

City of Huntington Park

City Staff & Mayor Interviews

**Prepared as part of the City of Huntington Park
Parks & Recreation Master Plan
May 2008**

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Many of the full time Huntington Park Parks & Recreation staff, Redevelopment Director, Community Development Staff, City Engineer, and City Manager were involved in one-on-one interviews to gather information about Huntington Park's past, as well as present Park Facilities, and Recreation Programs. Questions were asked about how Huntington Park's parks have functioned in the past and how they have changed over the years. The Staff was also asked how they thought the Parks and the Recreation Programs functioned now, and whether or not they served the community's needs adequately. Questions were then asked about what improvements and/or changes in Facilities and Programs should be made to better serve the residents of Huntington Park. Some of the Staff had grown up in the City of Huntington Park and shared some great information about how Huntington Park's Parks and Recreation Programs were in the past, compared with how they are now.

Manuel G. Acosta is the Housing and Community Development Manager. He pointed out, in his interview about the Parks & Recreation Master Plan, that Huntington Park is built-out and that there is not a great deal of property that would be available for parkland acquisition (Also see Section N for related discussions on private property condemnation and funding issues).

He also stated that 60% of Huntington Park is in the Redevelopment Area and that affordable housing is the number one concern for the residents.

Gabriel Vausista, the Huntington Park Planning Manager, reported that there is no vacant land at this time in Huntington Park that would be suitable to acquire for Parkland. There are 6 acres of land listed on the LA County Assessors Data Quick System, but the land is divided amongst 41 parcels with no one parcel large enough for a park.

The City can always use eminent domain to acquire property if it is for the public good, but Huntington Park does not have the funds to acquire property in this way. Eminent Domain always requires a strong political will because it is not generally considered a very positive action by residents.

The City is looking to develop some revenue streams through some stronger sales tax initiatives, like auto dealerships and converting some industrial areas in to a mixed-use commercial development with retail and entertainment. The City is in the process of developing a Restaurant Row along Santa Fe Avenue.

Mr. Acosta felt there is a strong commitment to Public Art in the community and said the 1% allocation for the Public Arts Program has been well received but that there is just not much development to generate funds for the program.

The City does work in close partnership with the Greater Huntington Park Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber sponsors a Christmas Parade, some downtown festivals and other special events to draw visitors to Huntington Park.

City Manager, Greg Korduner, was interviewed to gain better understanding of his vision for improvements to Park Facilities and Recreation Programs. The manner in which funding was determined for Facilities and Programs, as a part of the Annual Budget was discussed. Also discussed was the City Manager's understanding of what the City Council was expecting to gain from the Parks & Recreation Master Plan document.

Mayor Interviews

The Mayor was given a one-on-one interview to gather her information about the past, present, and anticipated Park Facilities and Recreation Programs.

Huntington Parks Mayor Elba Guerrero, has been the Mayor for 2 years. She has three grown children and has lived in Huntington Park all of her life.

Discussions included her understanding of how current facilities and programs are meeting the community needs, and what changes in facilities and programs she would see as necessary to improve upon the City's Park System and its current Recreation Programs. The Mayor was asked how she sees the City changing and how the facilities and programs need to change to continue to meet the needs of the community.

She feels that some of the strong community characteristics of Huntington Park are:

1. The strong sense of Hispanic Cultural Pride.
2. The importance of Family for the residents in Huntington Park.
3. The love of Soccer and Cultural Arts in the Community.

She would like to see more Recreation Programs at Freedom Park and Westside Park. Many residents who live around those two parks do not have transportation to Salt Lake Park, and she would like to see them be able to access more programs and services in their neighborhoods.

Purchasing some of the land adjacent to Salt Lake Park would be something she would like to have the City explore. There is a great need for more playing fields in the Community.

One of the negative impacts she sees affecting the parks are Carnivals and Circuses. While they provide low-cost family entertainment, they definitely do damage to the park grass and play areas. She would like to see the churches in the Community have the Carnivals and limit them to once or twice a year. Her Church currently has one carnival a year, but it is not as well attended as it might be, if there were fewer carnivals through out the city. So, if Carnivals were held at churches, it would take them off the parks and still provide the fun for the families and make it more worthwhile for the churches. She is looking into forming a committee to study Carnivals and Circuses and bring a recommendation back to the full City Council.

The Mayor feels Huntington Park City Council is very supportive of Parks and Recreation. She would like to see the Parks and Recreation Department able to provide more programs and services to the Community. She feels Recreation Programs are a strong element of Public Safety, because they offer the Community *positive* alternatives and activities.