PUBLIC COMMENT
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Council File 12-0899-S1 - Park Rangers

Chairman O'Farrell and honorable APHAR committee members:

>> Immediately restore the Chief Park Ranger position and hire new Rangers to correct attrition. <<

First and foremost, please do this ^^.

Note that I've been a volunteer with Rec and Parks for a decade (caretaker of Amir's Garden), and a Park Ranger advocate for nearly that long. I am not an employee and I have no financial or direct personal gain related to this department. We need the best for our parks and the children and families who enjoy them.

Park Rangers are the single most identifiable icon representing any parks department. With respect to our City Rangers, I've studied the job and requirements. I've attended hundreds of meetings and often spoken in support of the Park Ranger Division. I have kept extensive files detailing related history for the past decade that does occasionally counter revisionist history that tends to occur, and I've written about these issues extensively on CityWatch, Mayor Sam and Griffith Park Wayist. I've presented hundreds of detailed public comments about the current Park Ranger situation over the years.

What follows is an unfiltered response to the council motion based upon the sum total of this experience, for what it is worth.

A. Who are the City of Los Angeles Park Rangers?

The best way to understand who the Park Rangers are is probably by reading the Draft Park Ranger Division 5-Year Strategic Plan (2009).

The City of Los Angeles Park Rangers are a California POST-certified agency. Park Rangers are highly trained professionals whose job duties evolved directly from the day-to-day needs in our Los Angeles parks. No other agency can or does respond to these needs like Park Rangers.

Currently, Park Rangers are the in-the-field managers of our *Regional Parks* (largest City parks), including Griffith, Hansen Dam, Elysian, Harbor Regional, Sepulveda, Ascot Hills, Augustus Hawkins, Debs, O'Melveny, Verdugo Hills, Angel's Gate, and others. When allowed to respond, Park Rangers typically answer 26,000* calls for service in parks annually (*2007, 2008).

Park Rangers also play a critical and under-appreciated role in the Mass Care portion (Rec and Park's responsibility) of the City's Emergency Plan.

Vital park-specific services provided by Park Rangers.

Major job duties:

1. Security and Law Enforcement
2. Firefighting
3. Search and Rescue
4. Community Policing
5. Wildlife Management
6. Education and Interpretive

- Park Rangers patrol Recreation and Park facilities by vehicle, foot, horseback and bicycle to prevent unauthorized entry, vandalism, theft or other crimes.

- Park Rangers provide emergency services, shelter and welfare to persons in emergency conditions.
- Park Rangers respond to accidents and administer First Aid and/or Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) to victims, some may have infectious diseases.
- Park Rangers carry out search and rescue operations for people who are lost.
- Park Rangers manage park resources to address wildlife issues, special events, repairs and maintenance, fire safety, patron utilization.
- Park Rangers present both professional and impromptu educational and interpretive programming to the public to enhance the enjoyment of the community.

B. What are the current challenges facing the Park Ranger Division?

A reasonable full deployment of Park Rangers for the Los Angeles Regional Parks we currently have looks essentially like this:

1 Chief Park Ranger
3 Sr. Lead Rangers
28 field Rangers
(Griffith Park Ranger Station) 12-16 full-time Rangers
(Hansen Dam Ranger Station) 8-12 full-time Rangers

Part-time Park Patrol officers and trained volunteers and docents can cover some of duties of these positions but are in no way replacements for full-time Park Rangers.

Currently, the sum total of Peace Officer Park Rangers and grandfathered Non-Peace Officer Park Rangers *is less than 17*, placing the Division and parks services and safety at a very critical tipping point.

Why are we at this point?

During the past decade, the City has allowed non-negotiable hiring freezes, lay-off threats, ersatz "park patrol" entities, managerial neglect and misuse, and attrition to literally decimate the Park Ranger Division.

Peace Officer status is vital to the safe, effective ability of a Park Ranger to efficiently manage their parks in the City of Los Angeles. The current situation is this: a non-POST certified civilian Assistant General Manager acts as the Chief Ranger through a puppet peace officer (typically a Captain) loaned from a different agency. The loaned officer often has little to no understanding of the full scope of the Park Ranger job and most have shown no desire or received no motivation to learn the job. The linear Command-and-Control structure that is fundamental to POST agencies was removed by the AGM in 2009. When there was a Chief Park Ranger previously, they were answerable to this AGM rather than to a GM.

The current type of structure and leadership are fairly unheard of for a California POST agency. Undeniably, it is not healthy, safe or appropriate.

Additionally, more than a century (100+ years) of invaluable institutional Ranger knowledge was lost during ERIP due in large part to the hostile work environment created by the manager in question.

Morale has understandably been low.

Non-equal pay (lower) within the City is a factor negatively impacting hiring. The college degree requirement impacts hiring but expertise is necessary for this complex position. Most Peace Officer Park Ranger agencies in California are armed. The current lack of being armed negatively impacts hiring. At face value, this should not be an issue since it is common in California. Los Angles politics remain the main reason for the continuation of this negative hiring impact, sadly.

Many of these challenges have been and remain unnecessary, specifically where the management of the Division is concerned. The management issue can be corrected by hiring or naming a Chief Ranger.

C. How do these challenges affect our parks and parks patrons?

During 2004-2006, hundreds of concerned parks patrons and almost 20 neighborhood councils representing more than 800,000 Angelenos passed resolutions or community impact statements that not only supported keeping the Park Rangers in our parks as full peace officers, but with increased staffing to include full coverage of each regional park with Senior Lead Rangers and a Chief Park Ranger. (List is attached)

The situation now with few Rangers and no proper Chief Ranger is that *no one is home in these parks.*

When no one is home... Parks users are not safe. Park inhabitants are not safe. Park resources are not safe. When no one is home, our fragile City resources are damaged and abused, costing even more funds to restore. Or they are damaged beyond restoration altogether.

LAPD is not a replacement for Park Rangers.

OPS was not a replacement for Park Rangers, and neither is LAPD. Except for special details, LAPD simply answers radio calls. Most typical park calls are prioritized by LAPD as lower than Code 2 and are placed in the non-emergency call queue (1-877-ASK-LAPD phone line). I have personally been on hold on this line for more than 30 minutes more than once before an operator addressed my call for service.

If the call is at a location without a street address such as we have in our Regionals Parks (ex: "Water Crossing" at Hansen Dam), the vast majority of LAPD patrol officers and dispatchers don't know the location.

LAFD is not a replacement for Park Rangers.

Witness the insane amount of expensive helicopter rescues in Griffith Park by LAFD in the past few years. Rangers contact, educate and inform the public about safe use of the parks before it gets to this point. Park Rangers intimately know their parks. Including locations without addresses.

Peace Officer Park Rangers in the field enforce:

- Alcohol laws
- Trespass laws
- Fire code violations (such as smoking in the brush or attempted arson)
- Handicapped parking violations
- Narcotics violations
- Animal welfare/abuse laws
- Vandalism or graffiti
- Vehicle code violations …and other important quality of life laws and ordinances that LAPD will not bother with.

Citing the smaller offenses in parks is proven to prevent escalation of criminality.

Both LAPD and LAFD work most effectively and efficiently in and around our parks as needed when they work with a strong Park Ranger Division.

Ranger role goes largely unrecognized in Emergency Preparedness.

Park Rangers play a critical role in the Mass Care portion (RAP's responsibility) of the City's Emergency Plan. The impact of the "OPS Consolidation" that removed 56 peace officer positions from the Dept. of Recreation and Parks (along with millions of dollars in vital equipment and dispatch positions) on RAP's specific role in the City Of Los Angeles's emergency plan has gone unrecognized, with little acknowledgement, and without any real analysis. Due diligence requires that this be addressed.

Neighborhood Councils passing Community Impact Statements or Resolutions supporting Park Rangers as Peace Officers and in numbers greater than 40 + Chief position. (2004-08)

Arroyo Seco NC	25,000
Atwater Village NC	15,000
Encino NC	44,000
Foothill Trails District NC	20,000
Glassell Park NC	25,000
Granada Hills North NC	29,000
Greater Echo Park Elysian NC	53,000
Greater Griffith Park NC	38,000
Historic Highland Park NC	58,000
Hollywood Hills West NC	47,000
Hollywood United NC	20,000
Lake Balboa NC	44,000
Greater Wilshire NC	50,000
North West San Pedro NC	21,000
Pacoima NC	74,000
Reseda NC	62,000
Silverlake NC	35,000
Sunland Tujunga NC	43,000
Venice NC	38,000
Wilmington NC	64,000
Representing	805,000 Los Angeles parks users

Some of the other community groups passing the same resolutions:

Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park
Debs Park Advisory Board
ETI Corral 38
Friends of Fern Dell
Friends of O'Melveny Park
Greater Silverlake Parks Coalition
Hansen Dam Park Advisory Board
Lake View Terrace Improvement Association
Los Feliz Improvement Association
Oaks Homeowners Association
Shadow Hills Property Owners Assn
Sierra Club
Wetlands Action Network
Wildlife Committee of the Sepulveda Basin
Valley Horse Owners Association (Los Angeles Horse Council)
Volunteers in Pride