

A large, leafy tree in the foreground, with a park path and a large building in the background. The tree's branches and leaves frame the top and right sides of the image. In the background, a large, modern building with a clock face and the words "FARMERS MARKET" is visible. The building has a distinctive architectural style with a central tower and a series of vertical panels. The sky is clear and blue. In the foreground, a person is sitting on the grass, looking towards the path. A person is riding a bicycle on the path, and another person is standing near a bench. The overall scene is a sunny day in a park.

A City That Works: Public Space as a Civic Promise

16 Actions the Los Angeles Mayor and City Council
Must Take to Improve LA's Public Realm

INVESTING
in **PLACE**

Summer 2025

Letter from the Executive Director

Los Angeles faces serious challenges: climate change, political uncertainty, and economic strain. But how we care for our sidewalks, streets, and parks is up to us. Local investment in public space is one of the most direct ways to improve daily life.

Now is a good time to focus on what local government can do well, especially when it comes to caring for communities. Public space is essential infrastructure. With coordination, investment, and clear leadership, we can improve every neighborhood.

Let's commit to a system that works for the people who live here and for the City staff who keep it running. I'd like to thank those on our Public Space Leadership Council for contributing their expertise to help develop this roadmap for reform.



Jessica Meaney
Investing in Place

Members of the Public Space Leadership Council

Barbara Goldstein
Art Builds Community

Blaine Merker
Gehl

Bruce Saito
LA Conservation Corps
(Retired)

Connie Chung
HR&A Advisors, Inc.

David McNeill
Baldwin Hills & Urban
Watershed Conservancy

Dennis Rodriguez
Parsons Corporation

Jason Foster
Destination Crenshaw

Jessica Duboff
HNTB

Jessica Monge Coria
Federal Reserve Bank
of San Francisco

Jon Dearing
National Cement

Juan Lopez
Deloitte Consulting LLP

Lul Tesfai
James Irvine Foundation

Marissa Ayala
ACT-LA

Marty Adams
City of Los Angeles Department
of Water and Power, LADWP
(Retired)

Midori Mizuhara
Gensler

Monique Earl
Accenture

Nella McOsker
Central City Association of LA

Nicole Neditch
SPUR

Oscar Alvarez
Community Coalition

Robin Mark
SALT Landscape Architects

Ron Bow
Trans Tech

Scarlett de Leon
ACT-LA

Veronica Hahni
Los Angeles Neighborhood
Initiative, (LANI)

William Gorham
Plenary Americas

TEAM

Jessica Meaney
Investing in Place

Kim Perez
Investing in Place

John Bwarie
Stratiscope

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction: A City That Works for People	5
What’s Broken	8
Why a Capital Infrastructure Program Can Help	9
Common Concerns, Honest Answers	11
Why Now	12
A Vision and Roadmap for a City That Works: 16 Recommended Actions	13
Summary: How to Improve LA’s Public Realm	20
Conclusion: Public Space Is a Civic Promise	23
Appendix A: Why Our CIP Focuses on the Public Realm	24
Appendix B: How These Recommendations Came to Be	25
Appendix C: Resources	27
About Us	28

Executive Summary

Los Angeles is home to 4 million people across 200+ neighborhoods and nearly 500 square miles, but it has no unified system for planning and maintaining the sidewalks, streets, parks, and public spaces that connect it all.

This roadmap presents 16 recommended actions to reform the way Los Angeles manages the public right-of-way. The core recommendation is this: the City of LA must adopt a Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP). The additional 15 recommendations will help the City put a CIP into action.

1 A Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP) makes Los Angeles more competitive and better prepared.

A CIP helps cities plan ahead, invest strategically, and secure funding. Los Angeles is the only major U.S. city without one. Without a CIP, we miss grants, delay projects, and fall into costly crisis management. With global events approaching and a historic budget shortfall, now is the time to adopt a long-term approach that supports jobs, saves money, and delivers the public spaces Angelenos deserve.

2 Public space is essential to health, safety, and community life.

Investing in sidewalks, streets, and parks improves physical health, supports social connection, and reduces long-term costs. Tree-lined sidewalks cool neighborhoods and improve air quality. Welcoming public spaces help people feel safe, support small businesses, and bring neighbors together. These are not extras. They are critical infrastructure, supporting daily life and community resilience.

3 A CIP makes the government more effective and financially responsible.

LA's budget process is fragmented and reactive. A CIP creates transparency, aligns investments with public needs, and helps prevent costly liabilities. It also opens doors to outside funding and ensures the City follows through on its commitments. At a time of limited resources, a CIP is a tool to deliver better results for the people of Los Angeles.

This is a moment of opportunity.

Tight budgets, global attention, and decades of unmet needs make the case for doing things differently. A CIP gives Los Angeles the structure to plan, fund, and deliver public space improvements guided by shared, transparent priorities and built for long-term impact for improving quality of life for all Angelenos.

Introduction: A City That Works for People

Sidewalks, streets, parks, and plazas are a city's most-used public assets, the foundation of daily life. These spaces help us get where we need to go, but their role is far greater. They're where neighbors stop to chat, families gather for birthdays, and communities come together to celebrate, speak out, and support one another. Vendors serve fresh fruit and tacos, musicians play, and cultures are shared in everyday ways. From CicLAvias to farmers markets, vigils to pop-up performances, public spaces make civic life visible and real. They hold room for joy, expression, daily rituals, and spontaneous connection to the small, powerful moments that shape life in Los Angeles.

In a well-functioning city, public space reflects care. The sidewalk is even. Curb cuts offer reliable access for people using wheelchairs. The streetlights work. There's a place to sit. Trees provide shade, and greenery (like small pockets of nature) is woven into the everyday. Drinking fountains and public bathrooms are nearby and maintained. Crosswalk signals make time for all ages to cross with confidence, whether walking with a stroller, using a wheelchair, or guiding a child across the street.

These features signal intention. They show that the City considered what people need, planned ahead, and followed through.

Too often, Los Angeles sends a different message. In many neighborhoods, you're more likely to find buckled sidewalks, broken streetlights, a lack of shade, the absence of street trees, and no nearby public bathrooms.

Functionality is Unpredictable

A street is repaved while the adjacent sidewalk crumbles.

A splash pad opens for summer, but the nearest bus stop lacks shelter from the sun.

One intersection gets a colorful crosswalk, while another (just blocks away) has no curb ramps, forcing wheelchair users to roll dangerously close to cars in the street.

A median is landscaped with drought-tolerant plants, while tree wells in the sidewalk sit empty and dry.

Decorative lighting is added to a plaza, but across town a busy street remains unlit and unsafe after dark.

One community celebrates a ribbon-cutting, while others keep asking for basic repairs through MyLA311 with no response.

These Outcomes are Not Surprising

They're the result of a system functioning exactly as it was designed.

The City of LA's approach to public space is fractured across more than 20 departments and agencies with no shared structure, no clear responsibility, and no long-term plan. Even strong efforts get stuck in silos, with departments left to navigate separate systems, disconnected budgets, and unclear priorities.

This fragmentation limits what's possible. Without a unified framework, good work is harder to deliver.

Taking Steps Toward Change

To improve the way the City of LA manages the public realm, Investing in Place convened a cross-sector group of civic leaders to form a Public Space Leadership Council.

The members met through 2025, and crafted the recommendations presented in this roadmap.

We are calling on the Los Angeles Mayor and City Council to adopt a Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP): a multi-year framework to identify, fund, and deliver improvements across the public realm. Used in nearly every major U.S. city, a CIP provides the structure needed to coordinate across agencies, plan for the long term, and care for the spaces and infrastructure people rely on. We also provide recommendations for additional changes that will help the City of LA put a CIP into action.

Why?

>50,000

sidewalk repair requests remain unresolved, and there's a 10-year wait for access ramp installations.

Sources: 2021 Audit: Repairing LA's Broken Sidewalk Strategy, 2023 We've Got LA's Number: An Inventory of LA's Public Right of Way, 2025 Los Angeles ParkScore Special Report: Creating LA's Park Legacy

200,000

empty tree wells in a sun-soaked, warming city desperate for more shade.

200+

neighborhoods in LA, most of which are littered with broken streetlights (and with actual litter).

And while parks offer vital space to unwind, connect, and play, more than

1.5 million

community members (mostly in lower-income neighborhoods and communities of color) lack easy access to a nearby green space—with 70 to 80 percent less park space than wealthier, whiter neighborhoods.

When public space works, it supports daily life.

Shaded sidewalks lined with trees make streets cooler and more comfortable, improving air quality and easing heat. Streets that are safe to walk and roll support physical health, enabling people of all ages and abilities to get outside and giving them a way to build movement into their day. Nature plays a role too: tree cover, planted medians, and pockets of green can reduce stress and offer moments of relief. And connection matters: during the 1995 Chicago heat wave, seniors with strong neighborhood connections had far lower mortality rates.¹ Public spaces that are thoughtfully designed and well cared for make room for everyone, improving access, supporting small businesses, and creating the conditions for people to feel well and welcome.

When there's a clear, coordinated system for managing public space, City services work better for everyone.

City staff have the direction and tools they need to create consistent work plans, clear priorities, and the ability to focus on doing the job well, rather than chasing one-off motions. Cities with a CIP are more competitive for grants, attract and retain businesses and community members, and ensure that projects are completed efficiently and cost-effectively. A CIP would bring transparency, allowing community members and council members to see where money is going and ensuring projects are prioritized based on need, not influence. It also opens up revenue-generating opportunities through public-private partnerships and better use of restricted funds.

It's possible to have a City that works as a system, where public dollars are used wisely, where staff can plan ahead, and where every neighborhood is treated with care and intention.

1. [Eric Klinenberg, Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago \(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015\).](#)

What's Broken

Despite its size and resources, Los Angeles lacks the basic tools most cities rely on to manage public infrastructure: multi-year budgeting, dedicated maintenance funds, an up-to-date inventory of public assets, shared priorities to guide investment, and clear ways to measure progress.

This isn't just a technical gap, it shapes daily life.

Sidewalks remain broken for years. Streetlights can take months, sometimes a year, to repair. Tree trimming happens once every two decades. The City doesn't even have a complete list of its assets, let alone a coordinated way to care for them.

Without a structure to connect plans to funding, and without enough staffing to deliver projects, decisions default to reaction. Pressure builds around urgent fixes, while basic infrastructure needs go unaddressed.

Each year, LA spends nearly \$1 billion in local funds on the public right-of-way (sidewalks, streets, trees), but without a shared strategy or way to track results.² Parks are under-invested. Compared to other large U.S. cities, Los Angeles ranks near the bottom in per-resident park spending. Peer cities invest three to five times more.³

Liability payments take a big chunk of the budget. In 2020 alone, the City of Los Angeles paid \$12 million to settle sidewalk injury claims: That's nearly a third of what it spent that year on actual sidewalk repairs. And the numbers have only climbed. Rather than investing in long-term solutions, the City continues to absorb the rising costs of preventable harm. This isn't just bad budgeting; it's a failure to care for public space as a shared civic responsibility.

City staff often know what needs to be done. But without a coordinated structure, even basic projects get delayed or delivered unevenly. No single office is responsible for looking across systems, setting priorities, or ensuring follow-through. Budgeting is done one year at a time, blending operations and capital in ways that are hard to track and harder to evaluate. Departments are often pushed to apply for new grants, but they may not have the staff to deliver on grants already awarded.

The result: piecemeal upgrades, duplicated efforts, and long wait times in some neighborhoods while others see more frequent improvements.

This isn't about any one agency. It's the outcome of a fractured structure that makes it difficult to lead, coordinate, or budget for the future. It's a structure that can and must be reformed.

2. [Investing in Place, "LA's Annual \\$1 Billion Gamble: Spending without a Plan," Investing in Place \(blog\), September 28, 2021, \[investinginplace.org\]\(https://investinginplace.org\).](https://investinginplace.org/2021/09/28/la-annual-1-billion-gamble/)

3. [Trust for Public Land, 2025 Los Angeles ParkScore Special Report: Creating LA's Park Legacy \(2025\).](https://www.trustforpublicland.org/2025-los-angeles-parkscore-special-report-creating-las-park-legacy/)

Why a Capital Infrastructure Program Can Help

A Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP) gives Los Angeles what nearly every other major U.S. city already has: a citywide framework to prioritize, coordinate, budget, and track infrastructure investments across departments and neighborhoods over multiple years.

A CIP is a tool. It's not a single report or plan, it's a process and system that brings coordination, consistency, and transparency to public investment.

Among the 25 most populous U.S. cities, all but Los Angeles use a CIP to guide how they upgrade and maintain public assets such as sidewalks, bridges, buildings, stormwater systems, and more. In places like Oakland, Long Beach, Minneapolis, and Houston, the CIP serves as a public roadmap that outlines which projects are planned, where and when they'll happen, and how they'll be paid for.

Los Angeles lacks that structure. The result is familiar: project delays, missed opportunities, overlapping efforts, and uncertainty for both Angelenos and City staff. Without a unified framework, staff struggle to advance even the strongest plans. People don't know what's coming next, and that makes it difficult for those in departments tasked with delivering services.

A CIP frees City staff to focus on doing their work well rather than reacting to crises or chasing disconnected motions. It improves efficiency, strengthens grant applications, reduces duplication, and builds public trust by showing where investments are going and why.

A CIP sets up a structure to:

- Link funding to shared citywide priorities
- Set clear timelines for project delivery
- Coordinate across departments and neighborhoods
- Track progress so Angelenos and City staff can see what's working and where
- Help ensure resources go where they're needed most, not just where political pressure is loudest

No New Plans—Follow Through on What We Know

Angelenos have already shown up to offer ideas, attend meetings, and review plans. The City doesn't lack public input; it lacks follow-through. Too often, plans are made without the funding or structure to bring them to life. A Capital Infrastructure Program changes that by tying community priorities to real budgets, timelines, and results.

This first cycle is about building a strong foundation. But CIPs are not one-and-done; they're designed to be updated regularly, with future cycles informed by community input. In many cities, that includes formal roles for community advisory committees. This makes public input not just a gesture, but a standing part of how decisions get made.

Los Angeles doesn't just need a fix—it needs a framework. It needs a citywide vision that treats public space as infrastructure: planned with care, maintained consistently, and delivered with coordination and leadership.

Cities that have a Capital Infrastructure Program

Top 10 U.S. Cities by Population		Top 10 California Cities by Population		Top 10 Cities in L.A. County by Population	
New York	Yes	Los Angeles	No	Los Angeles	No
Los Angeles	No	San Diego	Yes	Long Beach	Yes
Chicago	Yes	San Jose	Yes	Santa Clarita	Yes
Houston	Yes	San Francisco	Yes	Glendale	Yes
Phoenix	Yes	Fresno	Yes	Lancaster	Yes
Philadelphia	Yes	Sacramento	Yes	Palmdale	Yes
San Antonio	Yes	Long Beach	Yes	Pomona	Yes
San Diego	Yes	Oakland	Yes	Torrance	Yes
Dallas	Yes	Bakersfield	Yes	Pasadena	Yes
Jacksonville	Yes	Anaheim	Yes	Downey	Yes

U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, "City and Town Population Totals," Vintage 2024 Population Estimates.

Common Concerns, Honest Answers

Structural changes often raise questions (as they should).

Below are some of the most common concerns we've heard about a Capital Infrastructure Program, along with responses to help explain what's proposed and why it matters.

“We don’t have the money.”

Cities with a Capital Infrastructure Program don't necessarily spend more but they do spend smarter. A CIP helps cities use existing dollars more effectively by coordinating projects across departments, bundling contracts, and reducing delays and redundancies. It also strengthens the City's ability to compete for state and federal funding. In fact, by planning ahead, a CIP can help Los Angeles avoid the costly consequences of deferred maintenance and reduce the liability payouts that already strain the City's budget. Inaction costs more.

“We already have plans.”

That's true. But they live in separate departments, use different timelines, and rarely intersect, even when they involve the same stretch of road or sidewalk. A CIP doesn't replace existing plans, it connects them, giving City Council and the Mayor a tool and a multi-year budget to lead across systems. A CIP makes it more likely that existing plans will actually be implemented.

“It’ll take too long.”

That's why we need to start now. With leadership from the Mayor, City Council, and the City Administrative Officer, LA can move from talk to action and finally put a citywide plan in place. The longer we wait, the more time and money we lose. Behind every liability payout is often a person whose life was changed, a neighbor injured, a child lost. Delay isn't just inefficient, it's harmful.

“It’s too complex.”

Yes, creating a CIP is complex. But it's not nearly as complex as building a city without one. A CIP doesn't add complexity, it organizes what's already happening and makes that work understandable to the people it's meant to serve. Ultimately a CIP reduces complexity.

“Haven’t we tried this already?”

Almost. Over the years, City leaders and experts have called for a Capital Infrastructure Program. Motions have been introduced. Reports commissioned. But those efforts didn't move forward—not because the vision was wrong, but because we didn't have the leadership needed to coordinate, commit, and carry it through. That's the opportunity now.

Why Now

We have a rare and urgent moment of opportunity.

Crises

Los Angeles is facing an ongoing budget crisis that's forcing hard decisions. Legal settlements over dangerous and failing infrastructure are rising. Neighborhoods are still recovering from the devastating January 2025 fires. And the risks keep mounting: more extreme heat days threaten health and strain power systems, flooding from heavy rainstorms overwhelm streets and hillsides, and the threat of earthquakes is always present. We need a way to integrate shade, stormwater upgrades, and seismic resilience into routine repairs. We need long-term planning, so each crisis doesn't leave us more vulnerable and less prepared.

Deadlines

The 2026 World Cup, the 2027 Super Bowl, and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games are fast approaching, drawing global attention to the state of our infrastructure. Visitors will encounter what many Angelenos navigate every day: broken sidewalks, unshaded streets, and large stretches of concrete with little greenery or relief. These high-profile events are an opportunity to show what kind of city Los Angeles is, and whether we're investing in the accessible, welcoming public spaces that people rely on every day.

Momentum

Many policymakers called for systems reform during the FY26 budget hearings, and there are several big change initiatives already in progress.

- The newly formed Charter Reform Commission is inviting conversations about how the City functions today and how we can shape it for the future by updating our Charter.
- The City is conducting its first Park Needs Assessment since 2009, with an eye toward informing a potential ballot measure.
- The chair of the City Council's Transportation Committee introduced the idea of a new infrastructure bond or tax.

Conversations are already happening and people are asking the right questions: *What's broken? How do we fix it? How do we make sure that new dollars actually reach the neighborhoods that need them?*

Investing in Place has spent the last decade listening, researching, convening, and ground-truthing what many already know: LA's infrastructure system is fractured. But this is not just a crisis, it's a turning point. The systems are broken, yes, but the will to fix them is real.

This is our chance to design something better—something that works.

A Vision and Roadmap for a City That Works:

16

Recommended Actions

This isn't just a set of ideas, it's a roadmap grounded in experience and shared purpose. The members of the Public Space Leadership Council respectfully urge the Mayor and City Council to take these next steps, knowing that with the right tools and leadership, Los Angeles can deliver the public spaces Angelenos deserve.

Cross-Sector Expertise

These recommendations are the product of collaborative, grounded work shaped directly by the Public Space Leadership Council, a cross-sector group of civic leaders convened in 2025. Over months of dialogue, members helped craft and refine the structural reforms and recommendations outlined here, focusing on long-term planning, transparent budgeting, and coordinated delivery.

See Appendix B for more detail about the history behind these recommendations.

Fix the Governance Structure

1

Adopt a clear, citywide vision that centers outcomes, not activities or department checklists, showing what Los Angeles can be. This is a vision that every leader acknowledges and works toward, regardless of their area of expertise or responsibility. What follows is a draft vision informed by community members and City leaders.

Proposed Vision: Los Angeles public space is planned with intention, maintained with care, and stewarded through coordinated leadership to support daily life, reflect community priorities, and deliver safety, access, and dignity in every neighborhood.

As noted, public spaces are essential civic infrastructure that should support the well-being of all Angelenos in every neighborhood regardless of demographics. When sidewalks, streets, parks and plazas are cared for, they don't just connect people, they create opportunities. Local economies benefit when public spaces are welcoming and easy to navigate. Infrastructure projects can generate good local jobs. For Angelenos living without shelter, public space is not just a backdrop, it's where daily survival unfolds. A City that invests in its public realm is a City that invests in its people, advancing equity, supporting livelihoods, and building a more connected and inclusive Los Angeles. These are values we can all agree on.

2

Amend the City Charter to require the City of Los Angeles to adopt a 5-year comprehensive Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP).

This is a foundational step toward structural reform, signaling the City's long-term commitment to coordination, accountability, and investment in public space as essential civic infrastructure. Only items written into the City Charter create lasting mandates that extend beyond any one administration or elected official. Embedding the CIP in the Charter ensures it can't be sidelined by shifting political priorities. In the Charter, establish a clear process: the CIP must be reviewed and updated at least every three years, with flexibility for earlier updates in response to emergencies or shifting citywide needs.

To strengthen transparency and community trust, the process should include an independent citizen advisory committee (modeled after successful efforts in cities like Minneapolis and San Diego), composed of community members reflective of Los Angeles demographics. This committee would provide input on priorities, review progress, and help ensure public investments align with the values and lived experiences of all Angelenos.

The CIP should also include an appendix of unfunded needs to identify infrastructure gaps and guide future funding efforts.

3**Amend the City Charter to dissolve the Board of Public Works. Establish a Director of Public Works to serve as a centralized executive responsible for infrastructure coordination and for implementation of the CIP.**

The Board of Public Works is a century-old construct that no longer reflects the scale or complexity of LA's infrastructure needs. Board members are political appointees with no required background in project management, planning, urban design, engineering, construction, or capital planning. While many serve with dedication, the structure is outdated, redundant with City Council oversight, and lacks clear lines of accountability or expertise.

Establishing a qualified Director of Public Works (already mandated in the Charter) would bring professional leadership to this critical function, streamlining decisions, improving coordination, and creating clear accountability for implementation. Right now, responsibility is fragmented as bureau heads and general managers operate independently, with only the Mayor's Office tasked with coordination. A centralized Director of Public Works would have the authority to align departments, establish consensus on priorities, and ensure shared standards for project delivery and quality, to ensure long-term infrastructure investments are implemented effectively and equitably.

Align City Departments

4**Create an Office of Public Space and Infrastructure Management, reporting to the Director of Public Works, to manage planning, inter-agency coordination (clarifying leadership roles and responsibilities), and implementation of capital projects.**

Los Angeles has no capital planning office, no single entity responsible for coordinating infrastructure investments across departments. Sidewalks, streets, trees, stormwater, and parks are managed separately, with no shared project list, no clear lines of authority, and no unified plan to guide decisions. This lack of coordination leads to missed funding opportunities, project delays, and a public realm that feels disjointed and reactive.

An Office of Public Space and Infrastructure Management would change that. Reporting to the Director of Public Works, this office would provide centralized leadership to align departmental work, clarify roles and responsibilities, and coordinate project delivery. It would support multi-year planning, improve internal communication, and create a consistent structure for tracking progress and outcomes. Without a coordinating office, even the best infrastructure plan will remain aspirational. The Office of Public Space and Infrastructure Management is how we make it operational.

5**Clarify the Department of City Planning's (DCP) role in public infrastructure planning related to land use, growth, and public space strategies.**

In most cities, planning departments help shape long-range infrastructure priorities connecting growth, land use, and capital investment. In Los Angeles, DCP is almost entirely focused on zoning and private development, with little to no role in planning or budgeting for public space improvements. As a result, there's no coordinated approach to linking where the City grows with how it invests in sidewalks, streets, and parks.

6**Explore LADOT consolidation into the Department of Public Works to improve outcomes (not just to streamline the organization chart).**

Roads and sidewalks function together, but in Los Angeles, they're managed separately. LADOT manages roadbed striping, signals, curb use, and traffic operations, while Public Works manages the street bed and sidewalks, along with everything on them (from street trees and lighting to bus shelters and bathrooms).

For instance, the Bureau of Street Services, under Public Works, handles repaving, while LADOT is responsible for planning and installing bike lanes. This separation leads to missed opportunities and inefficiencies. One example: under the Healthy Streets LA (HLA) initiative, when a street is repaved and the Mobility Plan calls for a bike lane, it must be added. But that only happens if the two departments coordinate, which doesn't always occur in practice.

Bringing these functions under one roof could improve coordination and align departments that have historically operated with different goals. A unified structure reduces delays, strengthens project delivery, and ensures that the public right-of-way investments reflect shared priorities. Any reorganization should serve one purpose: better outcomes for the people who rely on these spaces every day.

7**Clarify the role of Recreation and Parks in capital planning and its current coordination with Public Works.**

If Los Angeles moves forward with a citywide Capital Infrastructure Program and a centralized Director of Public Works, it's critical to define how Recreation and Parks fits into that structure. Parks are public infrastructure and they represent some of the most loved and most used public spaces in the city. But today, Recreation and Parks manages its capital planning independently, with limited coordination with Public Works.

To ensure parks are fully integrated into citywide investment strategies, LA must establish clear workflows, responsibilities, and shared planning tools. This is especially important for delivering major capital improvements, coordinating maintenance, and meeting broader goals around access, shade, climate resilience, and neighborhood livability. Without intentional coordination, parks risk remaining siloed in a system that's aiming to become more connected.

Center Community and Workforce Needs

8

Establish local hire and workforce development goals as part of CIP implementation.

A Capital Infrastructure Program isn't just about what we build, it's also about who benefits. Embedding local hire requirements and workforce development goals into CIP implementation ensures that infrastructure investments create job pathways for Angelenos, particularly from historically underrepresented communities. This includes recruitment, training, and partnerships with labor, workforce boards, and community-based organizations. These standards should be tracked and reported publicly as part of the CIP's accountability framework.

Improve Budgeting

9

Commit to no new taxes related to the City's public spaces/public realm without Charter reform requiring the City of Los Angeles to adopt a 5-year comprehensive Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP).

Public trust in City spending is fragile, and asking voters to approve new taxes without first demonstrating a clear, accountable program undermines that trust further. Right now, the City has no coordinated system for planning, delivering, or tracking public space investments. Without a 5-year Capital Infrastructure Program required by Charter, there's no guarantee that new revenue would be spent wisely, equitably, or transparently.

Before pursuing new funding, the City must get its house in order. Charter reform is the foundation for long-term fiscal responsibility. It ensures that public dollars are tied to publicly adopted priorities, that departments are working together, and that community members can see where money is going and what it's achieving. Only then will voters have confidence that additional investments will lead to real, visible improvements in their daily lives.

10

Support transitioning the entire City budget to a two-year cycle to improve planning and continuity, and ensure adequate staffing levels to implement CIP work.

Annual budgeting makes it difficult to plan, coordinate, and deliver multi-year capital projects. Departments often face delays due to late approvals, staffing gaps, or shifting funding, undermining both accountability and efficiency. The yearly budget process consumes a significant amount of staff time across departments; that's time that could be better spent delivering projects, engaging communities, and solving problems on the ground. Moving to a two-year cycle would free up capacity and create more continuity in both planning and implementation. This process should remain distinct from the CIP, which serves as a separate multi-year capital investment program.

11

Implement a citywide asset management system that tracks real-time condition, use, and performance of public infrastructure.

Los Angeles currently has no centralized, up-to-date inventory of its public assets, let alone a system for monitoring their condition over time. Data is fragmented across departments, often outdated, and rarely used to guide planning or budgeting. This leaves policymakers in the dark about the scale of needs, and limits the City's ability to prioritize or deliver improvements effectively.

A citywide asset management system would change that. It would create a shared foundation for capital planning, maintenance, and long-term budgeting, ensuring that decisions are driven by actual conditions and community need, not guesswork or political pressure.

12

Establish a “State of Good Repair” policy with enforceable standards and dedicate a portion of the CIP budget to ongoing maintenance, not just new construction.

Too often, the City focuses on launching new projects while letting existing infrastructure deteriorate. Without enforceable standards and a dedicated maintenance budget, LA risks deepening safety hazards, driving up liability costs, and eroding public trust.

A “State of Good Repair” policy would define clear benchmarks for the conditions of sidewalks, trees, pavement, bus shelters and other assets, and it would guide how projects are prioritized across neighborhoods. It would also use the citywide asset inventory to ensure funding is tied to actual needs. Dedicating a set percentage of the CIP budget to maintenance is not only a matter of equity and safety, it's fiscal responsibility. Keeping infrastructure in good working order reduces long-term costs, prevents expensive emergency repairs, and protects public dollars by extending the life of past investments. Public space should not only be built, it must be cared for.

13

Require Life-of-Project Cost Estimates for all capital projects.

Capital projects don't end with construction; they require years of upkeep, operations, and eventual replacement. Yet the City of Los Angeles has no consistent process for calculating or disclosing the full cost of owning and maintaining public infrastructure over time. This leads to underfunded maintenance, rising liabilities, and unsustainable budgeting.

Life-of-project cost estimates are standard practice at agencies like LA Metro and should be adopted citywide. Requiring them would bring greater transparency and financial discipline to capital planning. This ensures departments account for long-term costs up front, helps prevent deferred maintenance, and protects the public from costly surprises. It's a foundational tool for fiscal stewardship and a smarter way to plan for LA's future.

Strengthen Accountability and Resilience

14

Explicitly integrate the benchmarks of climate/hazard resilience and equity into project selection and design standards.

Los Angeles faces growing risks from extreme heat, flooding, wildfires, and earthquakes, yet these threats are not consistently addressed in how infrastructure is planned or prioritized. At the same time, historically disinvested neighborhoods continue to bear the brunt of environmental stress without targeted investment.

By requiring all CIP projects to include resilience and equity benchmarks like shade, stormwater capture, seismic safety, and prioritization based on need, the City can deliver infrastructure that protects both assets and communities. This approach ensures public dollars address today's risks and past neglect, creating a safer, more responsive public realm.

15

Implement a metrics-based project delivery system to reduce delays, increase efficiency, and strengthen transparency and accountability from planning through completion.

Los Angeles has no consistent, citywide system for tracking how infrastructure projects move from planning to delivery. Timelines vary, accountability is diffuse, and departments often struggle to meet grant deadlines, putting funding at risk. In FY26 budget hearings, both LADOT and the Bureau of Street Services reported that hundreds of millions in awarded grant funds are delayed due to implementation backlogs largely driven by staffing shortages and coordination gaps.

A metrics-based project delivery system would bring visibility and structure to this process. It would set clear expectations for scope, schedule, and staffing needs, while tracking progress publicly from start to finish. This would help the City identify bottlenecks early, allocate resources more effectively, and protect hard-won grant dollars. Speed isn't the only goal, it's about delivering the right projects, with the right staff, on a reliable timeline that the public can trust.

16

Mandate an annual audit by the Controller's Office to assess and report back on the progress of CIP projects, budgets, and timelines.

To build trust and track real progress, the Capital Infrastructure Program must be more than a set of intentions: it needs independent oversight. An annual audit by the Controller's Office would provide a clear, public accounting of what's being built, how funds are being spent, and whether timelines are being met. This transparency strengthens accountability, helps identify systemic issues, and ensures the CIP delivers on its goals year after year.

Los Angeles has an opportunity to be more strategic and proactive with its infrastructure investments. Taking these actions would allow Los Angeles to move away from crisis-driven spending and toward a smarter, fiscally responsible and more resilient approach. This would save money, reduce waste, create local jobs, and deliver the world-class public spaces Angelenos deserve.

Summary: How to Improve LA's Public Realm

1 Adopt a clear, citywide vision centered on outcomes, not activities or department checklists

Barrier:
Lack of shared outcomes across departments

Expected Impact:
Aligns agencies, funding, and public expectations around common goals

2 Amend City Charter to require a 5-year comprehensive Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP)

Barrier:
No existing requirement for coordinated capital planning and maintenance

Expected Impact:
Establishes a predictable, long-term investment framework for public realm infrastructure

3 Amend City Charter to dissolve Board of Public Works; establish a Director of Public Works

Barrier:
Fragmented executive leadership

Expected Impact:
Creates a single accountable leader for infrastructure coordination and delivery

4 Create an Office of Public Space and Infrastructure Management

Barrier:
No unified leadership or shared priorities across departments for funding, development, and implementation

Expected Impact:
Improves coordination, strengthens accountability, and enables long-term, cross-agency planning and maintenance for public space investments

5 Clarify Department of City Planning's role in public infrastructure strategy

Barrier:
Planning roles are siloed and unclear

Expected Impact:
Ensures land use and infrastructure decisions are aligned

6 Explore LADOT consolidation into Public Works

Barrier:
Redundant and uncoordinated departments

Expected Impact:
Aligns leadership, reduces duplication, and improves coordination across street and sidewalk infrastructure for more consistent project delivery

7

Clarify Recreation and Parks' role in capital planning and coordination

Barrier:

No clear integration of parks into citywide capital planning

Expected Impact:

Ensures parks are included in citywide strategies: improving coordination, delivering major upgrades more efficiently, and advancing goals around access, shade, climate resilience, and neighborhood livability

8

Establish local hire and workforce development goals as part of CIP implementation

Barrier:

Without a clear list of upcoming projects, it's difficult for job centers and labor groups to align training and hiring efforts with future infrastructure work

Expected Impact:

Creates job pathways and supports equitable economic development

9

Commit to no new taxes related to public space without Charter reform requiring adoption of a 5-year Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP)

Barrier:

New revenue without reform risks inefficiency

Expected Impact:

Ensures any new funding is guided by a long-term CIP framework

10

Transition the City budget to a two-year cycle and ensure adequate staffing to support CIP implementation

Barrier:

The current process combines operating and capital budgets but doesn't align them—leaving departments unclear about future projects while fighting for staffing

Expected Impact:

Improves project planning, coordination, and workforce stability

11

Implement a citywide asset management system

Barrier:

No comprehensive data on infrastructure conditions

Expected Impact:

Supports better decision-making and resource allocation

12	Establish a ‘State of Good Repair’ policy with enforceable standards and maintenance funding	Barrier: No consistent standard for asset condition or care	Expected Impact: Improves transparency, extends lifespan of assets, and reduces long-term costs
13	Require Life-of-Project Cost Estimates	Barrier: Capital projects often underestimate true costs	Expected Impact: Reduces budget shortfalls and improves fiscal discipline
14	Integrate climate resilience and equity benchmarks into project selection and design	Barrier: Projects often ignore environmental risks and historical disinvestment	Expected Impact: Builds safer, more adaptive, and community-responsive infrastructure
15	Implement a metrics-based project delivery system	Barrier: Project delivery is inefficient and opaque	Expected Impact: Improves project tracking, timeliness, and transparency
16	Mandate annual Controller audits of CIP projects	Barrier: Lack of independent oversight and performance review	Expected Impact: Strengthens accountability and public trust

Roadmap

A practical guide for the Mayor and City Council to adopt and implement these 16 actions.

Phase I:

Groundwork

Establish leadership, roles, and a shared vision

Recommendations:

1, 4, 6, 7

Phase II:

Structural Reform

Set legal and governance foundations for long-term change

Recommendations:

2, 3, 5, 9

Phase III:

Planning and Budgeting Tools

Modernize systems for prioritization, funding, and fiscal stewardship

Recommendations:

10, 11, 12, 13, 14

Phase IV:

Implementation and Accountability

Improve project delivery, local benefits, and transparency

Recommendations:

8, 15, 16

Conclusion: Public Space Is a Civic Promise

The public realm is the foundation of daily life, essential to health, safety, and connection. It's where the government becomes visible. When it's cared for, it reflects something deeper: a promise kept.

But in too many Los Angeles neighborhoods, the basics of accessible and reliable public spaces are still missing. That's not just a gap in infrastructure, it's a gap in care. It's a gap in governance. These spaces shape how people move, rest, gather, and feel. They're also the front lines of climate resilience, where the effects of heat, flooding, and environmental stress are felt most directly.

Without citywide coordination, Los Angeles risks deepening long-standing inequities, investing where the spotlight shines, while leaving historically under-resourced communities behind. It also risks compounding the City's budget crisis. The current patchwork approach is inefficient, costly, and reactive, leading to higher liability payouts, missed grant opportunities, and piecemeal projects and investments. The 16 recommended actions in this roadmap would make the City more transparent, more accountable, and more financially responsible, ensuring that public dollars work harder for the people they serve.

With a shared vision and a system to deliver it, Los Angeles can finally build the public realm Angelenos have already imagined, and bring meaningful investment to the communities that have waited the longest. The best time to plant a tree (or adopt these reforms) was 20 years ago. The next best time is now.

Appendix A: Why Our CIP Focuses on the Public Realm

In other cities, a CIP might include everything from airport terminals to wastewater plants. But this roadmap focuses on a more visible, immediate, and deeply human category of infrastructure: public space.

That includes:

- Sidewalks and curb ramps
- Streetscapes and street trees
- Parks and open spaces
- Plazas and bus stops
- Public restrooms, water fountains, benches, and crosswalks
- Vacant lots and underutilized civic land with public potential

By centering a CIP on the public realm, Los Angeles has an opportunity to make its infrastructure not only functional, but meaningful—to create a public environment that reflects attention, care, and follow-through in every neighborhood.

Appendix B: How These Recommendations Came to Be

This report is the product of collaborative, grounded work shaped directly by the Public Space Leadership Council, a cross-sector group of civic leaders convened in 2025. Over months of dialogue, members helped craft and refine the structural reforms and recommendations outlined here, focusing on long-term planning, transparent budgeting, and coordinated delivery.

But the work actually began much earlier. It builds on nearly a decade of Investing in Place's research, organizing, and listening efforts that revealed how fragmented LA's public space systems are, and how deeply Angelenos care about fixing them.

Highlights of that path include:

- **Tripping Point Conferences (2016 & 2017):** Coordinated in partnership with a steering committee composed of organizations working across mobility, public space, and community equity. These two conferences brought together community leaders to hold workshops and share strategies for advancing policies that improve LA's sidewalks, street trees, and public spaces. These events empowered local community members to navigate the complex and often confusing City bureaucracy surrounding public space management in LA.
- **Moms and Mobility (2018–2020):** In partnership with South Central LAMP, this effort documented the experiences of mothers and caregivers navigating LA's public realm with their children. Their insights shaped a report, mini-documentaries, and meetings with Metro leadership, elevating caregiver perspectives in transportation policy.
- **The Bus Stops Here (2022):** This project documented the experiences of 58 volunteers who surveyed the challenges Metro bus riders face daily. Collaborating with organizations like SAJE and the Bus Riders Union, we ensured the voices of women and monolingual Spanish speakers were amplified, generating media coverage and pressuring policymakers to improve LA's bus infrastructure.
- **Capital Infrastructure Program Research and Education (2022–2025):** Through research, convenings, and public engagement, Investing in Place developed a nine-point CIP framework, rooted in best practices from more than 30 cities. Through this work, we also produced the first-ever citywide inventory of public right-of-way assets. We built public understanding and momentum through Zoom workshops, plain-language guides, and a Community Pledge, helping inform City Council motions and Executive Directives from Mayor Bass.

-
- **We've Got LA's Number (2023):** By engaging City staff and agencies, we created the first-ever inventory of LA's public right-of-way. Our report provides a comprehensive view of the City's streets and infrastructure, offering policymakers critical insights for equitable allocation of infrastructure funds. This project was informed by the very people who manage the City's assets, making it a groundbreaking resource for LA's decision-makers.
 - **Common Ground: Favorite Public Spaces in LA (2024):** Through in-person interviews and online surveys, we captured stories from 196 Angelenos about their favorite public spaces. This project highlighted the importance of public spaces in fostering well-being, community connection, and a sense of belonging across Los Angeles.
 - **Public Space Leadership Council & Governance Salon (2025):** This cross-sector council shaped this report's recommendations. In May 2025, more than 50 civic leaders (separate from the Leadership Council) gathered at a Governance Salon to vet and refine these recommendations, focusing on long-term planning, transparent budgeting, and structural reform.

All of this helped set the stage. The Public Space Leadership Council brought it together: validating the urgency, co-developing solutions, and shaping a roadmap that reflects both technical insight and lived experience.

Appendix C: Resources

Investing in Place

- 2023 We've Got LA's Number: An Inventory of LA's Public Right-of-Way
- 2023 Creating LA's Capital Infrastructure Plan: 10 Lessons From Other Cities
- 2023 Community Pledge: 9 Principles for LA's Capital Infrastructure Program
- 2024 Common Ground: Favorite Public Spaces in Los Angeles

City of Los Angeles

- Organization Chart

City Administrative Officer, City of Los Angeles

- 2017 Evaluation of the State of Street Infrastructure Programs in Los Angeles

City Controller, City of Los Angeles

- 2021 Audit: Repairing L.A.'s Broken Sidewalk Strategy
- 2021 Audit: Piling Up: Addressing L.A.'s Illegal Dumping Problem
- 2023 Audit: L.A. Tree Trimming and Maintenance

City Council, City of Los Angeles

- 2013 Motion to create a CIP
- 2018 Motion to evaluate Public Works and LADOT reorganization
- 2021 Motion to evaluate Public Works and LADOT reorganization
- 2021 Motion to create a CIP
- 2023 Motion to create a CIP

Mayor Karen Bass, City of Los Angeles

- 2024 Executive Directive Number 9 (Streamlining Infrastructure Project Delivery)

Trust for Public Land

- 2025 Los Angeles ParkScore Special Report: Creating L.A.'s Park Legacy

About Us

Founded in 2015 with a mission to leverage public space to improve quality of life for all Angelenos, Investing in Place provides an independent, people-centered voice in the decisions and power dynamics that shape public works and transportation in Los Angeles.

Our work is rooted in data, best practices, partnerships, and the stories of Angelenos. These tools focus attention and resources for a more coordinated and caring approach to public spending that supports physical, mental, and economic well-being.

We focus on sidewalks, streets, transit, and parks because everyday public spaces shape how people move through Los Angeles and connect with one another.

Investing in Place is a project of Community Partners.