

LA River Master Plan Evaluation

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Introduction & Background

The city of Los Angeles published the Los Angeles River Master Plan in February of 2021. The plan seeks to revitalize the Los Angeles river to promote the economic growth of the surrounding community and improve the river's ecology. 32 miles of the LA river that flow through Los Angeles intersect 7 U.S congressional Districts, 10 Council Districts, 20 Neighborhood Council Areas, and 12 Community Plan areas.

Restoring the LA river will improve the quality of life for the community as well as ecosystem by establishing much needed open green spaces that are resilient and beneficial for the ecology of the river. (M.A Palmer et. al)

While we understand that LA River Master Plan wants to direct development of the river for economic recovery that foresees the creation of jobs, allows for the expansion of arts and culture, and community engagement, commentary from local community members highlight concern for more planning to prevent green gentrification and other housing displacement consequences.

A major river restoration project in South Korea neglected preventative planning for gentrification behaviors and experienced an increase of high property values, displacement of small businesses and gentrification of the storefronts lining the riverbanks (Anderson & Lee 2013).

The purpose of our project is to evaluate how the Los Angeles River Master Plan addresses sustainability and equitability concerns with potential green gentrification and other possible impacts it may have on public and private housing.

- Keeping the River culturally diverse minimizes the risk of gentrification. Higher shares of Black and Latino residents **reduce** the odds of gentrification. A previous study on Los Angeles CSA, controlling for all other factors, **for every 1% increase in the percentage of Black residents, the odds of gentrification decrease by 2%** (Rigolon & Németh 2019)
- At the end of 2009 only 4 states had higher unemployment rates than California (12.4%)- Nationwide: 9.7%; Communities Surrounding the River Have Rates that are Much Higher-LA county: 12%; LA City 13.2%; City of Commerce: 21.1%; Compton: 20.2%; Bell Gardens: 18.9%; Lynwood: 18.8% (Nagami-Damon 2013)

Methods

According to the LA River Master Plan the main focused to revitalize the LA River is to make it more sustainable which will allow; for more open space that will be accessible to people in most disadvantaged communities. It plans to develop 200 potential project sites that will create local jobs, multi-benefit projects that assist in mitigating future disasters, such as flooding, and droughts that will enhance ecosystem function. In addition, it will create diverse, vibrant public spaces along and connected to the Lower Los Angeles River resulting in safe, inviting, healthy green spaces that support diverse local communities, allowing equitable access to nature and a variety of recreation entertainment, multi-modal transportation and socio-economic opportunities that enhances quality of life and sustains watershed health (Ginger 2020).

In this section we directed our focus to the LA River Master Plan Community meeting recaps to understand what concerns community members expressed. For example, in this section community members are concern if the new open space will be providing equitable, inclusive, trail, and safe parks for residents who already live in these areas. Will this new redevelopment support healthy, connected ecosystems and for who? Also, how will the LA River benefit and support the environment through ecology, habitat and vegetation without applying green gentrification? Lastly, many community members were concern of the long-term risks of the revitalization of the LA River that associate with the rise of housing, displacement, and how developers will address the homelessness that is happening along the river.

1,306
Community Participants Across 13 Community Meetings

1,650
Completed Online and In-Person Surveys

Results

- 27% of responses at the LA River plan community meeting #13 in Central Los Angeles were concerned about homelessness and housing displacement. One commentator specifically asks for: "A public analysis of displacement and gentrification impact" (LARMP 2019). The LARMP does address concerns about housing displacements and equitable access in Section III Goal 6 by: utilizing affordable housing committees, developing a map of high priority displacement risk areas, securing funding for affordable housing, and incentivizing resident equity building tools, such as tenant protection policies.
- LARMP did develop criteria needed for equitable river planning to address the river trail gaps, access points, adjacent trails, & greater access to metro stops, parks and schools.
- LARMP recognizes the need for cultural facilities proportional to the community's current population be developed and established but only proposes a "Cultural Art Corridor" to run along the river without any real specifics.

Figure 1: LA County Housing Affordability Need

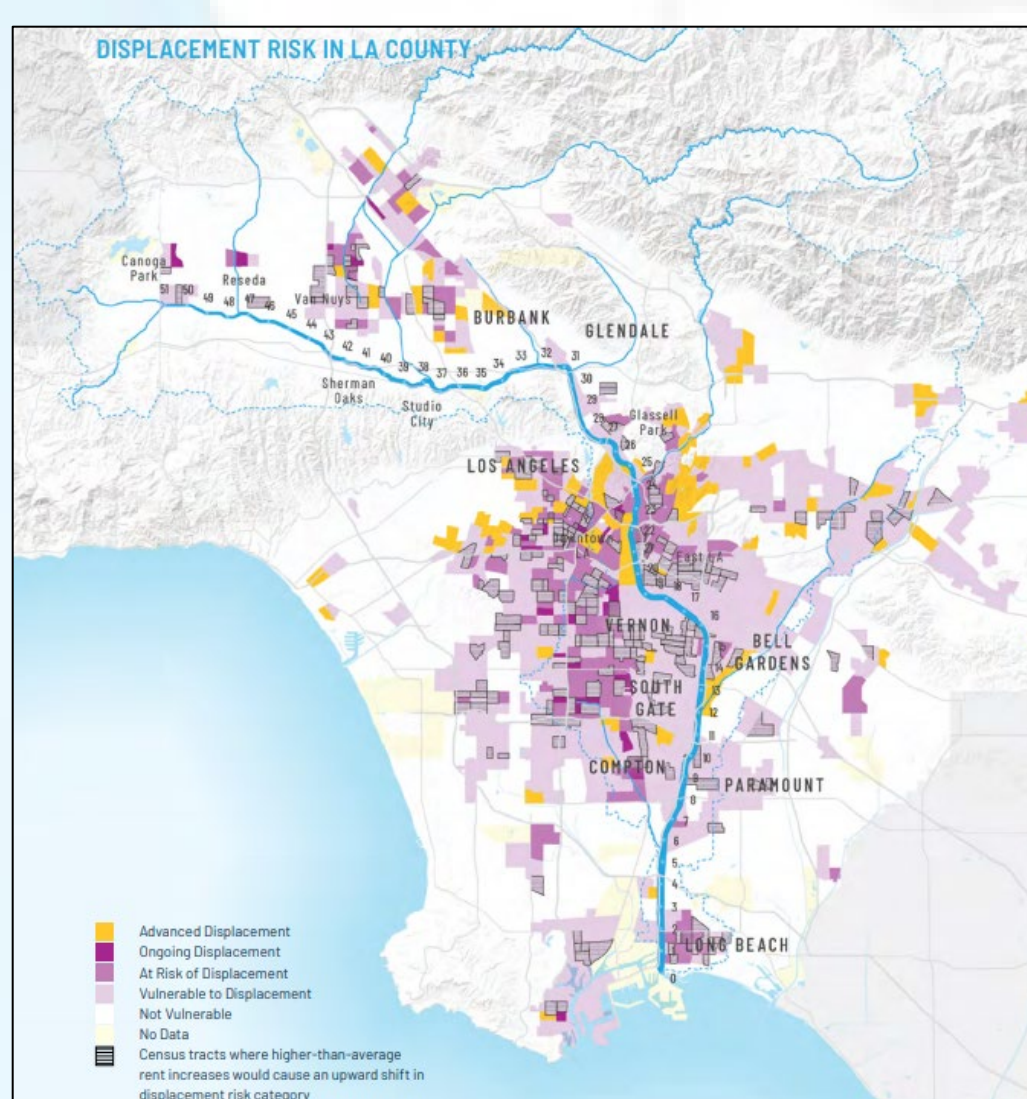
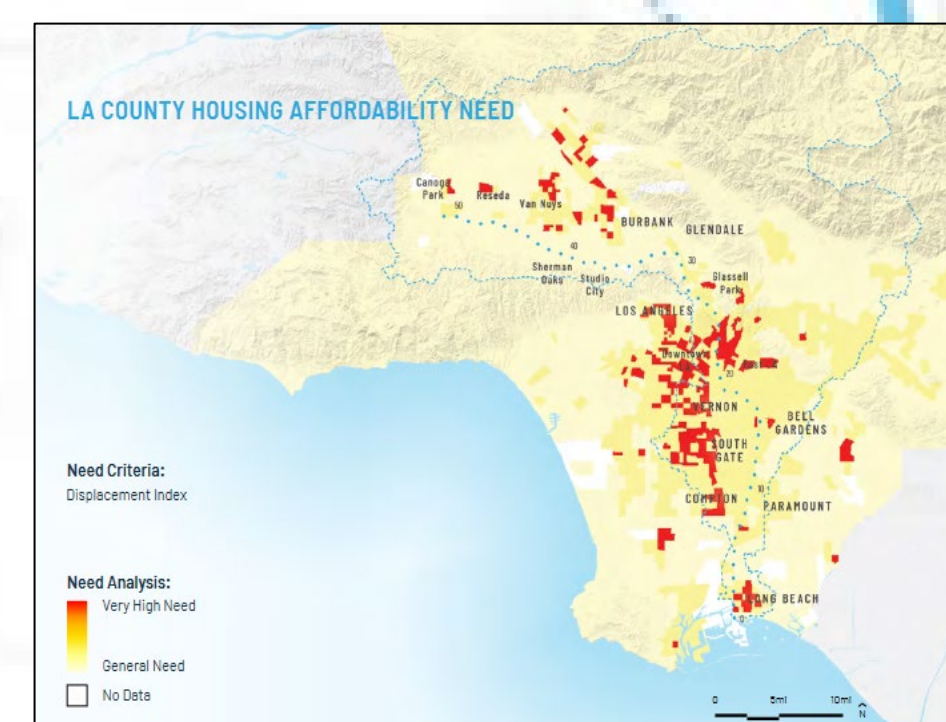


Figure 3: Real estate and land prices in some places have already risen steeply, which concerns many low-income residents. For example, in areas on Elysian Valley and Los Angeles



Discussion

Our findings suggest that the Master Plan supports and recognizes the need for equitable housing and displacement prevention but does not have any specific information to execute any policies.

In addition, there is no set timeline on execution of items listed in the Master Plan. There is no contingency plan for the homeless population living under bridges or on the riverbed itself. The Plan suggests funding affordable housing units withing a 1-mile radius of the Los Angeles River, but there is no specific delegated committee within the county for drafting affordable housing units.

The LARMP also considers plans for making the river accessible for the public. This includes making the proposed spaces transit-oriented and adjacent to schools.

Sustainability is measured by how equitable and renewable a community is. It is measured in the following ways: (1) improvement of quality of life, (2) meeting the needs of the present and future, (3) just & equitable spaces, and (4) ecosystem limits. The LARMP accomplishes the first two criteria by opening public spaces for the public and allowing the public to access the open spaces. Downsides to the LARMP are the lack of contingency for the displacement of the homeless and does not meet the needs to lower carbon footprints.

Figure 4: Example of projected river restoration design for Los Angeles Glendale Narrows Riverwalk



Conclusions/Policy Recommendations

The LARMP elaborates on the current state of gentrification and housing displacement issues however, the ambiguity in an exact timeline for reference leaves us with unanswered questions to how the plan seeks to address the said concerns and problems.

Based on our findings and evaluation of the LARMP proposal to address affordable housing and homelessness, we suggest the following recommendations:

- Create and enact anti-eviction policies to prevent displacement
- Prohibit the development of luxury condos within 1 mile of river which are areas most at-risk for gentrification
- Build more affordable housing in the area within 1 mile of the river
- Elaborate and specify goals in LARMP by developing action plans to address community concerns with target dates of completion
- Implement rent control policies as high housing costs is the main driver to homelessness, which is a big problem in the area of study

For more information

If there are any questions and/or comments, feel free to please use the following emails to contact us:

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