’s lack of racially discriminatory covenants practiced elsewhere in the city. Pacoima soon became largely comprised of working class African-Americans. Timothy

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Williams of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that “by 1960, nearly all of the Valley’s 10,000 African Americans lived in Pacoima”.204

Later in that decade, however, an ethnic succession began to take shape when large numbers of Mexican immigrants began to move to Pacoima, drawn by its low housing costs and proximity to manufacturing jobs. Slowly, the African Americans who could afford to move out did so and were soon replaced by a “growing population of poorer [Latino] people”, according to Williams.205

Between the mid-1970s and 1990, the percentage of African-Americans in Pacoima went from 75% to a mere 10% while the Latino population rose to 71% by 1990. This led to an interesting ethnic transition and adaptation within Pacoima, wherein many of the African American hairstylists for example began advertising in Spanish and churches started to provide Spanish language services.

This ephemerality is a defining feature of both Pacoima and downtown Los Angeles; neither is particularly seen as the ideal location to “settle down” within the city of Los Angeles. Pacoima is also connected to South Los Angeles by the stigmatization that high crime rates, low property values and the immense amount of run down sites have left on the areas. The amount of public green space in Pacoima is lower than that of any other part of Los Angeles, with only 54 acres of green open space.206 The average rule, under Proposition K, used for Los Angeles is 4 acres per 1,000 residents, meaning Pacoima, with its population well over 100,000, should have at least 4,000 acres.207

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205 Ibid.
This low percentage of green space, combined with the high percentage of Pacoima residents with health problems have presented the local, state and federal government with a need for change within the area. Aside from leading the Pacoima Wash project, Pacoima Beautiful conducts numerous surveys around the community, holds workshops ranging from community planning to educating Pacoima youth on environmental justice, and applying for grants that help provide funding for local beautification projects. In one of their more recent studies the organization found that 29% of Pacoima youth were obese; the national average is 17%. Additionally, one out of every four Pacoima adults has a heart disease, most likely related to obesity, and 20% of residents suffer from asthma.208

These statistics bespeak two of the large issues at hand that those behind the Pacoima Wash Greenway aim to confront and change: lack of recreational space and the environmental injustices brownfields create. These issues point to the bigger issue of public health, one of the lead driving forces for the Pacoima Wash Greenway project.

II. Process

Compared to the Cornfield, the Pacoima community has always been on the offense. The dispute is less of a controversial break in ideas and plans and more of a constant search for funds in the form of grants and loans. The project is based around community involvement but without funds to accompany the collective vision, the project can only go so far.

The Wash is a 10-mile flood control channel constructed in the 1940s and still owned by the County Flood Control District. (Figure 1) It begins at the Pacoima Dam in

the San Gabriel Mountains and ends at the Arleta Spreading Grounds, passing through the communities of Sylmar, Pacoima and the City of San Fernando. The Wash has sat idle for a number of years and has been the venue for both illegal dumping and other illegal activity such as graffiti. Though not precisely a brownfield itself, except by virtue of illegal dumping, many conventional brownfields border and shape the site, depreciating its value even more.

The original function of The Wash was to serve as a tributary to a tributary from the San Gabriel Mountains to the Los Angeles River. Unfortunately the lack of freshwater runoff from the mountain range, combined with the aesthetically unpleasing concrete lining have made the site nothing more than another barrier for the physical community, which is already split by three freeways. The land surrounding The Wash is behind barbed wire and no signage exists to warn illegal trespassers of the potential health impacts entering the area may have. These impacts range from harm on respiratory health from contaminants dumped in and around The Wash along with potential injuries from the uneven pathways. By turning this eyesore and harmful site into a greenway, “residents will have a beautiful and safe new way to move through the neighborhood and bypass the barriers” as the Wash becomes a “place for neighbors to relax, play and commute.”

In the cases of The Cornfield and Wetlands Park, the issue at hand was about what was being proposed by the developers. With Pacoima the issue began as what was not being proposed, by anyone. The essence of this dispute is that this site lay derelict for many years without even the possibility of a proposed site design for economic, social or

210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
ecological purposes; despite the fact the Wash could improve the area in all three categories.

Fortunately, with the 1996 formation of Pacoima Beautiful, concerned citizens have begun to merge various grassroots and community projects happening throughout the area, all working towards the same goal of a cleaner, safer and more sustainable area.\textsuperscript{212} Since it’s inception, the staff and members of PB have worked tirelessly to engage residents in neighborhood cleanup campaigns and community involvement projects in order to reduce the overload of trash and other “bulky items” being dumped on the street of their community. The non-profit’s mission is to empower the Pacoima community through these campaigns and cleanup programs while also providing the residents with knowledge of the environmental injustices they are facing and eventually providing those interested with the correct resources to take a leadership role in correcting these injustices. The organization values consensus building, survey conducting and in-depth interviews with community members as forms of ensuring every voice is heard and involved in the projects.\textsuperscript{213} The three largest programs PB is currently spearheading are the Clean Up, Green Up campaign which meets every month to participate in advocacy on pollution mitigation policies throughout Los Angeles; the Complete Streets/Caminos del Pueblo program, a community design and long-term vision plan which helps residents participate and lead projects that will help improve Pacoima’s streets for it’s residents; and the Pacoima Wash Program.

Pacoima Beautiful has wholeheartedly led The Wash project since the beginnings of the plan were created in the early 2000s. The organization recognized The Wash as yet

another barricade in their community like freeways and freight lines complicated by the lack of walking or bike paths throughout the area but saw the potential for paths, along with the potential The Wash had to improve water quality, increase green space and act as a catalyst for a variety of health-oriented outdoor programs. It was not until this organization began to gain local political attention that The Wash Greenway project started to gain state and federal attention.

In 2008 Pacoima Beautiful was awarded a Policies for Livable Active Communities and Environments (PLACE) grant by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health for the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan Initiative. This grant provides the majority of funding that has so far come to the project. Each year, for the first three years after the award is granted, the organization receives $100,000 for site assessment and planning. Additionally PB was awarded an initial $20,000 grant for the physical implementation of the project. The sheer fact that PB won this extremely competitive grant has helped the organization gain attention and has brought this project to the attention of other financial stakeholders. In essence, this grant gave PB the resources to begin conducting extensive research on the community needs while also buying time to enlist more stakeholders.

As part of an effort to foster policy change that supports healthy, safe and active environments the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health launched the PLACE Program for all LA County residents. Since it’s creation in 2006, this program has given only five grants within the City of Los Angeles, thus demonstrating the understood need

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for the Pacoima Wash Greenway, but also indicating the potential scale of unmet need across the city given the modest budget of the program..

To meet the goals of the grant, Pacoima Beautiful partnered with the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) and Initiating Change in Our Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (ICON CDC) and formed a vision plan. Later the same year, PB was awarded yet another grant from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Program, which helped to complete this plan the next year. This grant helped to provide fundamental support and assistance with the creation of the plan.215

From here, PB began it’s first round of outreach to the community in order to identify out the needs and objectives for the Vision Plan. The first outreach occurred from August-October 2009 and consisted of a series of focus groups. Within each focus group a variety of community groups participated. These groups included students, parent groups from local schools, neighborhood councils and government officials. Focus groups specifically targeted community members and stakeholder groups likely to use park and open space. (Figure 2) In October 2009 the organizations held a mobile charette event at the local Richie Valens Park. This event gave residents and stakeholders the opportunity to walk around the normally off limits of The Wash.

In preparation for this event, PB staff and volunteers went door to door in the surrounding neighborhoods to publicize the event. To integrate successfully as many members as possible, it is necessary to implement community outreach procedures such as this. As a result, more than 100 community residents and stakeholders attended the

215 In-Person Interview with Ken Frederick of Pacoima Beautiful, April 11th, 2013
event.216 This process was also utilized with the Cornfield case but not as fervently as with Pacoima. In fact, Pacoima Beautiful still frequently follows up with members of the community from the initial community outreach programs to keep them involved as possible; while the Cornfield similar efforts were only used at the beginning of the recruitment process.217

In 2010 a second round of outreach took place from March to June at a local high school that borders The Wash.218 At the end of these three months, an event, which exhibited the physical plan, was held to give stakeholders an update.

By the end of the outreach program, the project had gained much attention politically. Since the project brushed up on many topics, specifically public health and environmental stewardship, stakeholders of all kind signed on. In terms of Los Angeles departments and councils involved, the Department of City Planning, Department of Public Health and City Council District 7 have all helped to push the project along as much as possible in the recent years, and in terms of ecological advice and technical assistance the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority and landscape architect Mia Lehrer and her associates have all participated. It should be noted that the community outreach may have begun with door-to-door advancements but it is currently still being executed through monthly meetings open to any adults of the area interested in the design process and weekly meetings for the youth. In an interview with Ken Frederick of Pacoima Beautiful he emphasized over and over the importance of both flexibility and open-mindedness

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217 In person interview with Ken Frederick, April 11th 2013
when it comes to these projects. Those two factors, he explained, are what makes this project more successful than others.

Just as the stakeholders range from A to Z, the problems they all aim to fix with the Greenway project are equally all encompassing. Combined ecosystem and human health issues sit at the core. Urban surface runoff is one large issue at hand. The untreated water, entering through the Pacoima segment of the site, carries litter, industrial sediment, pet waste, fertilizer remains and heavy metals from automobile parts. This is an issue that was addressed during the outreach programs, and PB plans to address it throughout the design as well with bioswales and other permeable surfaces. Another public health problem issue is obesity and lack of activity spaces in Pacoima. In the San Fernando Health District 32.1% of adults and 11% of children are minimally to completely inactive. A correlating figure is that 41% of children in Pacoima public schools are clinically overweight. These absurdly high numbers only restate the need for more activity and recreational space for the adults and especially youth of Pacoima.

The plan also takes into consideration the area’s comparatively high unemployment rate and aims to fix this by promoting the greenway as a commuting asset, specifically for those who don’t have cars and those who don’t utilize the public transit system due to financial constraint or inconvenience.

The outreach programs brought out these three issues and the stakeholders have thus kept on track with fixing them. This is evident with the vision plan (Figure 3).

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IV. Product

The amenities incorporated into the design plan are as plentiful as the needs they aim to address. Unlike Arthur Golding or Hargreaves original design plans for the Cornfield, the Vision Plan does not have any unnecessary or unreasonably costly features to it. The main focus of the greenway is to connect the surrounding neighborhoods with a vital new green space that will become a place for relaxation, recreation and transportation.

Due to public health being the focal point of the Vision Plan, the social and recreational components of the design are integrated with one another to make the exercise component less forced and more pleasurable. An example of this is the provision of various “unstructured” workout areas. Along with pedestrian trails, jogging paths and bicycle lanes, bridges will be installed at potential connections or “nodes of activity” to prevent The Wash from continuing to act as a blockade and to allow for looped connective recreation. The bike lane will also further connect to the San Fernando bikeway, which already connects to commercial activities and the Metrolink commuter rail.

In terms of parks and additional green space, the plan lists many potential sites for future park use. One of these sites is a vacant recycling facility, which would demonstrate the theory that brownfield revitalization projects are catalytic. Another area recently purchased by the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks will be for the specific use of additional park space. The plan also incorporates side trails to current parks such as Richie Valens Park, where PB’s mobile charette was held in the beginning.
stages of public dialogue. Throughout the greenway bi-lingual signage will promote way finding and encourage users to explore and discover nearby places and amenities.

The greenway will provide many outlets for environmental education and sustainable design. Given The Wash’s location at the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, the vision plan has integrated various “Habitat Restoration Areas” near the North End of the greenway in order to allow the natural flora and fauna to establish in a restoration process while allowing Greenway visitors to observe these processes within the various “wildlife corridors”. Additionally the plan includes green buffers in the form of tall, native grasses and other vegetation between The Wash and the residential areas. The plantings not only incorporate more native greenery but help combat noise pollution as well, a component The Cornfield seized to consider.

The multi-use pathway will be graded with different materials for the different intentions of each trail. The equestrian trail, for example, will be made with larger aggregate while the hiking trails will be made with a smoother compacted surface of decomposed granite. The inclusion of equestrian trails is an example of the flexibility and open-mindedness Frederick spoke of with this project. He explained that a few vocal horseback riders regularly attend the monthly meetings and urged for equestrian trails separate from the bike path because bikes make horses nervous. The planners then added a separate pathway separated by bioswales for this purpose.221

The bioswales are one of the many features that aid in flood prevention, other features include permeable pavement and increased vegetation to slow water flow.

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221 In person interview with Ken Frederick, April 11th, 2013
The park vision and design is realistic with the amenities it aims to include given its amount of funding. The spaces the plan provides have versatility that is essential when trying to appease a large consistency with varying interests.

**VI. Conclusion**

Even putting environmental design features completely aside, the Pacoima Wash Greenway is the most sustainable of all three projects from a process perspective. Especially in the beginning phases, no park is able to sustain itself without the help and investment of time and money from the range of stakeholders. Because the plan integrates so much community involvement and truly aims to meet the needs of it’s future users, it has a much higher chance of being sustained than in a community that had no input on it such as the Wetlands Park or a community, which could potentially begin to resent the site, such as The Cornfield.

In comparison to the other cases, the Pacoima Wash Greenway tactfully meets the needs of the community, as The Cornfield was originally aiming to do, while also meeting the requirements of the larger community. Just as the Wetlands Park’s main initiative was to meet water requirements set by the state and federal governments, the Pacoima Wash Greenway is attempting to demonstrate the integration of ecosystem and human health strategies through attention to sources of polluted runoff, and provision of recreational space in connective green space.

While this plan has taken a while to get off of its feet, since the beginning stages the stakeholders have worked tirelessly to make sure it does not stall like as The Cornfield. Keeping the Pacoima residents involved as much as possible—an aspect that
the Wetlands Park failed to incorporate—is a central objective. As mentioned above, PB does this with weekly and monthly meetings and has recently created a “Planning Process School” which allows interested residents to get an overview of the planning process and help those, especially non-English speakers, better understand the complexities within the process. Additionally, the organization has a few community organizing staff members to call and inform residents who may be interested in the undertaking.

In 2012 alone the vision plan was accepted by the Pacoima regional council as a certified community plan. Almost immediately after its official approval, PB held a community service event where a large number of stakeholders worked together to build a pocket park near one of the high schools located near The Wash. Pomona Beautiful has also improved one of the only bridges. Before their improvements the bridge, which is used by nearly 200 students per day, had missing pieces and was a safety hazard. They have also created one small park that was originally owned by the city of Los Angeles under Quimby Funds but not being utilized. Their next project is another vacant lot being converted into a park. The park design is in the shape of a figure eight because of a local youth community member who came to a meeting and begged for a place to ride his bicycle.

For the Pacoima Wash Greenway, it is important that all voices are heard and taken into consideration. Frederick said that a part of the project’s success is due to flexibility and open-mindedness but another portion is due to the community being an “us” community; defined by the willingness to hear out the needs of everyone and see which weigh the most. If each project were dealt with the way the Pacoima Wash Greenway project is happening, the success rate may be much higher.

Figure 1: Portion of Current Pacoima Wash; LA County Public Health Archives

Figure 2: An excerpt from a community outreach survey; Pacoima Beautiful
Figure 3: Pacoima Wash Greenway Vision Plan; Pacoima Beautiful Archives
Conclusion

The reuse and revitalization of brownfields into parks and green spaces is inherently ecological. However, in order to achieve eventual sustainability the standards must be set higher and the priorities of the federal government must be re-considered.

One suggestion is the broadening of incentives. Currently, the most sought after incentives for brownfield conversions are economic, with the majority in the form of liability relief and post-conversion economic gain. Due to the large emphasis on economic gain, the majority of brownfields in the United States are being converted into various facilities, warehouses or industrial parks, which are thought to have greater economic potential than parks or community spaces. This explains why only 4% of brownfield conversions are to green spaces.223 These facilities, however, also have a much greater potential of becoming yet another, even more polluted brownfield. When incentives are solely economic, a cyclical system is created where the economy is both the creating force and the ending force. In order for the system to include ecology, society and improvement of the public’s health, the economy must be seen as an equal component to all of these. The system should not be one of hierarchy, but of heterarchy.224 This idea, created by Warren McCulloch is defined as the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways. If the social, economic, ecological and health related impacts of brownfield conversion projects were seen through a more heterarchical

lens, perhaps the products from these projects would be more holistic and successful in the end. This theory is used in the Pacoima Wash Greenway. Some of the pocket parks along the linear runway were designed for recreation and exercise, while others were created with the idea of ecological restoration in mind.

Just as the process should be more holistic, the incentives for creating the project should be as well. In order for the brownfield to green space projects to become more common and less economically driven, the incentives should be less about alleviating the liability from the past owner and instead focus on seeing these projects as catalysts for further sustainable development. If a project meets the needs of the community and the environment surrounding it, the incentive should be based on further efforts to improve the area, which may then lead to economic incentives. This is seen with a current project happening around the Cornfield in Downtown Los Angeles. The city of Los Angeles has recently approved for the first affordable housing project without parking minimum in the design plan. This can be viewed as an effort to help make the area more walkable and less dependent on automobiles. Perhaps this will inspire even more community parks and green spaces for the residents to walk around. Incentives such as adjusting parking minimums, beautifying areas adjacent to the sites, and even donating amenities, such as bicycle racks or water purification systems, could be other forms of incentives in addition to financial liability relief. This idea calls for more research on the economic, social and health incentives that come with ecological restoration of a space, specifically in low-income areas. Research must further prove that ecological restoration can in turn revitalize the economy and social infrastructure of previously deteriorating areas such as Downtown LA.
On a federal level it is appropriate that the incentives remain in the form of grants, loans, and other financial assistance. However, the allocation of these funds needs to be reworked. Less money should be put into the removal of the liability from the contaminating party and more funding should be directed toward financially assisting sustainable projects. In order for this to be more feasible, projects should be modeled after the Wetland Park in the sense that it has multiple uses and is seen as a community asset in addition to providing a positive ecological and health based venture.

On a more local scale, however, the project should be run as it was with the Pacoima Wash Greenway; with one main body representing and working with the community at hand, while receiving aid and assistance by many other parties. The Cornfield project was on track in this manner, with the Chinatown Yards Alliance as the head body, but it lost it’s momentum when the design process began. What can be learned from the Cornfield example is that it is important to create an initial design in the early stages to ensure all stakeholders have a baseline understanding. Once that is created, it is necessary that the stakeholders understand the complex process and realize that flexibility and open-mindedness, the two integral components stressed by Pacoima Beautiful, are essential.

Additionally, there needs to be more of a cohesive understanding between the stakeholders—mainly environmental justice advocates, politicians, designers and community members. With cohesion comes across the board understandings of what is desired, what is necessary, and what is feasible. Cohesion also helps to keep the momentum alive by creating a base vision plan that the stakeholders can then pursue. That being said, there must be a mixture of both the private and public sector within these
projects in order to achieve the financial goals and abide by the numerous policies, acts, bonds, and zoning codes that can become obstacles throughout the process.

Furthermore, projects such as the Pacoima Wash Greenway must be more heavily publicized in order for communities with few resources, like Pacoima, to acknowledge the amount of power there is in community activism. Pacoima Beautiful was started less than 20 years ago by a small group of individuals and is now a vital presence within the community. Both Pacoima Beautiful and the Chinatown Yard Alliance were started with no more than 5 original people and grew into large forces that truly changed the system. These cases must be recognized in order for communities around the United States to understand the power of speaking up. As seen in both examples, change is not a short process, but it is possible and worthwhile.

As reinforced by the literature on brownfields, the sites are issues of environmental justice that go beyond the scope of the harm done on the environment and into the harm of the health and well-being of the surrounding community. Brownfields depreciate the surrounding area, add potential contamination to the groundwater sources and make the neighborhood surrounding them a generally less safe place than it could be. For this reason, the community deserves to and must be involved in all aspects of the project. At the very least, extensive thought must be put into the culture, history and priorities of the community. This is one of the lessons learned by looking at both the Cornfield and The Pacoima Wash Greenway.

The involvement of community also helps to make these projects more sensitive to the larger area’s history, climate, geography, and culture. For example, if the Wetlands Park were to be placed in Dearborn, Michigan, where over 30% of the population speaks
Arabic, the issue of the lack of Spanish signage would not be the same as it is in South Los Angeles. These projects must be taken situationally in order to provide for the community around it. A question worthy of further investigation is; How can these projects be site-specific while still abiding by local, statewide and federal regulations? There also needs to be more data on the allocation of funds, as well as more policy research on how to reprioritize funding, specifically on the federal level, for these projects to occur more frequently. One way of approaching this is would be by showing the importance that parks and green-spaces have on lowering crime rates or childhood obesity rates, or increasing neighborhood pride and increasing beautification efforts. There should also be more research on the negative effects brownfields can have on communities.

Until these conversions become more facilitated, financially accessible, and politically agreeable, it is important that more cities implement programs such as those in Los Angeles, in which the city provides as much aid as it can. These projects aid in developing community pride, and are spurs for further sustainable development. In essence, they are imperative to cities who are attempting to become more sustainable, safe and livable. Future projects should follow the Pacoima Wash Greenway model, as it has already improved it’s community’s economy and ecology before being even halfway complete.

In conclusion, in order to create a successful and sustainable end product, the process must include ample community involvement and outreach, the stakeholders must include a combination of public and private participants, sustainability must be a goal that is broadly understood to include social and environmental outcomes, and there needs be
design flexibility and open communication during the process. There must also be a baseline understanding of the ecological, economic, social and health impacts of these projects; with none of them weighing more than the rest. If these goals can be achieved, brownfield to green space conversions will serve as catalytic forces in the movement for a more sustainable and livable world for all.
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