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California City Solutions: Paramount Collaborates to Create A Unique Outdoor Fitness Facility

This story is part of an ongoing series featuring Helen Putnam Award entries. The 2015 entries are available on the League's website as a resource for cities in a searchable database called [California City Solutions](#). The city of Paramount's Salud Park was submitted in 2015 for the CCS Partnership Intergovernmental Collaboration award category.

Paramount is one of the smallest cities in Los Angeles County in terms of land area, yet one of the most densely populated. There is little open space other than the park system, which is below the 6.1 acres per 1,000 persons recommended by the National Parks and Recreation Association. Collaboration between multiple agencies turned a strip of Southern California Edison's right-of-way on the city's densely-populated Westside it into what is known today as Salud Park, an outdoor fitness facility and open space park, enhancing the quality of life for residents. *For more, see Page 2.*



Jan. 21 Early Bird Registration Deadline Fast Approaching for Feb. 5 Municipal Law Symposium

Ensuring Integrity in 21st Century California: Water & Public Works in Our Arid State

Scheduled for Feb. 5 in Sacramento, the 2016 Municipal Law Symposium will focus on the challenging issues public agency attorneys face in the areas of water and public works. After the early bird registration ends on Jan. 21, the cost to participate increases from \$150 to \$175. *For more, see Page 2.*

The city is largely a working-class community, with per capita income mostly in the lower range and according to the latest U.S. Census figures, 78.6 percent of the city's population is Latino. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2010 study reported that U.S. Latinos under-utilize health care, have low rates of health insurance and higher rates of obesity and diabetes. According to studies by the Center for Latino Community Health, Evaluation and Leadership Training at Long Beach State, as Latino immigrants adapt to U.S. cultural norms, their nutritional practices deteriorate. The Los Angeles County Department of Health reports that Paramount's obesity rates are close to 30 percent.

Paramount city officials are always trying to figure out how to meet the challenge of creating more open space with limited resources and because of high land costs and water cutbacks it has been difficult to build new parks. The city though, worked to create small pocket parks, which have been recognized by the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council.

City leaders had a vision of creating something unique, such as a fitness facility that could function as an outdoor gym and sought out Southern California Edison's (SCE) utility right-of-way on the city's densely-populated Westside. They wanted to create a 10-acre area featuring a fitness park with pathways, tracks, sporting fields, exercise equipment, a plaza for instructional classes, and a sand volleyball court. Thousands of existing acres of SCE's right-of-way are leased to private entities, but are not actively used.

The idea was well received by SCE and organizational collaboration soon began. Participating organizations included: the city of Paramount, SCE, the state of California, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), the Los Angeles County Fire Department, and the Paramount Unified School District.

City staff held six community meetings over a three-month period to gather opinions from residents for the general design. It had applied for a state grant to cover the funding. The city was awarded Proposition 84 grant funds because of the high quality of the project's planning, obvious need for park space in Paramount, and the projects shovel-ready status. The \$42 million in state grant funds received covered the project's total costs. Only three other similar cities in the Southeast Los Angeles County area were also chosen to receive grant funds.

Paramount and SCE worked closely in devising a facility that could serve residents while preserving the utility's criteria for development along its transmission corridors including access, security, and maintenance needs. The plan included a bike track that doubles as an access road for service vehicles to reach the transmission towers, and the track and athletic field are mostly located out from under the transmission lines.

Once the design process was complete, the PUC studied the project intensely before approving it and set the lease rate. The Los Angeles County Fire Department was very vigilant in terms of working out the unique safety issues on the right-of-way and other requirements.

The city also worked with the Paramount Unified School District as Salud Park is adjacent to one of the district's elementary schools and provides easy access for students to take advantage of the many fitness offerings.

Paramount ultimately completed this public resource at a low cost. The lease agreement with SCE, for instance, calls for the city to pay just \$4,600 a year for the first five years, with minor increases every five years thereafter. The PUC established these terms.

Salud Park has increased the total park acreage in Paramount by 25 percent. The facility features a decomposed-granite pathway for walkers and joggers and a first of its kind for the city 440-yard, rubberized, running/jogging track.

The infield of the track is a synthetic turf area available for a variety of sports. This synthetic turf allows for year-round use, since there is no need to replant natural grass, sometimes necessary due to heavy usage and rainstorms. All this saves significant water costs. And while there are natural turf areas elsewhere, the majority of the landscaping is drought-tolerant.

Outdoor exercise equipment includes elliptical, rowing machines, legs presses, and more. The plaza provides space for instructional fitness classes. Completing the amenities is the sand volleyball court.

Fitness is the focus of the park. It provides the residents of Paramount with a free gym membership, available for use seven days a week, a long-term public benefit. As such, there are no other traditional park uses such as playgrounds or picnic tables.

Residents consistently fill the park from morning through evening. When it opens, there are lines of folks waiting to get in. When it closes, the park is crowded. Families spend quality time playing sports and exercising, individuals jog, kids ride their bikes, and seniors stroll and sit in the sun.

Residents have volunteered to lead aerobics/zumba exercise classes. Others share their talents by serving as trainers, showing visitors how to use the gym-quality equipment safely and efficiently.

With the cost of joining a private gym, this facility saves Paramount residents hundreds of thousands of dollars. Additionally, the inter-agency cooperation that created Salud Park saved the city millions of dollars during tough economic times, which ultimately can be used for other residential programs and services. The state of California recognized the value of Salud Park in its 2015 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

'Muni Symposium' Continued from Page 1...

Panels will focus on: water rights, drought, and enforcement; water issues related to CEQA and land use; alternative water supplies, including storm water, groundwater, and recycled water; water and public works finance issues including those related to Proposition 218; and conflicts of interest, including an update on the new FPPC Regulations and conflict of interest issues relevant to public works projects.

Titled "Ensuring Integrity in 21st Century California: Water & Public Works in Our Arid State," the symposium will be held on Feb. 5 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento.

[Register online.](#)

This annual event is co-sponsored by the Municipal Law Institute of the League of California Cities®, McGeorge School of Law, the County Counsels' Association and the State Bar of California Public Law Section.
