

The single most important lesson we've learned about creating parks in Los Angeles is the importance of coalition building. Creating broad, diverse, and nontraditional alliances has made a difference. We've also learned that we must clearly articulate what's at stake, including the physical and psychic health of our children, and create an inclusive vision that encompasses the needs and values of everyone around the table.

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of access to opportunities places the entire community at risk for poorer health outcomes through the socioeconomic disparities discussed earlier.⁶⁴

The challenges of poor urban design are hardly limited to the suburbs. Many neighborhoods in central cities, which may have originally been built to the standards of their day as walkable blocks, are often now

very deficient with respect to supporting exercise. The parks in such neighborhoods are often unsafe, poorly maintained, and much too small for the current population. Lower-income housing is too often near freeways, ports, or other sources of diesel and other air pollution. Research shows that polluting sites are more likely to be built in low-income communities of color than in wealthier areas.⁶⁵



The Greening of Los Angeles: Improving Health Through a Movement for Urban Parks

Factors: Social, physical, service, economic

Nearly two-thirds of the children who live in Los Angeles County have no park or playground nearby. Latino, Asian, and African American youth suffer most because existing parks are concentrated in predominantly white neighborhoods. The lack of play space, combined with high rates of obesity for Latinos and African Americans, points to an unhealthy future for low-income children and children of color in the county.

Fortunately, a diverse group of organizations have come together to build more parks for the neighborhoods that need them most. They are lobbying political leaders, conducting research, organizing underrepresented communities, and brokering solutions to increase the number of parks and open spaces in Los Angeles. And they've been successful. Major new parks in the past seven years include the Los Angeles State Historic Park at the Cornfield in downtown Los Angeles, Rio de Los Angeles State Park at Taylor Yard, the Baldwin Hills Park, and the Ascot Hills Park. As part of a massive effort to revitalize the Los Angeles River, leaders have proposed the creation of 80 new parks to create a continuous 51-mile recreational greenway.

Los Angeles is getting new parks because a broad group of advocates is collectively pushed for the passage of five local and statewide bond measures, raising \$15.5 billion for parks, open spaces, and water-supply projects. Approximately \$600 million is targeted specifically towards urban or neighborhood parks. The most recent bond measure, Proposition 84 in 2006, drew support from environmental, conservation, and parks groups; labor and civic organizations; business interests; the environmental justice community; groups involved with public safety; agricultural organizations; public health organizations; and faith-based groups. Importantly, people of color also were instrumental in the passage of Prop 84, demonstrating their political power and their growing awareness that their communities should benefit from the bonds and that parks are an important aspect of their public health and well-being.

Los Angeles is becoming greener, and in neighborhoods that most need it, because groups with disparate mandates are working together. The coalition has broadened to include environmental justice groups and health organizations. Representatives of communities of color and low-income communities have joined with traditional environmental groups and are participating in an unprecedented fashion in parks advocacy. Together, all of these groups are literally reshaping the landscape of Los Angeles. While there is much work to be done, the momentum is there.

