

**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

**DATE:** April 6, 2022

**TO:** Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council  
c/o City Clerk, Room 395

**FROM:** Keith Mozee  
Executive Director and General Manager  
Bureau of Street Services (StreetsLA)

DocuSigned by:  
Greg Spotts  
4/6/2022

**SUBJECT: CF 21-1386 LANDSCAPED MEDIAN CONDITION AND MAINTENANCE**

The Los Angeles City Council (Council) instructed the Bureau of Street Services (StreetsLA) to report on the City's improved and unimproved medians to include StreetsLA plans, the resources needed to design, install, and maintain medians throughout the City, while incorporating environmentally sustainable components.

Additional instructions were given to StreetsLA, Urban Forestry Division(UFD) to collaborate with the Bureau of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment (LASAN)'s biodiversity team, the Community Forest Advisory Committee with the input of California Native Plant Society; for these departments to seek additional public funding, including from Measure W and the newly unveiled California budget that includes nature based solutions to climate mitigation, and community resilience funding (CF 21-1386).

**WILDLIFE CORRIDOR MEDIAN CONVERSION**

In collaboration with LASAN's Biodiversity Team and Watershed Protection Division, StreetsLA will be leading the conversion of water-wasting turf medians into drought-tolerant and California native landscaping using water-efficient irrigation and incorporating stormwater capture elements wherever feasible. The particular plants and trees will be selected with input from experts and community members to provide maximum benefit to birds, bees, butterflies, and other permanent and migratory species prevalent in Los Angeles. StreetsLA will continue to seek grants for urban greening and stormwater capture improvements, such as Measure W and the Clean CA grant.

**CLIMATE MITIGATION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FUNDING**

Recently, StreetsLA was awarded approximately \$10 million of the Clean California Local Grant Program for two median conversion projects that will refurbish over 92,000 square feet of existing improved and unimproved medians into drought-tolerant plantings, water-efficient irrigation and increase permeable surfaces by over 22,000 square feet. The lessons learned from these projects could be replicated throughout the City. Additional staffing resources will be necessary to carry out this work.

StreetsLA is pursuing Measure W funding through Round 4 of the Safe Clean Water (SCW) Program for two projects in order to integrate stormwater improvements and greening in existing and new landscaped medians that were proposed as part of transportation grant-funded projects. If

CF 21-1386 LANDSCAPED MEDIAN CONDITION AND MAINTENANCE

April 1, 2022

Page 2 of 3

awarded, the projects will contribute to converting nearly one million square feet of medians into either drought-tolerant plantings or additional permeable surfaces in the City's street network.

StreetsLA will also utilize the Metropolitan Water District's rebate program, which will provide additional opportunities for median conversions, and plans to request \$40 million from the federal Healthy Streets Program, Transportation Alternative Program, and the State's Urban Greening/Urban Forestry Grant Program for median conversion opportunities.

StreetsLA will continue to seek additional grant opportunities as they become available with the goal of transforming the median network from thirsty turf medians into water-efficient landscaped medians supporting biodiversity. To design, construct and maintain these projects; additional staff are needed. There will be an opportunity to train entry-level city employees in maintaining native plants, positioning those workers for success in environmentally-friendly infrastructure.

### **LANDSCAPED MEDIANS**

StreetsLA oversees approximately 241 acres (10.5 million square feet) of landscaped medians in the City right-of-way. The total area of landscaped medians does not include certain landscaped medians maintained by other City departments, Business Improvement Districts (BID), and Community groups through the Adopt-A-Median program overseen by the Office Of Community Beautification (OCB).

All landscape maintenance under StreetsLA purview is currently performed by contractors on four contracts, each representing a geographical area. Landscape contract administration and oversight is absorbed by StreetsLA/UFD through the General Fund.

### **UNIMPROVED MEDIANS**

There is an estimated 4.65 million square feet of unimproved medians located in the City right of way; these medians do not have irrigation and typically are composed of dirt, concrete, or asphalt. StreetsLA is currently not funded to improve or provide even basic weeding and trash removal on these medians, as the staff that performed these functions was deleted during the financial crisis of 2009-2011. StreetsLA has previously reported to Council on the resources needed to properly maintain the unimproved median network (CF 18-0879). On a case-by-case basis, StreetsLA may pursue grants to improve some of the unimproved medians into wildlife corridors.

### **MEDIAN ISLAND INVENTORY**

Median Islands are currently being inventoried by a contracted vendor and will be incorporated into the Bureau's Cartegraph Enterprise Asset Management program to enable systematic work planning, scheduling, and coordination with other StreetsLA assets. As median conditions are recorded, a Median Island Management Plan will be developed that outlines policies aligned with City and Bureau overall objectives. Basic median island inventory is estimated to be completed by the end of June 2022.

CF 21-1386 LANDSCAPED MEDIAN CONDITION AND MAINTENANCE

April 1, 2022

Page 3 of 3

## **SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF BIODIVERSE LANDSCAPES**

As part of the Fiscal Year 2022-23 budget process, StreetsLA recently requested funding for twenty-five (25) resolution authorities for the conversion of landscaped and unimproved median islands to wildlife corridors that will include planting of drought-tolerant native groundcover and shrubs including various tree species that support biodiversity. The budget request for staffing and materials is estimated to cost approximately \$3.5 million dollars for salaries and supplies. The budget will require an additional estimated cost of \$1.51 million dollars for one time purchase of equipment.

If approved, UFD will be able to launch an annual program converting turf, landscaped, and unimproved medians into aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sustainable landscapes. These newly-converted medians will utilize less than 50% of the water required to irrigate turf. Converted medians will no longer need to be mowed biweekly by gasoline powered equipment, creating pleasant habitat corridors supporting butterflies, bees, migratory birds, and other fauna.

Providing water-efficient irrigation and enhanced native and drought tolerant trees and landscaping within the safety improvements that medians provide, will help conserve water use, reduce urban runoff, alleviate the urban heat island effect, improve air quality, and provide habitat connections. A complete transformation of the median network will require staff to properly maintain the medians as water-conserving biodiverse landscapes that provide optimum ecological function for wildlife species living in the LA basin. By providing native and drought-tolerant landscapes and species-appropriate greenspace, water consumption can be reduced by 50 to 80 percent compared to turf landscapes.

In addition to converting medians, UFD is planning to use some of the staff to assist in landscape maintenance needs of the newly installed wildlife corridors and lessening reliance of contractors for maintenance needs of all its converted medians. This team will be capable of performing maintenance and repairs on newly-installed drip irrigation systems. Approval of additional staff is needed to assist StreetsLA in providing the needed resources to support the City's Greening and Biodiversity initiatives.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Instruct CAO to identify funding for 25 positions, equipment, and material needed for StreetsLA to implement the Biodiversity Initiative; and
2. Request Council approve resolution authority for 25 positions needed for StreetsLA to implement the Biodiversity Initiative.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Executive Officer Greg Spotts, at (213) 847-3333.

KM/GS:hb