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**Riverpark Coalition and LA Waterkeeper Prevail Against City of Long Beach to Protect Promised Park Land Along LA River**

*Court ruled the City must set aside approval for the commercial Pacific Place project unless and until it complies with CEQA on issues regarding land use, biological resources, air quality and transportation safety*

**LONG BEACH, Calif.** – The environmental justice group Riverpark Coalition (RPC) and the prominent environmental watchdog organization Los Angeles Waterkeeper prevailed in their lawsuit against the City of Long Beach, challenging a project that would develop land adjacent to the Los Angeles River previously slated for open space for decades. The Los Angeles County Superior Court ruled that the City violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in approving the Pacific Place project, a proposed self-storage facility and parking lot, without properly examining and mitigating its environmental impacts.

"This win is a victory for park equity and environmental justice for the most neglected side of Long Beach and the Lower Los Angeles River," said Juan Ovalle, President of Riverpark Coalition. "The ruling defends much-needed park space, as well as the specific goals of the Long Beach Riverlink Plan and LA River Master Plan."

The court ruled the City must halt any work on the project unless and until they prepare an environmental impact report (EIR), which is necessary to address significant environmental, biological, recreational and cultural impacts that the development slated for 3701 Pacific Place would present. The EIR requirement may help to forestall this ill-conceived, anti-river revitalization project. The site is just across the Metro line tracks from Los Cerritos Elementary School, Los Cerritos Park and a residential neighborhood. This parcel has long been promised to the western Long Beach community as its future river park and nature preserve, not simply as an addition to the concrete commercialized wasteland characterizing so much of the LA River through western Long Beach.

"This week's ruling is a solid win for the LA River and for all of Los Angeles," said Bruce Reznik, Executive Director of LA Waterkeeper. "Instead of adding more concrete along the LA River, we need to be adding green spaces, especially in park poor neighborhoods such as western Long Beach."

"The court's ruling affirms that the City of Long Beach violated the law in approving the Pacific Place project despite its extensive, inevitable environmental and community impacts," explained attorney Douglas Carstens of the environmental litigation firm Chatten-Brown, Carstens & Minter. "The community has tried to guide the City to a better-informed decision that would comply with the California Environmental Quality Act and that would be better for the area. The City can no longer

disregard their input.”

In not requiring an EIR for the project, the City violated CEQA. The court’s ruling found that the City violated CEQA by failing to require an EIR for the project, identifying numerous deficiencies in the City’s environmental review that included:

- The failure to adequately analyze numerous applicable land use plans and policies and the project’s inconsistency with the designation of the site as open space by the City of Long Beach General Plan;
- The failure to address potentially significant impacts to the southern tarplant, a California Native Plant Rank List 1B species, including the inadequacy of the plan to translocate plants previously removed from the site;
- The failure to adequately analyze air quality impacts (in an area near a school and park), particularly the failure to analyze impacts from refrigerated trucks, which emit higher levels of air pollutants; and
- The failure to address potentially significant traffic hazards, particularly of the proposed project's proximity to the 405 and 710 freeways and the dangers posed by these freeway entrances.

The court unfortunately did not acknowledge the deficiencies in the project's storm drain infrastructure or issues with the City's height variance for the self-storage warehouse, as raised by RPC and LA Waterkeeper.

Ovalle added, “The ruling vindicates what we have been saying for a long time--that this site has been long planned as open space--and we hope this opens a pathway for the developer and site owners to work with the community to achieve the vision of greenspace along the Los Angeles River.”

By voting to approve the InSite Property Group’s development of 3701 Pacific Place, the Long Beach City Council chose destruction of river open space over regional and City promises dating back to 1996. This parcel, formerly a golf driving range and before that a petroleum waste site, was identified as a site for open space in the LA River Master Plans of 1996 and 2006. The City’s own Riverlink Plan produced in 2007 served to supplement the master plan vision in Long Beach and was unanimously re-adopted in 2015. The City ignored this multi-decade river revitalization movement in its decision to greenlight an RV parking lot and self-storage facility at this location.

The State Legislature passed AB530 which provided the impetus for the 2015 Lower LA River Revitalization Plan/2020 LA River Master Plan, which described this site as “the jewel of the river,” for pending future open space—to be known tentatively as the Wrigley Heights River Park—for over two decades. Even the current 2020 LA River Master Plan calls it a “planned major project” for park development.

Funds already exist with the regional Rivers & Mountains Conservancy and other sources that could fund acquisition of this property and the development of a park on the land. It remains to be seen whether the City will again support another poorly conceived industrial project, or if it will instead honor its own plans to create more green space in park poor communities.

Western Long Beach has suffered from a history of environmental injustice. A lack of infrastructure investment has left it with just one acre of park space per thousand residents compared to approximately

17 acres per thousand in the far more affluent East Long Beach.

The Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, the Los Cerritos Elementary School PTA, the Long Beach Reform Coalition, the Trust for Public Land, Speaker Anthony Rendon, Assemblyman Patrick O'Donnell, Congressman Alan Lowenthal and more than 1,400 residents have all lent their support to see that the promised open space at 3701 Pacific Place is realized.

Please find recent op-eds and editorial support [here](#).

Please find the Los Angeles Superior Court order granting petition for writ of mandate [here](#).

#### **About the Riverpark Coalition**

Riverpark Coalition is Long Beach's only environmental justice organization dedicated exclusively to improving access to the lower Los Angeles River, promoting park equity, and developing planned green space in western Long Beach. As a community group and policy advocate, they are committed to holding Long Beach decision makers, elected officials, and city planners accountable for delivering on commitments to build green infrastructure along the river and facilitate community access. Visit them at <https://www.riverparkcoalition.org/>.

#### **About LA Waterkeeper**

For more than a quarter century, LA Waterkeeper has served as LA's water watchdog, safeguarding our inland and coastal waters using the law, science and community action. They work to eliminate pollution, achieve ecosystem health for our waterways and secure a resilient, multi-benefit, low-carbon water supply for the region. LA Waterkeeper is an organization of Waterkeeper Alliance, the world's fastest growing environmental movement. Along with nearly 350 other Waterkeeper Organizations, their movement works for swimmable, drinkable and fishable waterways worldwide. Visit them at [www.lawaterkeeper.org](http://www.lawaterkeeper.org) or follow them on social media [@lawaterkeeper](#).

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