

ELYSIAN PARK:

New Strategies for the Preservation of Historic Open Space Resources



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the past 210 years, Elysian Park has served the residents of Los Angeles as an oasis of cool valleys and spectacular vistas. The last remaining open space of the original land grant of 1781, the Park offers Angelenos a rare escape into a natural recreational environment. This report addresses how the Park and the many resources it possesses can continue to serve as a refuge for the Los Angeles community into the future. It identifies and discusses the many issues concerning the Park's historic and natural preservation and recreational use, and seeks to promote awareness about the Park and concern for its survival. The report offers a range of recommendations concerning Elysian Park's use, historic resources and conservation.

Chapter One suggests that public awareness and enjoyment of the Park could be enhanced by promoting its use amongst a broad audience. Potential users could include nearby downtown public employees and the Chinatown community, as well as schools that could develop educational programming. To improve services in the Park and promote youth involvement in its conservation, the Department of Recreation and Parks could organize an Urban Ranger Program to foster Park maintenance and a Guardian Angel organization to address security issues. The construction of public toilets and water fountains would enhance public facilities in the Park.

Access to and within the Park and increased public information sources could enhance appreciation for Park resources. Chapter Two encourages a greater availability and use of public transportation to reach the Park and enhanced signage and information to promote its full use. Rehabilitation of the existing recreation building as a center for visitor information and interpretive trails and markers would broaden users' understanding of the Park.

The Park's largest user group is the Latino community. To increase appreciation and responsibility for the Park amongst this group, Chapter Three recommends the development of bi-lingual workshops to further acquaint the Latino community with Park resources. The workshop, which would include a slide show that identifies different Park environments and would emphasize the user's responsibility for maintaining them, could be presented to local Latino community organizations and school groups.

The Policy Academy site is a unique cultural resource the potential redevelopment of which prompted the examination in Chapter Four of how the site could be preserved and re-used for a purpose that complements the Park. Possible re-use schemes could model successful examples from throughout the country, like Fort Mason in San Francisco and the Headlands Art Center in Marin County. Appropriate uses would include a theater/performance center, artists studios, hostel, museum, or public athletic center.

The architectural and historical significance of Barlow Hospital, examined in detail in Chapter Five, suggests that its preservation and incorporation into future development plans are of the utmost importance. The designation of this resource as a Los Angeles Historical Cultural Monument will help ensure its preservation and appropriate use.

One of the greatest threats to Elysian Park's survival, discussed in Chapter Six, is the piecemeal loss of land to public works projects and incompatible private development. Designation of the Park as open space, under the potential open-space zoning ordinance, would protect it from further development by government and private bodies. Education and regulation of public agencies and private developers regarding development in the Park could considerably reduce intrusive development and encourage compatible projects.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHAPTER ONE: ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS
Current use, problems and opportunities

Sophie Spalding

CHAPTER TWO: INCREASING AWARENESS:
Accessibility, Information, and Programming

Sylvia Patsaouras

CHAPTER THREE: ELYSIAN PARK CONSTITUENCY:
Outreach to the Latino Community

Maria Gomez

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LOS ANGELES POLICE ACADEMY:
Potential for Adaptive Use

Jessica Lehrbaum

CHAPTER FIVE: BARLOW HOSPITAL:
Historic and Architectural Significance

Jim Dobbs and Jennifer Schroder

CHAPTER SIX: LAND ENCROACHMENT:
Everyone Wants What Elysian Park Has

Amy Anderson

CHAPTER SEVEN: RECLAIMING LOST SPACE
A Comprehensive and Contextual Planning Approach
for the Eastern Areas of Elysian Park

Timothy Sales

CHAPTER EIGHT: VIEW PROTECTION
Visual Impact Analysis for Preservation
of Historic Open Space Resources

John McDermon

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report covers three areas of preservation concerns: public access and custodianship, historic resources development, and policy planning for open space conservation.

Chapters One, Two and Three focus on the users of Elysian Park. Chapter One evaluates the results of a survey administered to Park users and highlights such data as user demographics, preferences, needs, and recreation patterns. Chapter Two explores ways to increase access and enjoyment of the Park's amenities through public information systems, educational and interpretive programs and infrastructure improvements. In Chapter Three, a citizen participation model is developed to foster a sense of Park ownership among Latino residents of surrounding neighborhoods. The methodology builds on the cultural traditions and social/family roles of this constituency.

Chapters Four and Five address the preservation issues of two important historic landmarks within the Park environs. Chapter Four researches a variety of adaptive use opportunities for the Police Academy, with the priority of identifying uses that both maximize public access and are complementary to the Park's recreational, historic and cultural strengths. Chapter Five takes an integrated approach to researching the architectural history and evolution of Barlow Hospital, including the history of tuberculosis treatment and the social/medical influences on the design of the 26-acre complex.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight deal with public policy issues affecting the conservation of historic open space. Chapter Six documents numerous land "exchanges," incompatible city-sponsored projects, and other encroachments that destabilize the integrity of the Park and indicate the need for policy restrictions on appropriation of Park land. Chapter Seven explores the eastern area of the Park, less frequented for recreational use. This chapter addresses the need for visual and functional connections of comparatively remote Park areas to the rest of the Park and to adjoining neighborhoods. Chapter Eight outlines new visual simulation techniques to evaluate the potential effects of development proposals on scenic views and vistas. Specific vista points and view corridors are identified which are in need of protection from visual obstruction.

The range of material presented in this report should be of significance to local and state policy makers as well as preservation and open-space conservation organizations. The authors intend the report to assist these groups in identifying how Elysian Park can be preserved and celebrated for generations to come. We hope it will strengthen on-going efforts and foster new ventures to maintain Los Angeles' oldest urban park.

Sincerely,



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To all interested parties,

In the Spring of 1990, a group of students from UCLA's Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning compiled a document concerning the future of Elysian Park. *ELYSIAN PARK: New Strategies for the Preservation of Historic Open Space Resources* is the result of their efforts. The report focuses on issues related to preservation, planning and user accessibility in the Park and provides readers with policy and program recommendations for its protection. In February, 1991 the document received the Los Angeles Conservancy's *Royce Neuschatz Memorial Award* in recognition of its contribution to landscape and open space preservation.

Though almost two years have passed since the document's completion, its content remains highly relevant and accurate. Issues relating to Elysian Park have not received priority status among most policy makers. We hope that release of this document will encourage local leaders to re-evaluate their agendas and to recognize the importance of this Park to the well-being of the Los Angeles community.

This briefing book explores the extraordinary resources of Elysian Park, raises questions about the Park's survival, outlines strategies for maximizing public benefit, and recommends policies for ensuring preservation of this invaluable community asset. In 1971, the Elysian Park Master Plan generated a strong civic commitment to enhance and protect Elysian Park's resources. The authors of this report hope that the material provided here will help reaffirm that commitment.

ABOUT THE PARK

Elysian Park is the last remaining open space of the original 1781 land grant to the pueblo of Los Angeles from King Carlos III of Spain. The first 550 acres of the Park were dedicated in 1886, as the City's first and, now, oldest park. Numerous sites, buildings and rare specimen plantings, both within and adjacent to the Park, have since that time acquired historic significance and some have been designated as Historic-Cultural Monuments. The Park, however, is continually threatened by inadequate funding for maintenance and programming and by encroachments that have steadily diminished its size and integrity.

DISCLAIMER

Neither the University of California nor the GSAUP either support or disavow the findings in this project. The University affiliations are for identification only; the University is not involved in or responsible for the project.

THE ROYCE NEUSCHATZ MEMORIAL AWARD

for *Elysian Park: New Strategies
for Preservation of
Historic Open Space Resources*



On the Road of a Thousand Wonders.
Postcard of Elysian Park, circa 1909

This award goes to the Elysian Park Preservation Issues Research Team of the UCLA Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning for their project "Elysian Park: New Strategies for Preservation of Historic Open Space Resources."

The project resulted in a briefing book which explores Elysian Park's resources and public benefits, and develops policies and proposals for preservation and improved utilization of this important open space. Elysian Park, Los Angeles' first city park, is the last remaining open space portion of the original 1781 land grant to Los Angeles from King Carlos III of Spain.

The research team included Amy Anderson, Jim Dobbs, Maria Gomez, Jessica Lehrbaum, John McDermott, Sylvia Patsaouras, Tim Sales, Jennifer Schroder, and Sophie Spalding. Project managers were Carol Goldstein and Shivsharan Someshwar.

The Royce Neuschatz Award was established in 1990 to honor the memory of Royce Neuschatz, an L.A. City Recreation and Parks Commissioner, and LAC Board member. Royce brought to historic preservation and planning an understanding of the need for parklands and open spaces. Her battles against the misuse of city parkland included leading efforts against a landfill in Griffith Park. A grove in the park has been named in her memory.

Chapter Seven focuses on the physically isolated and under-utilized eastern portion of the Park. The separation of this area created by the Pasadena Freeway could be overcome through appropriate planning. Visually de-emphasizing its isolation, improvement and promotion of the pedestrian walkway, and rehabilitation of recreational spaces could effectively reintegrate this area. Also, linking this natural space to El Pueblo de Los Angeles through historic interpretation would create an exciting new aspect to this area.

Vistas to and from Elysian Park are some of its greatest assets. To ensure their preservation Chapter Eight recommends that a comprehensive survey identify significant view sheds. Based on this information, the City could develop regulations that protect these vistas and require all potential developments to study their impacts on these views. State-of-the-art advancements in visual simulation technology would ensure the accuracy of these assessments.

Though encompassing a broad range of issues, the varied topics addressed in this report indicate the breadth of the problems facing Elysian Park as well as its numerous assets. The future of Elysian Park as a cultural, natural and recreational resource of Los Angeles will depend on a collective and comprehensive effort by private and public groups to manage its conservation and use.