



# City Council Report

City Council Meeting: January 28, 2025  
Agenda Item: 7.A

To: Mayor and City Council  
From: Rick Valte, Public Works Director, Public Works, Architecture Services  
Subject: Santa Monica Airport Conversion Project (SMACP) Guiding Principles

## Recommended Action

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Adopt the finding that the recommended actions herein do not constitute a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and are exempt under CEQA Guidelines Sections 15262, and 15306, and file a notice of exemption pursuant to CEQA Guideline 15062;
2. Hold a study session to review and comment on the five Guiding Principles for vetting and evaluating the feasibility of features, amenities, programs, technical performance requirements, financial strategies, phasing, and planning scenarios related to the closure of the Airport and alternative land-use scenarios post-closure (collectively, “the Santa Monica Airport Conversion Project, or the Project”);
3. Consider the commencement of feasibility analysis for three planning scenarios for the Airport Conversion Project (“Phase 3”), based on the draft Guiding Principles; and
4. Provide direction to staff on how to proceed with respect to Phase 3.

## Executive Summary

As a result of the Settlement/Consent Decree between the United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the City (the “2017 Consent Decree”), the City has a legal obligation to continue operation of the Santa Monica Airport until December 31, 2028. After that, the city is released from any obligation to the FAA to operate the Airport. Based upon the authority to close the Airport in the Consent Decree, Council adopted Resolution 11026 (Attachment D) on February 28, 2017, authorizing the City Manager and staff “to take all actions necessary and proper” to close the Airport

effective as of midnight on December 31, 2028. The closure of the Airport sets the stage for considering post-closure land-use scenarios (collectively, referenced herein as **“The Santa Monica Airport Conversion Project”**). This project would establish a preferred scenario for the conversion of the Santa Monica Airport, centered on a “Great Park” (consistent with [Measure LC](#)), after closure at midnight on December 31, 2028.

Ultimately, the closure of the Santa Monica Airport, presents a once-in-a-lifetime planning effort to return the Airport land into anticipated parkland supported by community amenities, services, and experiences. Following extensive community engagement (which includes residents, business owners, people who work in Santa Monica, enjoy our community resources, send their kids to school here, and more), City staff now seeks input to commence feasibility analysis for three land-use planning scenarios. This includes an inclusive public input process that amplifies the voices of Santa Monica’s many distinct communities and utilizes a broad range of feedback tools to find consensus and agreement on the difficult trade-offs that are inherent to a project of this scale and significance. At nearly 200 acres, the opportunity presented by the closure of the Airport ignites the imagination of many and rouses the passion of advocates across a spectrum of interests. A majority of participants that have engaged in the process thus far are largely from Santa Monica but not evenly across all demographics, advocating to convert the land to a “great park,” inclusive of active and passive recreational uses, and a variety of supporting uses. Nearly 20% of participants in engagement efforts to date have advocated for the site to involve land uses that could or would require another ballot measure as required in Measure LC, such as café/restaurant, amphitheaters, housing, markets, and other commercial activities. This report presents information on how these various ideas have garnered favor or criticism through the project’s first two phases of work over the past nine months, and it reports on the complexity of evaluating several clear community preferences through the lens of Measure LC.

At the cornerstone of the project’s aspirations to discover, design, and transform the Airport land into a reimagined community space are the goals established by City Council at the January 24, 2023, meeting (Attachment A) that serve as a framework for

the elaboration and evaluation of ideas. These include elevated sustainability objectives to ensure thoughtful stewardship of ecological resources, promote environmental justice, and address resiliency against climate change, as well as goals for inclusivity and access, and equity and accountability in the process. Also included as a fundamental goal is the need for the preferred scenario to be economically self-sustaining and “live within its means” to support not only the initial capital investment in remediation, design, and construction, but also the ongoing operations, maintenance, and programming of the site in perpetuity. To this end, several financing approaches are outlined in this report that will become the focus of additional analysis as the project moves into its third phase of work in spring 2025 (Phase 3).

To aid staff in this endeavor, City Council awarded a multi-year contract to the interdisciplinary firm Sasaki Associates, Inc. (Sasaki) at the December 19, 2023 (Attachment C) City Council meeting. Sasaki brings to the table a depth of experience in assisting other municipalities around the globe with converting their airports into new community spaces and is complemented by a team of sub-consultants from a variety of disciplines handpicked to serve Santa Monica’s unique needs and requirements. With their support, the Airport Planning Team has been able to move efficiently to identify existing conditions, opportunities and challenges, and implement the project’s first two phases of community outreach, which has produced a wealth of data that has been analyzed and refined for use during the subsequent phases of concept design. Through community open houses, pop-up events, micro-grant sponsored “community conversations,” online surveys and more, thousands of individuals have contributed to the record, and have woven their voices into the tapestry of dreams for the future of the Airport land, which has resulted in the development of the five draft **Guiding Principles** that are presented to Council in this report.

The Guiding Principles provide the philosophical framework to analyze the feasibility of three alternative land use scenarios for the Airport site post-closure. Distilled and refined from the community feedback received through nine months of outreach, and drawing reference from the project’s established goals, they encapsulate the ethos of the moment in which Santa Monica advances towards one of the largest land use

decisions it will face in the 21st century. Written broadly to allow for multiple potential outcomes and to retain adaptability to evolving regulatory realities, the draft Guiding Principles will serve as a framework for three potential scenarios, and ultimately the Council-adopted preferred scenario in the project's final phase leading into the necessary CEQA analysis. The draft Guiding Principles are:

- **Start with Nature** - The project design should consider the impact of any future intervention on the natural environment, and the Airport land's ability to regenerate species and build community resiliency against climate change.
- **Inspire Wonder** - The project should connect individuals in powerful and far-reaching ways uniting people of all backgrounds and ages in meaning, happiness, and heightened energy.
- **Balance Economics** - The project should achieve economic equilibrium by balancing revenue with construction, operations, maintenance, and programming costs.
- **Amplify Versatility** - The project should be vibrant in the 'every day' and the 'big day, working for the Santa Monica community for large events and unprogrammed day-to-day activities with active and passive amenities.
- **Celebrate Place** - The future project should embrace the layers of the site's history, and share the stories of the place and region, from pre-colonial to the history of aviation on the site.

The feasibility analysis for identification, refinement, and presentation of the preferred scenario to become the basis of the CEQA analysis is anticipated in December 2025, at which time it is anticipated that City Council would direct staff to commence CEQA analysis for the preferred and alternative post-closure scenarios (collectively, "the Project" as defined for CEQA). The Project must be analyzed for environmental impact before City Council approves the Project for implementation.

Lastly, this report concludes with focused questions for City Council discussion that are relevant to the project's next phase of work. City Council's response to these questions will assist the project team in vetting and evaluating the feasibility of concept features,

amenities, programs, technical performance requirements, financial strategies, phasing and implementation. These questions include:

- Does City Council:
1. Have feedback on the draft Guiding Principles before finalization?
  2. Authorize staff to begin exploring the feasibility of three alternative scenario concepts for Phase 3, based on the draft Guiding Principles?
  3. Authorize staff to explore the feasibility of the spectrum of community preferred land uses including one scenario that is consistent with Measure LC without a vote?
  4. Authorize staff to explore the feasibility of traditional and innovative financing structures and explore alternative organizational structures and/or partnerships to construct, operate, maintain, program, and manage the site?

The project is currently on schedule, and on budget. Timely completion of the Airport Conversion Project in December 2025 is critical if the City is to proceed with implementing authorized post-closure uses immediately or shortly after closure of the Airport effective midnight on December 31, 2028. Staff expects that the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will have a two-year timeline before certification and approval of the Project to proceed.

Accomplished and Anticipated Project Timeline

The anticipated timeline for the Airport Conversion Project is noted below:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Date</u>
<i>City Council Contract Authorization</i>	<i>December 19, 2023</i>
<i>Sasaki and Staff Project Kick-off</i>	<i>March 2024</i>
<b>Phase 1: Charting the Course (3 months)</b>	
<i>First Community Event</i>	<i>May 19, 2024</i>
<i>Phase completed</i>	<i>June 30, 2024</i>
<b>Phase 2: Discovering Place and Setting the Stage (5 months)</b>	
<i>Second Phase begins</i>	<i>September 19, 2024</i>
<i>Second Community Event – Draft Guiding Principles</i>	
<b>The team presents to City Council for comment</b>	<b>January 28, 2025</b>
<b>Phase 3a: Defining the Future of Place (4 months)</b>	
<i>Third Community Engagements – Three Scenarios (3a)</i>	<i>Early 2025</i>

<b>The team presents to City Council for comment</b>	<b>Spring 2025</b>
<b>Phase 3b: Defining the Future of Place (4 months)</b>	
Fourth Community Engagements – Preferred Scenario (3b)	Spring 2025
<b>The team presents to City Council for comment</b>	<b>Fall 2025</b>
<b>Phase 4: The Path Ahead (3 months)</b>	
<b>The team presents final scenario to City Council to commence CEQA analysis.</b>	<b>Winter 2025</b>
<b>Phase 5: Preferred Scenario Plan Vision Book (2 months)</b>	
Kick-off for CEQA analysis (not part of current contract)	Winter 2025

## Background

The City of Santa Monica is closing the Santa Monica Airport at midnight on December 31, 2028, as authorized by the Consent Decree/Settlement Agreement with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which was entered as a Consent Decree in U.S. District Court, and resolved by City Council Resolution No. 11026. This closure will enable the city to repurpose the 192-acre site, originally purchased with a park bond, into a park-focused project with supporting uses that will serve Santa Monicans for generations to come. The project scope involves extensive community engagement to determine how best this land can serve all of Santa Monica by balancing preferred uses with adopted city policies, and other immediate and long-term community needs in an economically supportable scenario.

## Project Goals

As directed at the January 24, 2023, City Council meeting, and reaffirmed at the December 19, 2023, meeting, the following goals, values, and principles were approved by City Council to guide the initial planning process for the Airport Conversion Project.

1. City Council Values – Establish a standard for the planning process by adhering to the values of a reliable, effective, and efficient government as per the 2019 budget "Framework." This framework provides a strategic vision and identifies key outcomes for the city. They are:
  - **ACCOUNTABILITY:** A city that transparently acts in the best interest of the community it serves.

- **EQUITY:** A city that provides all community members with access to resources and opportunities, and where differences in life outcomes cannot be predicted by race, class, gender, disability, or other identities.
- **INCLUSION:** A city where diversity of backgrounds, talents, and capabilities are welcomed and leveraged for learning and informing better business decisions.
- **RESILIENCE:** A city that builds sustainable capacities to withstand and recover from adversity.
- **STEWARDSHIP:** A city that thoughtfully plans for the long-term and effectively manages resources.
- **SAFETY:** A city that promotes and invests in the safety of all community members.
- **INNOVATION:** A city that seeks out and implements cutting edge, efficient, and effective new solutions to address challenges.

2. Park Goals – The Conversion of the Santa Monica Airport is a multi-faceted and complex process, with various pathways for implementation. City Council directed Staff to include the goals outlined in the Airport to Park Conversion Report and these goals set forth the guidelines for a great park and supporting land uses, ensuring a successful transition from airport to green space. They are:

- **CONNECTED:** Focus on strengthening connections to local transit and regional transportation systems to ensure seamless, multimodal access to the park.
- **INCLUSIVE:** Develop diverse programs and opportunities to meet the recreational needs of Santa Monica and the surrounding community. Ensure inclusive play experiences that cater to all ages, abilities, and play styles.
- **FLEXIBLE:** Create a park with adaptable, multi-use infrastructure to accommodate evolving preferences and maximize programming flexibility.

- **SUSTAINABLE:** Promote sustainability and climate resilience in Santa Monica by incorporating green infrastructure and urban greening initiatives into the park's design.
- **CELEBRATORY:** Honor the site's history through thoughtful design and interpretation while engaging existing cultural and educational facilities.
- **INCREMENTAL:** Implement improvements gradually to support financial self-sustainability and adapt to changing recreational needs and user preferences.
- **SELF-SUSTAINING:** Ensure the post-closure Airport Park operates as a financially self-sustaining facility by incorporating revenue-generating opportunities to fund its development, operations, and maintenance.
- **COLLABORATIVE:** Foster partnerships with public agencies and explore public-private collaborations to support park development, maintenance, community benefits, enhancements, and safety.

3. Sustainability and Resiliency – Santa Monica has leveraged community collaboration for over 30 years to enhance resources, protect the environment and human health, and support the social and economic well-being of the community. The city is recognized for its sustainable practices, exemplified by its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Cities Platinum certification and the construction of the highly sustainable City Hall East Facility. Staff are now considering the Living Community Challenge framework to further promote sustainability in future plans, including those for the Airport. This framework aims to create regenerative communities that foster a symbiotic relationship between people and their built environment, enhancing the health and resilience of economies, cultures, and people. They are:

- Healthy for all elements of life.
- Nurturing and generous places that promote healthy lifestyles for everyone.
- Net Positive with respect to water and energy.
- Regenerative spaces for people and natural ecosystems.



- Places that are walkable, bike-able, and have affordable public transportation.

Guided by the above, Staff and Sasaki began the community engagement process to establish the Guiding Principles to establish a conceptual framework for a future park and supporting uses at the Airport once it closes.

### Sasaki and Project Scope Overview

The city selected [Sasaki](#), a global landscape, planning, and architecture firm, to lead Santa Monica's multi-year, five-phase, planning process for repurposing the Airport site. Renowned for their expertise in Airport conversions, including the transformative [Ellinikon project](#) in Athens, Greece, Sasaki emphasizes community-driven design and strategic collaboration. Their approach builds consensus through methodical engagement utilizing a variety of activities to reach as many segments of the Santa Monica population as possible through in-person and online opportunities as well as in small groups and large to ensure as many voices as possible are heard. Sasaki's experience spans diverse, large-scale projects, successfully creating multi-generational park spaces through inclusive community outreach and expert project management.

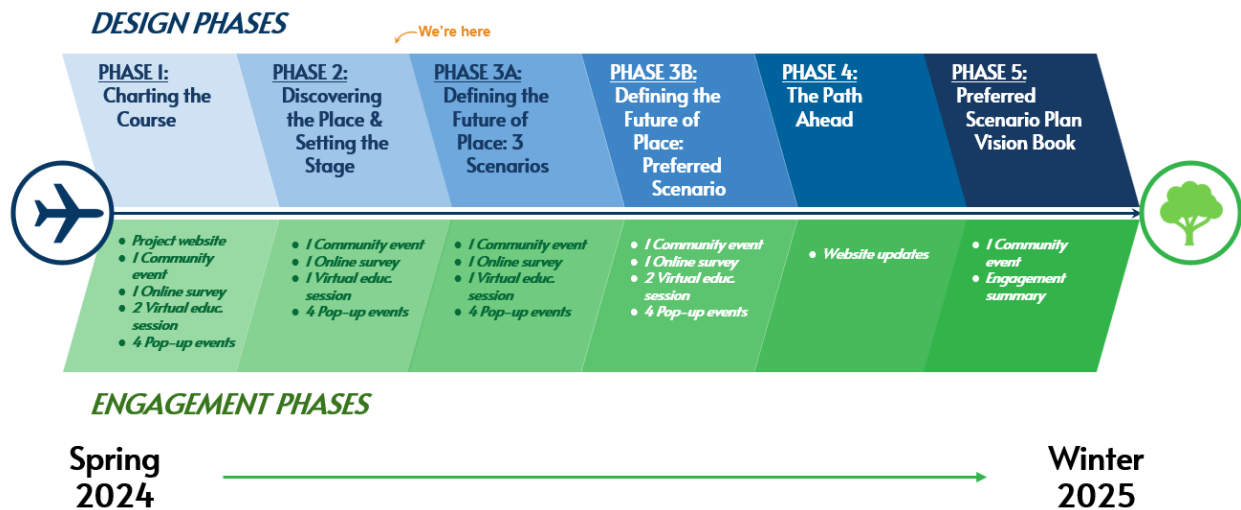
The team assembled by Sasaki brings together the following disciplines, in alignment with the scope of the RFP to address the complexity of the project:

- Landscape architecture, planning, sustainability, ecology, project management, community engagement - Sasaki
- Supplemental Community & Stakeholder Engagement – [The Robert Group](#) (TRG)
- Historic and Cultural Resources – [Environmental Services Associates](#) (ESA)
- Transportation, Infrastructure, Utilities - [Arup](#)
- Cultural Planning – [Community Arts Resources](#) (CARS)
- Market and Economic Analysis - [HR&A](#)
- Soil Remediation - [Group Delta](#)

- Sustainability - [Atelier 10](#)

The five-phases of the 21-month project are:

- Phase 1: Charting the Course – Project Kick-off, Alignment, Document Review, Future Needs & Desires (3 months) - Completed
- Phase 2: Discovering the Place and Setting the Stage – Existing Conditions Analysis, Guiding Principles (5 months) - Complete
- Phase 3: Defining the Future of Place - Scenario Testing and Plans (8 months) - Upcoming
- Phase 4: The Path Ahead – Potential Implementation Planning (3 months) - Future
- Phase 5: Preferred Scenario Plan Vision Book (2 months) - Future
- Continuous Engagement & Community Outreach: utilizing Outreach Milestones throughout the Process as illustrated in the diagram below (21 months)



### Project Purpose

With the closure of the Santa Monica Airport by the end of 2028, the community has an exciting and unique opportunity to develop a vision for nearly 200 acres of public land to serve generations to come. In all its work, the city strives for a community that is vibrant, safe, sustainable, resilient, mobile, culturally rich, ethnically diverse, and equitable to serve the needs of the entire community and to foster a thriving local economy.

Key deliverables, many of which can be found on the project website, [www.smacproject.com](http://www.smacproject.com), include comprehensive reports, educational materials, visual content, case studies, community workshops and interaction opportunities, economic feasibility studies for scenarios, mobility enhancements, incrementally phased plans, and refined hybridized scenarios leading to an actionable preferred scenario.

### Phase 1: Charting the Course - Completed

This phase involved reviewing existing data to create a [Site Inventory](#) and engaging the community in a variety of meaningful ways. The Site Inventory outlines the initial findings about the Airport land and establishes a framework for future tasks by examining policy documents, historical and cultural resources, and the site's environmental, cultural, and planning attributes. The engagement activities focused on understanding community needs and desires through a series of community events, pop-up activities, Virtual Education Sessions (VESs), and an online survey about what future uses should be considered for the project. Staff presented the project publicly at 12 meetings including the Airport, Planning, Sustainability, Recreation and Parks Commissions; the Urban Forest Taskforce; and Santa Monica Travel & Tourism (SMTT). Staff also communicated with neighborhood councils, staff liaisons, libraries, recreation partners, and community groups to build awareness about the project, the community event, pop-up events, and the survey to engage with as many folks as possible in the places and spaces they already inhabit. Several commissions (e.g., Arts, Airport, Sustainability, and Recreation and Parks) created Ad Hoc sub-committees to engage with Staff and work on specific tasks around the Airport Conversion project.

### Phase 1 Engagement highlights include:

- Kick-off Event at Clover Park 5/19/24: estimated attendance of more than 400 attendees.
- Pop-up Events: estimated attendance of more than 100 attendees, at each of the four events. These were held after the community kick-off to get community

members engaged and excited about the project and this opportunity for Santa Monica.

- 5/29/24: Downtown Farmer's Market
- 6/1/24: Virginia Ave. Park Farmer's Market
- 6/9/24: Main Street Farmer's Market
- 6/15/24: Juneteenth Celebration at Virginia Ave. Park
- Comment Cards: Over 300 written comment cards received in-person or through the website.
- Website Traffic: 6,100 visitors and over 400 people signed up for updates in Phase 1.
- Survey Response: Nearly 2,000 responses were recorded and almost 60% were from respondents that self-reported a zip code in Santa Monica.
- Virtual Education Sessions #1 & #2: over 2,000 views between both sessions.



*Photos from Phase 1 Community Engagements*

### Themes from the Phase 1 Engagement Activities

- Many attendees and participants were enthusiastic about the Airport closing and appreciated the process to determine the site's future.
- There was a desire for uses beyond those mentioned in Measure LC, including interest in housing, particularly affordable housing, as well as revenue-generating and commercial uses.

- Organized support for continuing to use the site as an airport, with participation from numerous pro-Airport community members.
- Many attendees and participants viewed the size of the site as a unique opportunity to focus on passive recreation and landscape uses, which are currently lacking in Santa Monica according to the [Los Angeles Countywide Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment](#).

#### Details for the Virtual Education Sessions (VESs)

The VESs provide another way for the community to learn about the project anytime and anywhere that they choose as these utilize an asynchronous delivery method via YouTube. Community members can share the content with friends and family, listen to them at faster or slower speeds and as many times as they like, as well as learn interesting and fun facts about the project.

- [VES #1](#) has over 1,700 views at the time of this report and is titled “Project Launch and Existing Conditions” with an introduction to the Sasaki team, project structure, timeline, and targeted outcomes. It also covers the steps for Airport closure, project timeline and deliverables, the history of the land, features of the land both on-site and adjacent, and how the preliminary existing conditions findings will inform the project going forward.
- [VES #2](#) has over 720 views at the time of this report and is titled “Understanding Scale & Airport Conversion 101” with an overview of the project goals and then a study putting the size of the site into context for viewers within Santa Monica and the region. It then focuses on Sasaki’s experience in converting Airports around the world giving a wide range of example outcomes including basic financial analysis for different types of park projects.

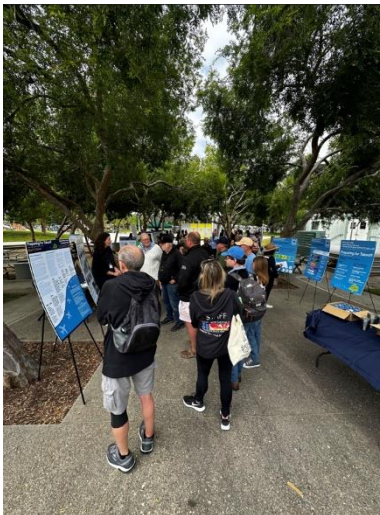
#### Details for the Kick-off Community Event

The idea for the community event was to encourage attendees to learn about the project, provide feedback to the project team, have fun together, and encourage others to engage in the project as well. All boards and activities were in English and Spanish, and two interpreters were present during the event.

- There were nine stations, and each had the opportunity to interact with at least one member of the project team in an activity to familiarize community members with the site and explore what Santa Monica needs to thrive now and in the next 100+ years.
  - #1: Welcome Station: (sign-in sheet, junior passport pick-up)
  - #2: Site Features & Context (project overview including Measure LC and mobility voting exercise)
  - #3: Site History & Culture (focus on park and aviation history)
  - #4 Planning Process (overview of what is available in Phase 1)
  - #5: Understanding Community Needs (some basic site analysis and the push-pin activity about the needs of Santa Monica)
  - #6: Community Priorities & Aspirations (Council Priority activity and the Storyboard activity)
  - #7: What's Possible Here (Scale Comparison activity)
  - #8: Connections (written story cards and voice recordings of community members sharing memories of the Airport)
  - #9: Kids Zone (coloring pages and refreshments)
- Many attendees expressed enthusiasm that the Airport was closing and appreciation for a public process to determine the future of the site.
- Many attendees saw the size of the site as a unique opportunity to focus on passive recreation and landscape uses, which were discussed as lacking in Santa Monica today. At Stations #5 and #6 there was broad support for passive or active recreation uses.
- There was broad support from attendees prioritizing walking and biking to the site as well as Council Priorities of Sustainable & Connected Community and Clean & Safe Santa Monica for the future of Santa Monica.
- There were attendees that expressed a desire/need for uses that would/could require a vote pursuant to Measure LC and were curious as to why such potential future uses/opportunities were not featured/asked about at this event. While most of these individuals were interested in housing (and specifically affordable

housing), many discussed the need for revenue-generating and/or commercial uses as well.

- The scale activity at Station #7 helped attendees contextualize the size of the Airport land in relation to other recreation spaces in Santa Monica and Los Angeles. Participants remarked on how large the space was and noted that this activity was a great vehicle to facilitate community collaboration on potential site uses, even when there were initial disagreements.
- The event attracted organized support for continuing to use the site as an Airport, including the participation of dozens of pro-Airport community members. This voice came through especially at Station #6.



*Photos from the Phase 1 Community Event on 5/19/2023*

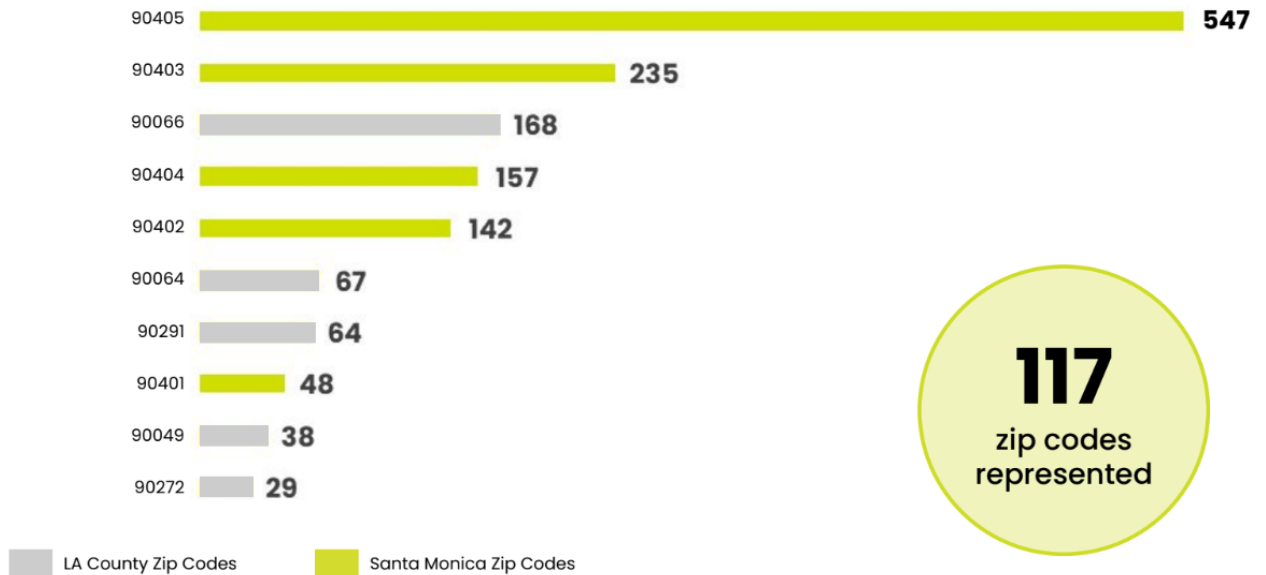
### Details for the Phase 1 Online Survey

The survey was created so that anyone that was not able to attend the in-person events were able to engage with the project on their own time and location as well as in their own language. The survey began with basic demographic information and then mimicked much of what was covered in the community event, albeit a self-guided experience, in 21 questions.

- 1,921 completed responses and 58.77% of respondents indicated that they were from Santa Monica zip codes.

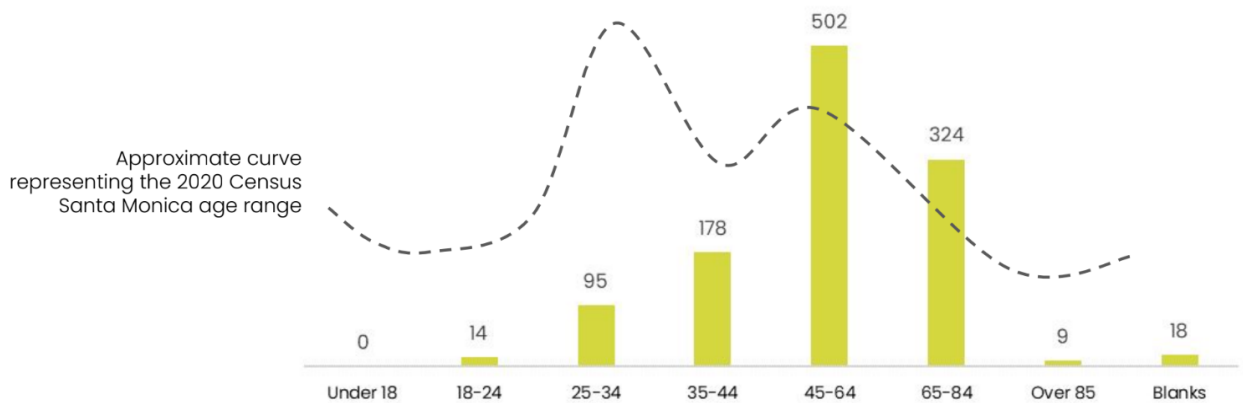
- Representation from all five of Santa Monica's zip codes, 28% of all respondents self-identified as 90405 and all of the 10 top zip codes were Santa Monica or west Los Angeles.

### Top Ten Zip Codes



- 68% of all respondents were over the age of 45 and only 2.7% were under the age of 24.

### Age of Santa Monica Survey Respondents



- Some of the favorite things to do in the park and recreation spaces were: Walk, Park, Play, Picnic, Beach, Soccer, Bike, etc.
- Items that Santa Monica needs more of today according to top votes include: nature parks/landscapes, pickleball courts, aquatics center, community gardens,



rectangular sports fields, entertainment facilities, common/flexible lawns, etc. and the results for the future needs were very similar.

- There were a significant number of respondents who wrote into several questions the need to keep the Airport and the need for affordable housing.
- Addressing Homelessness and Clean & Safe Santa Monica ranked highest here of the Council priorities.
- Top concerns about the Airport Conversion Project are: development concerns, traffic & congestion, and homelessness & safety.
- The benefit community members are most excited about are: increased recreation space and amenities, enhanced offerings for community needs and reduced air pollution.
- Data on ethnicity was not asked in this survey.

The project is setup so that each phase builds on the next and the work of Phase 1 becomes the basis for Phase 2. The community event, pop-ups, and the survey created a lot of great feedback from the community and heard 147 different uses to be considered and prioritized in Phase 2. The [community engagement summary](#) of all of the activities in Phase 1 gives more specifics than are discussed in this Staff Report.

### Phase 2: Discovering the Place and Setting the Stage - Complete

Staff and Sasaki were pleased with the quantity of community feedback in Phase 1, however there were areas for improvement. Specifically, youth involvement was not representative of the current population and Santa Monica zip codes outside of 90405 participated at significantly lower numbers. Recognizing the importance of youth involvement, Staff and the Sasaki team crafted Phase 2 to target youth engagement, get the word out even more broadly, and refine and prioritize the 94 uses (consolidated from the 147 uses when they were similar) into the draft Guiding Principles to be presented to City Council as the Phase 2 culmination.

Phase 2 involved two elements: 1) The discernment phase (2a) and the creation of draft guiding principles (2b). 2a was designed to facilitate the prioritization of 94 preferred

land uses requested by the community in Phase 1. Staff also took steps to prioritize youth participation and engaging with a diverse range of Santa Monicans. For Phase 2, Staff presented to community members at 24 meetings including to the Arts, Airport, Disabilities, Planning, Sustainability, and Recreation and Parks Commissions; the Urban Forest Taskforce; the Virginia Avenue Park Advisory Board; and continued to communicate with neighborhood councils, staff liaisons, libraries, recreation partners, and community groups. Further, Staff worked hard to increase community participation and project awareness with the youth of Santa Monica by reaching out and presenting to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Council and various Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) individual school communities, SaMo High, JAMS, Grant, Edison, and McKinley specifically. Staff also created a specifically designed voting game for younger community members to participate in five events to share in the vision of the project.



*Photos of the youth-focused voting activity.*

Phase 2 Engagement highlights include:

- Phase 2a survey: launched September 19, 2024, the city received almost 2,400 completed surveys, despite its length (20-25 minutes on average, asking very detailed questions) and another 3,800 completed it through Questions 8 - 10 (the top 15 and bottom 5 questions) for a total of 6,174 survey responses to these questions. It was open for a little over a month and closed October 20, 2024 and

almost 70% of all respondents indicated that they were from Santa Monica zip codes.

- Pop-up Events: these were held before the large community event to raise awareness about the survey which was different from how Phase 1 was organized.
  - 9/19/2024: Local's Night at the Pier
  - 9/21/2024: Pancakes in the Park at Ishihara Park
  - 9/29/2024: Americana in the Park at Gandara Park
  - 10/5/2024: Mini Fall Festival at Virginia Ave Park
- Community Conversations: 20 conversations were completed with over 400 participants from a wide variety of backgrounds and zip codes within Santa Monica including SaMo High and SMC students.
- Work with SMMUSD: Staff presented at the PTA Council and participated in five school events with a child-focused activity. Staff have begun forming relationships with JAMS and the High School and have a Project Based Learning (PBL) senior who is using the Airport Conversion project as her senior thesis to help engage the community's youth in meaningful ways.
- Youth-focused outreach: In addition to the direct connection with SMMUSD, Staff developed a youth-focused voting activity that was used for five events and resulted in over 1,800 use votes cast or approximately 124 participants.
  - 10/5/2024: Mini Fall Festival at Virginia Ave Park
  - 10/9/2024: Wednesday Farmer's Market in downtown Santa Monica
  - 10/16/2024: Wednesday Farmer's Market in downtown Santa Monica
  - 10/27/2024: Roosevelt Community Conversation at Marine Park
  - 10/29/2024: Teen Activity at the Main Library
- Website Traffic: 23,000+ unique visitors, 42,000 page views, and over 600 people signed up for updates
- Virtual Education Session #3: has over 1,700 views
- Community Event #2: was December 7, 2024, at Memorial Park Gym from 1 – 4 pm and had over 400 people sign-in, more than 500 comments on the draft

Guiding Principles and 201 comment cards received. 73 people completed Balance Builder and 88 took a photo of their Park Puzzle at the event as well.

- Online activities after the community event: Survey 2b was primarily about the draft Guiding Principles and a way to give community members a chance to participate if they were not able to make it in person. There were 1,618 responses to Survey 2b and just over 42% of respondents were from Santa Monica zip codes. The other online activity had 372 people complete the Balance Builder online, bringing the total responses to 445 including the in-person responses.

### Details for the Phase 2a Survey

Sasaki and Staff designed this survey to help the team prioritize and refine the 94 uses from Phase 1 and better understand the community's thinking so that the draft Guiding Principles would be reflective of the community feedback thus far at the Phase 2 Community Event and ultimately presented to City Council. This survey began with basic demographic information and then focused on understanding the priorities of the community for the project and refining the top 94 uses from the first phase. Each of the 94 uses were broken down into four categories to make it easier on respondents, those categories and number of uses within each were: 18 passive recreation, 29 active recreation, 31 community hubs, and 16 arts and culture uses. The survey had 33 questions in total, questions 8 – 10 asked participants to select their top 15 uses and their bottom 5 uses and then rank their top 15 so the team could understand which uses had the broadest support and which ones had the least so that the draft Guiding Principles could reflect the preferences shared, balanced with all engagement feedback. Questions 11 – 24 asked a series of Agree vs. Disagree questions so Staff and Sasaki could understand what types of funding strategies and options should be considered for the Airport conversion. The remaining questions asked about sustainability, beloved places at the Airport that should be integrated into the project, integration strategies for the site into neighborhoods, and how the history of the Airport should be celebrated.

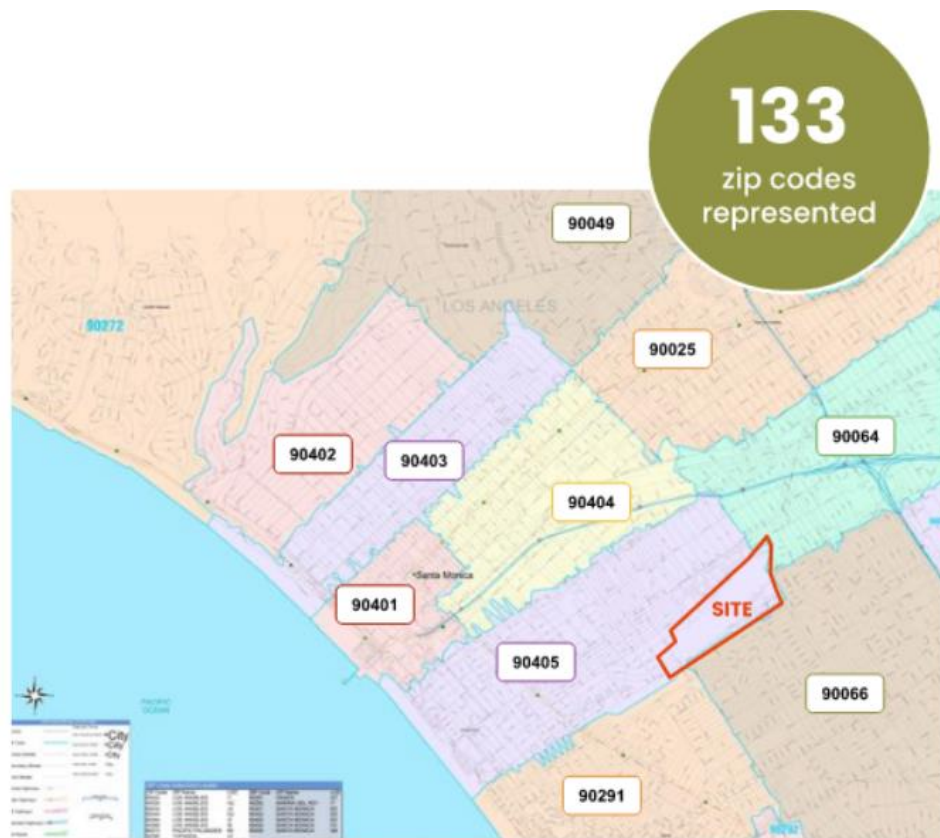
Survey respondents made clear that a balance of passive and active recreation uses were overwhelmingly supported with a strong preference for re-wilding, passive

landscapes, and uses that connect community members with the natural world. Multi-use paths, pollinator/butterfly gardens, urban forests, and grassy knolls were all top selections. For active recreation, adventure playground, multi-use fields (lacrosse, rugby, field hockey, soccer, football, etc.), aquatics center, and dedicated bike trials and walking/running loops were also popular. There were also a few uses, that even though noted that they could/would require a vote pursuant to Measure LC such as a café, small outdoor amphitheater, markets, and a family friendly beer garden, that also ranked as top selections. The full report about the [Phase 2a survey results](#) can be found on the website under “Resources”.

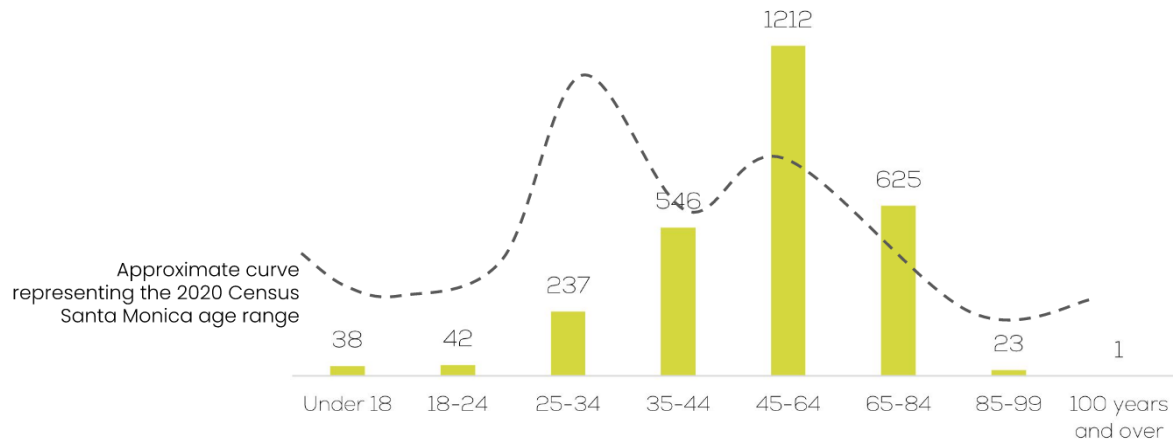
This survey saw an increase in respondents that self-reported that they lived in Santa Monica (60% in Phase 1 Survey, and 70% in this Survey) and questions about age range and ethnicity were asked.

### Top Ten Zip Codes

- 90405 - 1,569 responses
- 90403 - 443 responses
- 90404 - 409 responses
- 90066 - 351 responses
- 90402 - 224 responses
- 90291 - 148 responses
- 90064 - 125 responses
- 90401 - 85 responses
- 90025 - 71 responses
- 90049 - 62 responses

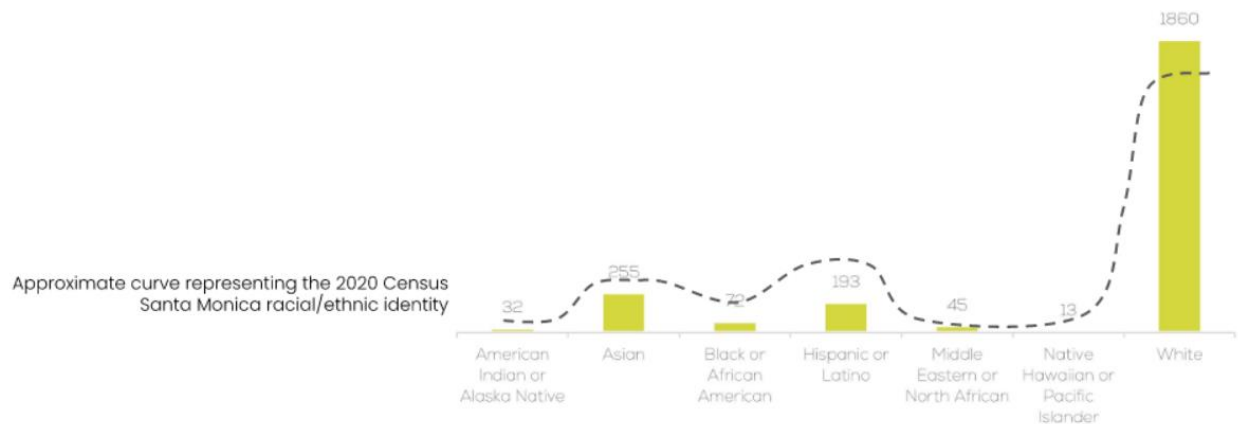


## Age of Santa Monica Survey Respondents



Survey 2A shows overrepresentation of White residents (75.30%) compared to Santa Monica's general population (66.90%). Hispanic or Latino residents are notably underrepresented (7.8%) compared to their 16.40% presence in Santa Monica. Asian residents show accurate representation in survey 2A (10.32%) relative to Santa Monica's 9.80%. Black or African American residents are underrepresented in Survey 2A (2.91%) compared to the city's 4.90%. The remaining demographic groups (American Indian/Alaska Native, Middle Eastern/North African, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) show relatively minor variations across all three populations.

## Racial/Ethnic Identity of Santa Monica Survey Respondents



Staff and Sasaki analyzed the results of Questions 8 - 10 that asked what the top 15 uses were and then to rank them. The top 50 uses were distributed across the four categories where 38% were passive uses, 25% were active recreation, 25% were community hubs, and 12% were arts and culture destinations. It must be noted that just because uses were or were not in the top 15 or 50 does not mean they should not be considered. For example, not many of the arts and culture responses ranked very high, but this does not mean that arts and culture uses will not be located at the Airport as there are existing arts and culture uses there. Analysis also showed that 83% of the highest-ranked uses would not require a ballot measure in accordance with Measure LC.

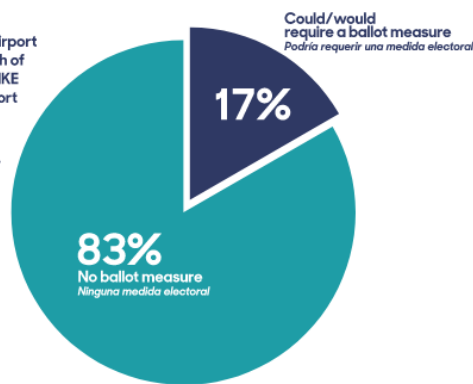
### Survey Question #9

Considering the potential future role of the airport site as a place for a variety of activities, which of these potential programs would you MOST LIKE TO SEE take shape on the Santa Monica Airport site? Select fifteen (15) uses.

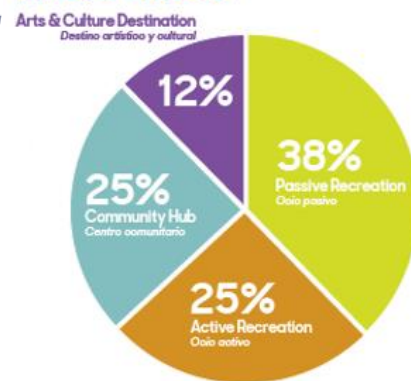
*Teniendo en cuenta el posible papel futuro del aeropuerto como lugar para diversas actividades, ¿cuál de los posibles programas LE GUSTARÍA ver en el aeropuerto de Santa Monica? Seleccione quince (15) usos.*

Based on the selections made for survey question #9, 83% of the top 15 uses selections of survey respondents do not require a ballot measure, while 17% of selections could/would require a ballot measure.

*Teniendo en cuenta el posible papel futuro del aeropuerto como lugar para diversas actividades, ¿cuál de los posibles programas LE GUSTARÍA ver en el aeropuerto de Santa Monica? Seleccione quince (15) usos.*



### Most Liked



Survey question #10 did not ask participants to rank the bottom five uses (or least favorite), so they are listed here with the first as least favorite: golf course, housing, homeless service center, commercial uses, and hospital/clinic. Of the bottom 25 uses 41% were active recreation, 39% were community hubs, 15% were passive recreation, and 5% were arts and culture destination.

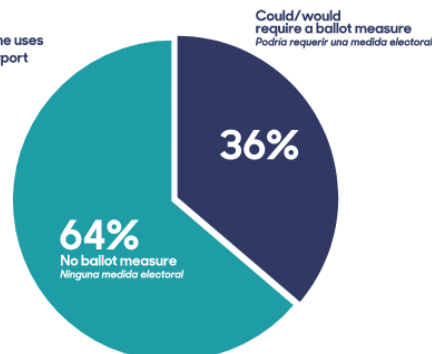
### Survey Question #10

From the same list of potential uses, which are the uses you'd LEAST LIKE TO SEE at the Santa Monica Airport site? Select five (5) uses.

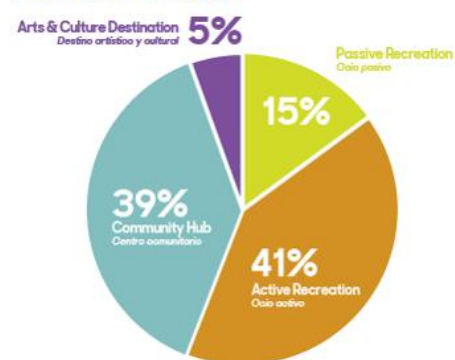
*De la misma lista de usos potenciales, ¿cuáles son los usos que MENOS LE GUSTARÍA VER en el aeropuerto de Santa Monica? Seleccione cinco (5) usos.*

Based on the selections made for survey question #10, 64% of the 5 uses survey respondents selected as they would LEAST LIKE TO SEE do not require a ballot measure, while 36% of selections could/would require a ballot measure.

*De acuerdo con las respuestas a la pregunta n° 10 de la encuesta, el 64% de los 5 usos que los encuestados seleccionaron como los QUE MENOS DESEARÍAN VER no requieren una medida electoral, mientras que el 36% de las selecciones podrían requerir/requerirían una medida electoral.*



### Least Liked



While the top 15 and bottom 5 use preferences were the main focus of the 2a survey, the other themes include:

- 69% of respondents think the youth input should be prioritized.
- 76% of respondents said the city should explore Public Private Partnerships.
- 73% of respondents believed the city should extend non-aviation leases beyond 2028 to ensure those revenue streams.
- 69% of respondents want to adaptively reuse the existing building and structures to start and grow local businesses.
- 68% of respondents think a balance of neighborhood amenities with destination activities is important for the Airport Conversion project.
- 80% of respondents want to enhance police and fire safety personnel at the site and within the immediate neighborhoods.
- 50% of respondents support preservation of the history, specifically the Compass Rose, along with public art displays.
- Connection to nature, water self-sufficiency, biodiversity/restoration ecology, 100% rainfall capture, and carbon neutrality were the top five responses about sustainability practices.
- Write-in comments focused on a variety of arguments about housing and keeping the Airport open.

#### Detail for the Community Conversations

Staff also administered a micro-grant application process, based on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Team's work for the Equity Plan earlier this year. It empowered community members to host a Community Conversation on their own time, in a location of their choosing, and with their own community in whatever language they felt most comfortable. The \$500 grant had to be used to make the event inclusive and accessible by providing, for example, food, childcare, language interpretation services, paying a notetaker, and/or any other relevant accommodation. This opportunity was advertised in the *Santa Monica Daily Press*, *La Opinión*, and on the project website, it was open to all Santa Monicans. The application required that applicants lead a group



of at least six participants through a list of questions supported by supplemental information provided by Staff and then send back the question responses and a few photos of the event.

25 applications were submitted, and 20 conversations were completed before October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024, with over 370 community members participating from a wide variety of zip codes and representation in almost all groups from 90404.

Key themes included:

- Park and space for kids was paramount, real open space that create an immersive experience in nature with large trees, even a farm.
- Spaces for cultures to celebrate their special events and share their traditions were mentioned in several responses.
- The need for large gathering spaces that could be free or very low cost as well as space for art and creativity were popular.
- Affordability was mentioned frequently as well, especially around housing, groceries, business opportunities, and space for seniors.
- It was noted that the closure of the Airport is very important and that this process should be a priority for the city. The park is important to Santa Monica's future and a diversity of funding strategies should be explored to realize the park.
- A few mentioned the need for parking to support park functions as well as a needed upgrade for the current roads.





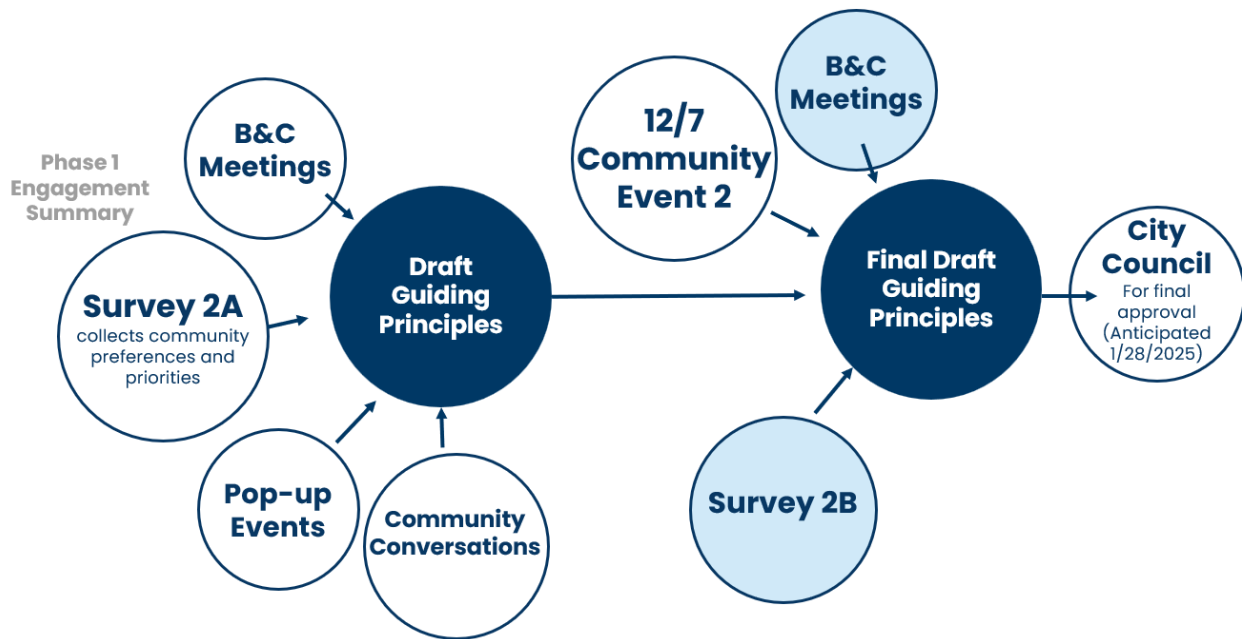
*Photos from some of the Community Conversations*

### Detail for Virtual Education Session #3

[VES #3](#) has over 1,000 views at the time of this report and is titled “Site Opportunities & Sustainability” and explores the Santa Monica Airport site in depth, focusing on constraints and opportunities for potential future conversion. It emphasizes achieving a sustainable conversion to new public-serving uses. Sustainability is examined through various lenses, including environmental, energy, and water resilience, economic self-sufficiency, and social equity. The document explains sustainability strategies and reviews select case studies to illustrate how similar strategies can be leveraged at the Santa Monica Airport site.

### **Discussion**

The work of Phase 1 and the first half of Phase 2 mark nine months of intense community outreach to understand the preferences of Santa Monicans. The efforts discussed above were distilled down into the draft Guiding Principles (dGP). Staff and Sasaki created the first round of dGPs and then went back to the community for feedback by holding a large community event, creating another survey to reach as many community members as possible where they are, meeting with boards, commissions, and taskforces to refine the dGP into what is being brought before City Council tonight for discussion and direction.



### Draft Guiding Principles

In the Santa Monica Airport Conversion Project context, *Guiding Principles* are value statements describing the aspirations and expectations for the conversion of Santa Monica’s future “Great Park” and supporting uses. The guiding principles are distilled from community engagement through online surveys, community member comments, in-person workshops, community conversations, and pop-up events, as well as from adopted City policy. These principles will be used to explore design proposals and serve as definitions of success. The design team will use these principles to vet and evaluate park features, amenities, programs, technical performance requirements, financial strategies, phasing, and implementation approaches. Each guiding principle is organized through a thesis, a description, and key goals. The thesis is the banner statement, providing the value declaration. The description expands on the thesis to explain the breadth and depth of the concept.

### Draft Guiding Principles Mission Statement

The Santa Monica Airport Conversion Project is a once-in-a-lifetime planning effort for Santa Monica to create a preferred scenario centered on a great park, consistent with Measure LC. The future scenario will enhance connections to the rest of the city, create

a quality public realm, and increase the quality of life for the residents, workers, and visitors of Santa Monica.

## 1. START WITH NATURE

Project design should consider the impact of any future intervention on the natural environment, and the airport land's ability to regenerate species and build community resiliency against climate change. This project should include curated planting areas and restoration or 'rewilding' spaces, celebrating pollinator gardens, showcasing local biodiversity, and demonstrating ecosystem services. This project should exemplify Santa Monica's climate goals, provide climate resilience, and be a model for sustainable stewardship. The creation and operations of the project should not deplete natural resources. The project should be designed to serve many generations and contribute to a regenerative urban ecology.

- The project should have spaces where visitors can be immersed in nature.
- The project should celebrate local and regional plant and animal communities. This includes areas dedicated to meaningful habitat creation through restoration planting, reforestation, rewilding, and planning for ecological succession. The project should support animal habitats, including gardens and species that feed and shelter insects, birds, amphibians, and mammals.
- The project should restore the land after 100 years of aviation operations and uphold the original intention to enhance park and public open spaces in Santa Monica.
- The project should support a wide variety of plants and plant communities by creating microclimates based on topographical and hydrological design.
- The project's green infrastructure should showcase ecosystem services, such as stormwater management, and sustainable municipal facilities, and be used to support biodiversity.
- The project's landscapes should only use reclaimed water for irrigation, and the designers will prioritize drought-resistant and adaptive, low-water use planting and indigenous planting strategies.

Examples of uses from the survey: Urban Forests, Nature Reserves, Arboretums, Wildlife Habitats, Pollinator Gardens, Wildflower Meadows, Stormwater Gardens, etc.

## 2. INSPIRE WONDER

The project should connect individuals in powerful and far-reaching ways uniting people of all backgrounds and ages in meaning, happiness, and heightened energy. The project should support planned and unexpected wonder and connection. Spaces for events, athletics, and celebrations should be designed to complement and work with ecological programs, either for community gatherings or limited to a single visitor experience. The project should support, enable, and showcase creativity and art. The project should provide a diversity of play experiences for all age groups, and highlight inclusive play that engages nature, natural elements, and healthy activity. The project should feel safe and welcoming to all. The project should enable accessible mobility, provide spaces for rest and sport, and include supportive mobility infrastructure, so all visitors can enjoy the park experience when they arrive.

- The project should be a place for visual art, supporting art in public space, and the creation of art.
- Play should integrate park design, with a diversity of inclusive play typologies including imagination, adventure, athletics, sports, interactions with nature, and exploration.
- Play should not be limited to playgrounds or certain age groups. Play could include curated nature experiences, interactive art and water features, exercise, signage and wayfinding, and even collaborative creation spaces.
- The design should be culturally and generationally inclusive, and prioritize safety, belonging, and comfort for the diversity of our community's population.
- Wayfinding, interpretation, and storytelling should be multimodal to create an intuitive experience for all visitors, regardless of age, culture, or ability.
- The project should include 'active' and 'quiet' spaces and programs, providing amenities and places that will feel inviting, exciting, and comfortable for the full spectrum of human physicality and neurodiversity.

- Showcasing the site's legacy of innovation and creativity of the physical environment, inspiring civic pride, and amplifying the safety and care of future generations are important.

Examples of uses from the survey: Murals, Sculpture Gardens/Walks, Art Galleries, Performance Centers, Local Artists' Studios, Adventure Playgrounds, Interactive Art-Themed Playgrounds, etc.

### 3. BALANCE ECONOMICS

This project should achieve economic equilibrium by balancing revenue with construction, operations, maintenance, and programming costs. This principle suggests that capital investments be strategic and vetted, balancing the programmatic needs of the project with the financial plans, agreements, and strategies needed to fund those investments. Financial responsibility for the project to be defined as the composite of revenue-generating activities, capital strategies, and funding allocations required to avoid an unfunded liability for the city government, shall be adhered to. The project infrastructure should anticipate a fossil-free future, and a warmer, less stable climate. The project economy should target circularity, with zero-waste goals for construction and operations plans, net-zero energy, and a high standard of water self-sufficiency.

The combined income from the site's land uses and amenities should provide suitable income for the operations, maintenance, and programming expenses needed to keep the project in good condition.

- The project capital costs should be linked to a reliable funding source(s).
- Project elements should balance more expensive amenities with lower-cost project uses. Higher revenue-generating uses should balance low or no revenue-generating uses.
- High-value investment programs should provide clear and defensible community benefits for the Santa Monica community.
- Project features should be brought online incrementally as funding allows. Innovative financing structures, such as a 'Friends of' or 'Creative Financing District,' or athletic league sponsorships, may be explored.

- Landscape and buildings within the Santa Monica Airport site should be net zero energy for future operations through on-site energy production, energy efficiency, and electrification of all systems.
- The project should mitigate local climate change impacts and provide a heat refuge for Santa Monica community members in the future to build resiliency for the environment, municipal operations, and regional economy.
- The project should minimize demolition waste by prioritizing reusing and recycling existing materials and structures and should have a waste management plan for future project operations. This plan may include on-site green waste processing, such as composting.
- Potable water uses should be limited to where necessary for drinking water or cooling stations. Any future water features should be water efficient and recirculating. Stormwater should be managed on-site, captured, infiltrated, detained, and treated through green infrastructure systems.

Examples of uses from the survey: Amphitheaters, Event Centers, Markets, Outdoor Movies, Cafe, Restaurants, Food Truck Space, Indoor Sports Venue, Family Friendly Beer Garden, etc.

#### 4. AMPLIFY VERSATILITY

The project should be vibrant in the 'every day' and the 'big day,' working for the Santa Monica community for large events and unprogrammed day-to-day activities with active and passive amenities. Flexibility in public spaces and programs should allow for different uses to cohabitate, and for the site to adapt to changing needs over time. As an intergenerational space, the project should anticipate fluctuations in community interest for certain uses and activities and be able to reorganize accordingly. This project should prioritize versatility, so visitors of many backgrounds, needs, exercise goals, and recreational desires can use individual spaces or programs. At the same time, the project programs should be immediately useful to visitors, with programs that maximize utilization and active recreation. Partnered with project programs should be operations and maintenance facilities - and these facilities will need to be developed in a bespoke manner matching the versatility and requirements needed to support a high

standard of care for the project and future recreation facilities. The project should contribute to physical, mental, and spiritual wellness, regardless of users' religion, ability, or age. Physical well-being should be enhanced and celebrated through group amenities, sports fields and courts, and individual fitness infrastructures. Mental and spiritual well-being should include spaces specifically dedicated to mindfulness and presence.

- The project should prioritize amenities that enable consistent and regular use.
- The project should balance specific action-oriented high-use programs with flexible and passive spaces.
- The project should support performing arts, such as providing spaces for music, dance, theatrical productions, and more.
- The project should welcome large groups for big events, small groups, and individuals for personal recreation and wellness, and will choreograph many simultaneous experiences and uses in harmony.
- The project should invite visitors from all cultural backgrounds to share a sense of community and collective ownership and include spaces to host cultural celebrations.
- The project should limit single-use programs to those meeting specific recreational needs or providing a clear revenue opportunity to support the park's operations. This should include both free programs and amenities and ticketed programs, event spaces, or recreational facilities.
- The project should support active recreation for groups such as flexible fields and courts. The project should include individual fitness infrastructure, such as outdoor equipment for strength/flexibility training.
- The project should support running, walking, and biking, providing many trail experiences that complement the city's existing trail and bicycle networks.
- The project should prioritize biking/walking/transit to the site.
- The project should include spaces for meditation, with dedicated spaces for contemplative rest, like forest bathing, or active mindfulness, like yoga decks and sensory gardens.



Examples of uses from the survey: Flexible Lawns & Plazas, Outdoor Fitness Areas, Active Recreation, Multi-use fields (lacrosse, rugby, field hockey, soccer, football, etc.), Sports Courts (Basketball, Tennis, Pickleball, etc.), Multi-use Paths, Aquatics Centers, Grassy enclaves, etc.

## 5. CELEBRATE PLACE

Santa Monica is an iconic city, with a unique history and culture, and the airport site has witnessed many eras of historic significance. The future project should embrace the layers of the site's history, and share the stories of the place and region, from pre-colonial to the history of aviation on the site. The planting and materiality of the project should be contextual to the current airport and wider community architectural and horticultural expressions. The project should value and celebrate the wider connections to the sea, the mountains, and the city as well as the innovation and inspiration histories of this place. The project should invite visitors from all cultural backgrounds to share a sense of community and collective ownership and provide spaces for cultural celebrations. Celebrating place is both about honoring the past and empowering our future.

- The project should have a unique sense of place - or genius loci - where visitors must know they are here, within Santa Monica, and nowhere else in the world.
- The project should acknowledge and celebrate the history of this place, both the pre-colonial regional history and the history of aviation on site.
- The project should adaptively reuse buildings of cultural interest and structural viability and celebrate the history of the uses of those buildings in parallel with supporting new programs.
- The project should recognize and enhance the important roles of the current museums, art galleries, maker spaces, theater, and play in the project and continue those uses in the future design.
- The planting design should include local native species and plant communities, and reference existing City planting typologies.
- The materials should prioritize on-site material reuse, and regional and local materials and products.

- The project should reinforce key viewsheds, strategic gateways with multi-modal connectivity, and activities that reflect and enhance the relationships to the sea, mountains, and urban community.
- The project should attempt to accommodate event spaces for small and large events, including anticipatory infrastructure, such as stages, media, power, and lighting.
- The approach to the project should celebrate the uniqueness of place, gateway experiences, and pedestrian and bicycle mobility, fitting the Santa Monica commitment and culture of prioritizing carbon-free mobility.

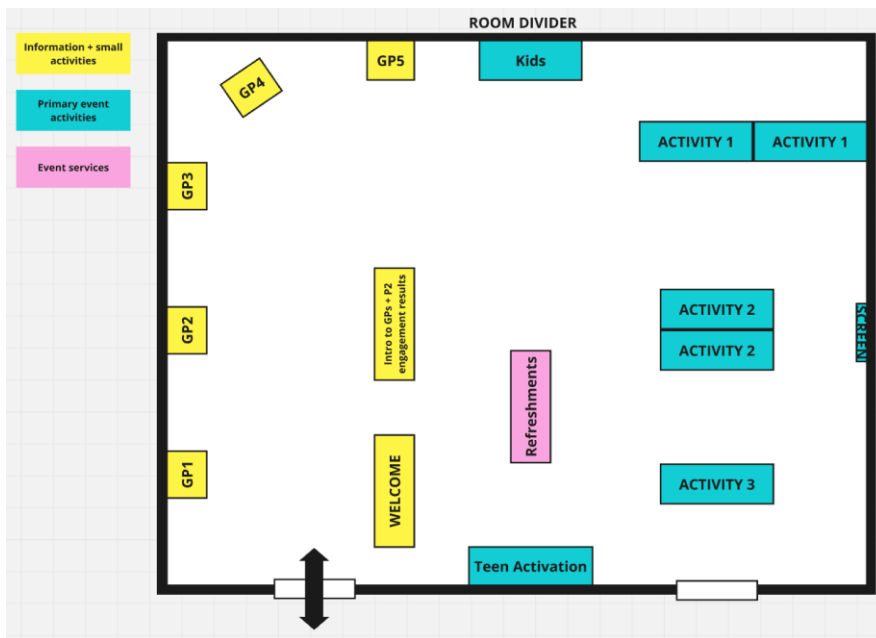
Examples of uses from the survey: Community / Cultural Centers, Senior Centers, Airport Historic Interpretive Walks, Community Gardens/Farms, Museums, Outdoor Classrooms, etc.

#### Vetting the dGPs at the in-person Phase 2 Community Event

The dGPs above are the results of robust engagement with the community. A first draft was created from the Phase 2a work in the Fall of 2024 and then vetted through a series of engagement activities throughout December 2024 and January 2025 to test if dGPs were representational of the community priorities for this project. The major in-person event for Phase 2 was held on December 7, 2024, from 1 – 4 pm at the Memorial Park Gym and had over 400 sign-ins, doubling the attendance of the Phase 1 Community Event. It is anticipated that more than 800 individuals actually attended as many chose not to sign-in during the three-hour event. The event was organized so participants could orient themselves, engage with each of the draft Guiding Principles, participate in three activities, and connect with other attendees. There was also a Teen Area that the SaMo High PBL Senior activated as part of her senior thesis, so teens had an area to hang out and discuss the dGPs in their own forum.

- Station 1: Welcome Desk for attendees to orient themselves and sign-in.
- Station 2: Introduction to the draft Guiding Principles and Phase 2a engagement results, largely from the survey and community conversations.
- Stations 3 - 7: each one discussed in detail one of the five draft Guiding Principles

- Activity 1: Balance Builder, a card game that encouraged participants to select uses and balance sustainability, economics, and accessibility scores. Participants selected cards with varying scores in each category and if their board did not reach zero or better they could use bonus cards to balance out their board.
- Activity 2: Park Puzzle, asked participants to create their project using the top 50 uses at an approximate scale to the site to see how their uses fit.
- Activity 3: Range Finder, included five boards each with different, opposing words on them and participants could place a sticky dot to show which word(s) described how they wanted the park to feel, and which financial options were acceptable.
- Teen Activation Area: provided a forum for teens to discuss the dGPs, hang out, and engage with the activities around the room. They also had their own boards to write their comments on the dGPs.



*Event layout from the 12/7/2024 Community Event*



*Photos from the 12/7/2024 Community Event*



*Photos from the 12/7/2024 Community Event*

The Community Event was well attended, with over 500 comments on the dGPs and showed that there was broad support for each of them. Many comments expressed clarification of what community members would like to see (such as types of recreation, arts, community hub activities), as well as thoughts about housing. There was an almost even split between pro-housing at the airport comments and no housing at the airport comments. Additional themes that emerged were:

- Strong support for green spaces, trees, and wildlife with a focus on sustainability and biodiversity, and blending nature with urban life.
- Strong support for field space, walking trails, and recreational spaces.
- Strong support on creating accessible space for all ages and abilities, including art and cultural activities and performance spaces.
- Preference for funding the project through existing leases and bonds, with strong support for exploring public-private partnerships. There were mixed results on the community's preference for large events a few times a year versus daily fees.

The full engagement reports for [Survey 2b](#) and [Community Event 2](#) can be found on the website under 'Resources'.

#### Vetting the dGPs with Phase 2b Survey, online card game, and Boards / Cxs

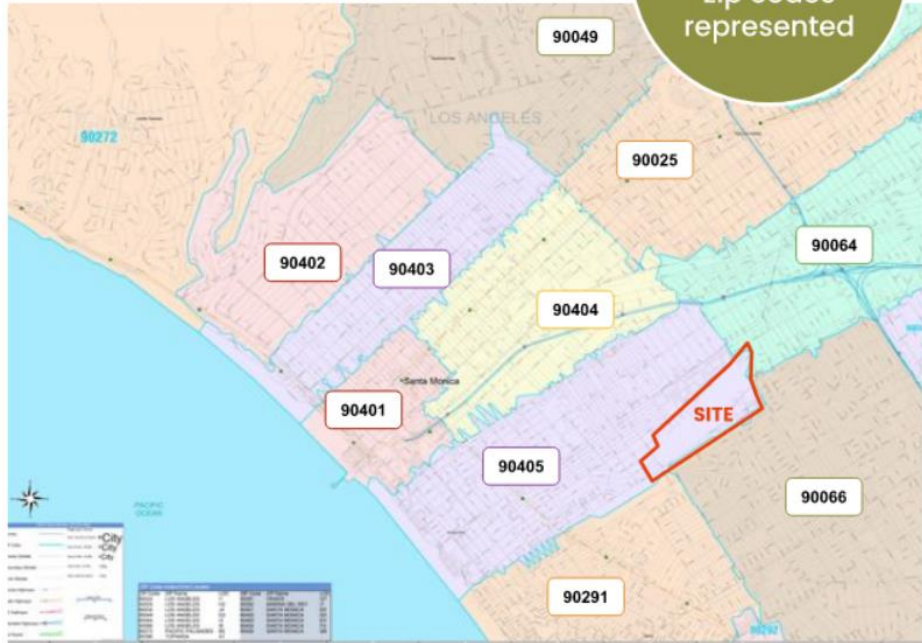
After the Community Event the team opened Survey 2b that focused on engaging community members that were not able to attend the in-person event. This survey asked specifically about the draft Guiding Principles and the Range Finder questions. There were over 1,600 responses across all five of Santa Monica's zip codes showing broad support for the draft Guiding Principles as written. There was an increase again in the percentage of respondents that reported that they were from Santa Monica (Phase 2a Survey had 70%, Phase 2b Survey had 76%) and the questions about age range and ethnicity were asked.

**47**  
zip codes  
represented

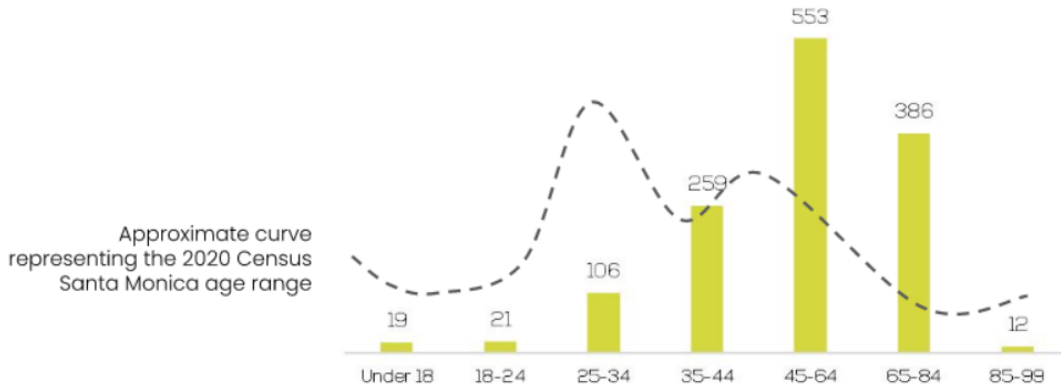
**Top Ten Zip Codes**

(Santa Monica zip codes in red)

- 90405 - 351 responses
- 90403 - 147 responses
- 90404 - 97 responses
- 90066 - 75 responses
- 90402 - 55 responses
- 90291 - 32 responses
- 90064 - 24 responses
- 90401 - 24 responses
- 90049 - 12 responses
- 90025 - 7 responses

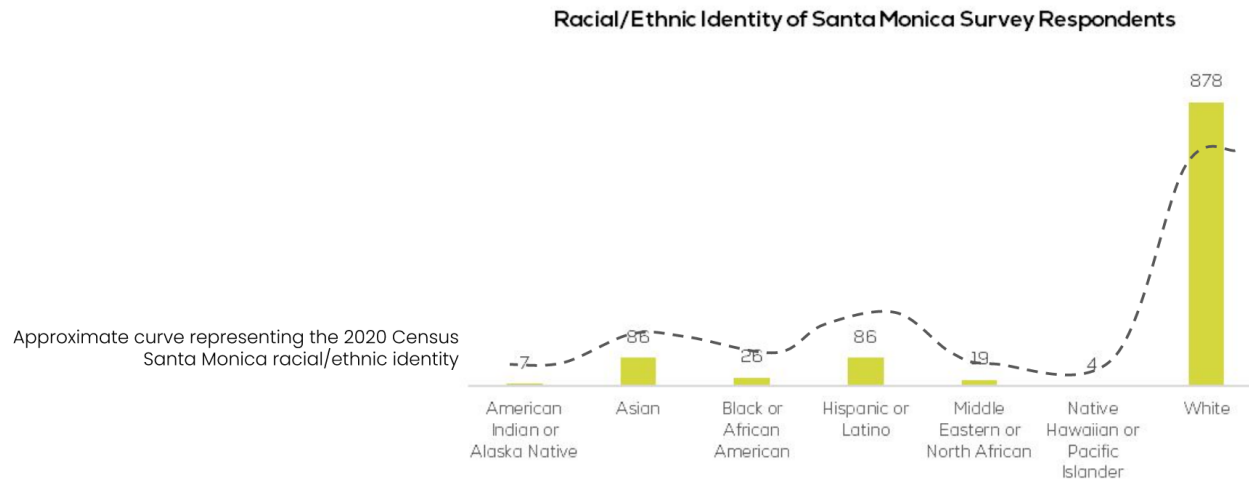


**Age of Santa Monica Survey Respondents**



The survey sample shows notably higher representation of White residents (79.39%) compared to Santa Monica's general population (66.90%). Conversely, Hispanic or Latino residents appear significantly underrepresented in the survey at 7.78% compared to their 16.40% presence in Santa Monica. Asian residents are also somewhat underrepresented (7.78% vs 9.80%), as are Black or African American residents (2.35%

vs 4.90%). Other groups including American Indian/Alaska Native, Middle Eastern/North African, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander show relatively small variations between the survey and overall population figures.



Every goal in each dGP had more than 50% support as written as well. Specific feedback on each dGP includes:

- dGP1: Start with Nature had almost 80% support overall, with immersive nature being the most supported goal.
- dGP2: Inspire Wonder had more than 75% support, with play typologies including imagination, adventure, athletics, sports, nature and exploration was the most supported goal.
- dGP3: Balance Economics had more than 70% support, with appropriate potable water usage by way of green infrastructure being the most supported goal
- dGP4: Amplify Versatility had almost 75% support, prioritizing consistent and regular use activities including running, walking, biking trails.
- dGP5: Celebrate Place had the least support at 57%, but still, more than half of the community supported this dGP, with the most supported goal being that the planting design should include local, native species.

While there was broad support for the dGPs there were many comments about housing and if it should be incorporated into the project. There were also concerns about over-development, safety, homelessness and revenue generating potential.

The Range Finder portion of the survey asked about look and feel of the project, and respondents wanted spaces that are a mix of the words presented, with a small preference for muted, calm, exploratory spaces. Most respondents want the project to explore public-private partnerships and use city funds over private ownership.

The Balance Builder card game was also made available virtually so people could provide their feedback on that activity from the Community Event as well. Between the boards completed during the event (73) and the online boards (372), a total of 445 boards were completed, with roughly half of them reaching the goal of zero or better. Top uses from all responses focus primarily on active and passive recreation uses as well as some uses that might require a ballot measure pursuant to Measure LC. The top bonus cards included substantial tree coverage, renewable power generation, maintain on-site buildings and revenue, corporate sponsorship and stormwater detention.

Staff and Sasaki also attended the following Boards, Commissions, and Taskforces to gather additional feedback from the public and commissioners specifically. The meetings attended were:

- December 9, 2024 – Airport Commission
- December 11, 2024 – Urban Forest Taskforce
- December 16, 2024 – Sustainability, Environmental Justice and the Environment Commission
- December 18, 2024 – Planning Commission
- December 19, 2024 – Recreation and Parks Commission

It is estimated that the draft Guiding Principles have been reviewed by more than 1,400 individuals over the course of the activities described above, as well as 1,100 page views online, and are now being presented to City Council for consideration. The outcome of this Study Session will be the basis that staff and Sasaki use to generate the three scenarios for public reaction in Phase 3a. These scenarios will evoke different emotions and sensibilities on purpose so that our community and City Council can then



provide guidance on which parts or pieces feel most appropriate and what should continue to the preferred scenario in Phase 3b.

**The question to City Council is: Do you have any feedback on the draft Guiding Principles before finalization AND should staff begin exploring the feasibility of three alternative scenario concepts for Phase 3, based on the draft Guiding Principles?**

#### Legal and Regulatory Frameworks to Consider

The City Attorney's Office has produced a memorandum identifying the legal framework that needs to be navigated as the project progresses. See Attachment E for additional information, a summary is provided below.

#### Measure LC

Measure LC was passed in 2014 by 60% of voters in Santa Monica and is a Charter amendment stating *"If all or part of the Airport land is permanently closed to aviation use, no new development of that land shall be allowed until the voters have approved limits on the uses and development that may occur on the land. However, this section shall not prohibit the City Council from approving the following on Airport land that has been permanently closed to aviation use: the development of parks, public open spaces, and public recreational facilities; and the maintenance and replacement of existing cultural, arts and education uses"*.

The final language for Measure LC was approved by the City Council on July 22, 2014.

#### Surplus Lands Act

The Surplus Land Act (Gov. Code, §§54220-54234) (SLA) aims to make local public land that is no longer needed for government purposes and entails a disposition of property (either long-term lease or sale) available for building affordable housing or open space. The SLA does this by requiring local agencies to provide notices about the availability of surplus property to the following entities:

- The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

- Any local public entity with jurisdiction over open space where the surplus local land is located.
- Developers who have notified HCD of their interest in developing affordable housing on surplus local public land.

Recent amendments to the SLA clarify that “disposition” of surplus property includes leases for a term longer than 15 years, inclusive of any extension or renewal options included in the terms of the initial lease, entered into on or after January 1, 2024.

If the local agency receives notice of interest from an entity desiring to lease or purchase surplus land on terms that comply with the SLA, the local agency and entity are required to enter into good faith negotiations to determine a mutually satisfactory sales price or lease terms. If the local agency and entity cannot agree after a 90-day minimum good faith negotiation period, the local agency can dispose of the surplus land without further requirements; however, the documentation of good faith negotiations must be submitted to HCD for HCD’s confirmation that the local agency has complied with the SLA.

Importantly, under the SLA, residential use is deemed an acceptable use for the surplus land for purposes of good faith negotiations, and the agency is prohibited from disallowing residential use of the site as a condition of the disposition of surplus land. As a practical matter, this means that the City may not be able to limit residential use of the Airport land post-closure if it desires to sell or lease the land to a third party, regardless of the limitations imposed by Measure LC. If the City wanted to proceed with third party disposition of property post-Airport closure, it would be advisable for the City to consider whether housing should be considered as part of “the Project” for purposes of CEQA analysis as well as future voter approval.

#### 7<sup>th</sup> Cycle Housing Element & Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA)

The State’s Housing Element laws require that the Housing Element include an implementation program that demonstrates how the city plans to accommodate the RHNA allocation after the 7<sup>th</sup> Housing Element is certified by HCD, anticipated deadline

is October 15, 2029. State Housing Element Laws require the City to upzone as necessary to ensure that there are sufficient suitable sites to accommodate the City's next RHNA allocation or face decertification of whatever housing element is adopted, even if the City obtains certification. Failure to upzone could subject the City to all legal remedies under State Housing Laws, including monetary penalties, third-party lawsuits, and the Builder's Remedy, citywide. Therefore, in addition to SLA conflicts, the city may need to consider whether any level of anticipatory new housing for the 7<sup>th</sup> Cycle is appropriate to be studied as part of the CEQA analysis for the post-closure uses at the Airport. Any restrictions under Measure LC that prevent housing will have no limiting impact if the city cannot sufficiently upzone areas citywide to accommodate the RHNA allocation.

**The question to City Council is: Should Staff explore the feasibility of the spectrum of community preferred land uses including one scenario that is consistent with Measure LC without a vote?**

#### Project Financial Discussion

One of the Council-adopted goals for the Airport Conversion Project is to be economically self-sustaining. This goal is particularly important for several reasons including:

1. The city's General Fund remains in a precarious financial situation with unprecedented liabilities, a backlog of infrastructure maintenance and unfunded capital projects, and an extraordinarily competitive labor market combined with significantly reduced general fund reserve levels. The city has paid out over \$230 million in settlements related to a former employee and is now facing more claims in the matter. Likewise, the California Voter Rights Act or CVRA case is back in the trial courts for additional judicial review. Further putting strain on the city's finances is the city's contract with the County of Los Angeles for lifeguard services, which will be expiring in 2025; the county is seeking an additional \$3 million a year to continue providing services to Santa Monica. Lastly, the city will enter labor negotiations with all 11 bargaining units next spring.

In addition to these liabilities, city programs and services in several areas remain below what they were prior to the COVID-driven restructuring of city services made in 2020. Given this financial situation, the city must be strategic in its investments, while seeking to restore city services, address deferred maintenance, identify funding for \$450 million in unfunded capital projects and rebuild city reserves which today are at historically low levels, impacting the city's credit ratings.

2. Parks are expensive to build, operate, and maintain and do not typically generate revenue unless complimented with uses that specifically generate income. At the scale of the Airport site, investments in converting the land into parkland could have enormous costs. This will be studied in far greater detail in Phase 3.

Knowing this, throughout the community engagement process in Phase 1 and 2, the project team brought forth different ideas on project financing strategies in VES 1 & 2 and asked about several of them specifically in the Phase 2a online survey, the community event, online through Balance Builder, and the Phase 2b online survey.

Themes include support for:

- Public private partnerships, but not for private ownership.
- Innovative funding sources for construction costs to build more of the park and associated uses faster.
- Exploring local/regional/federal partnerships and funding sources to create and operate the project.
- Extending non-aviation leases beyond 2028 to lock in known revenue, but not a tax increase.
- Corporate sponsorship, but not an independent operator.
- Maintaining and enhancing on-site buildings but not selling the 17 acres in Los Angeles to the city of Los Angeles.
- Creating a "Friends of" entity as a financial and organizing concept.
- There was mixed support for creating an in-lieu fee to support the project and/or allowing a few large events to pay for on-going free programming.

- Using innovative green infrastructure (renewable power generation, stormwater detention, etc.) as a funding mechanism

With this understanding as we move into Phase 3, the project financial consultant, HR&A, will be basing their cost estimating work on the community preferred uses, drawn by Sasaki with Staff input, with financing strategies to balance the project.

**The question to City Council is: Should staff explore the feasibility of traditional and innovative financing structures and explore alternative organizational structures and/or partnerships to construct, operate, maintain, program, and manage the site?**

### **Next Steps**

#### **Phase 3: Defining the Future of Place - Scenario Testing and Plans**

Once City Council provides direction on the draft Guiding Principles, the Airport Conversion Project team will begin Phase 3 where Sasaki will create and test the feasibility of three distinct high-level design concepts using the Guiding Principles, Project Goals, and community engagement feedback to show a range of possibilities for the Airport land. These scenarios will be the focus of the community engagement of Phase 3a and will come back to City Council before moving into Phase 3b, the preferred scenario. This process aims to highlight community ideas and ensure the successful implementation of the airport conversion project and will focus on:

1. **Defining Experiential Typologies:** Representing diverse potential experiences within the re-envisioned airport land, including cultural, recreational, ecological, infrastructural, or social elements.
2. **Creating Alternative Land-Use Types:** Generating multiple models of open-space land-use scenarios, exploring different park typologies, features, and layouts that align with the Guiding Principles.
3. **Community Engagement:** Engaging the community to refine broad, high-level ideas into three feasible alternatives (3a), which are then narrowed down to a single recommended scenario plan (3b) through feedback.
4. **Feasibility:** Ensuring the scenarios align with environmental, sustainable, financial, and programmatic feasibility.

Key tasks in this phase include:

- Preliminary Opportunities & Kit of Parts
- Trade-off Analysis
- Planning Concept Alternative & Comparison Matrix
- Scenario Feasibility & Economic Impacts Assessment
- Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) Opinion of Probable Cost
- Developing a Finalized Concept Scenario Plan Sketch
- Community Engagement

### **Environmental Review**

This study session and its recommendations for guiding principles do not meet the definition of a “project” subject to CEQA as it will not “cause either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment”. Additionally, per Section 15378(b) of the CEQA Guidelines, a “project” does not include administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment. Additionally, per Section 15262 of the CEQA Guidelines, the recommendations are exempt from CEQA, because City Council’s actions only involve planning studies for the airport and identification of potential land use scenarios for analysis under CEQA, and do not involve the approval of any scenarios, nor limit the scope of potential alternatives/mitigation measures. In addition, the recommendations provided herein are categorically exempt under Section 15306 of the CEQA Guidelines, because the project involves basic data collection, research, consultation, exploration of financing possibilities, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to environmental resources.

Furthermore, after further analysis, it was determined that Resolution No. 11026 constitutes a decision by the City Council to close the airport as of midnight on December 31, 2028. Therefore, no environmental review is required at this time for closure. However, environmental review is required for any future use of the site as determined through the Airport Conversion Project.

### **Past Council Actions**

Below are the previous dates that the Airport Conversion Project has been before City Council.

Meeting Date	Description
02/28/2017	Staff Report from the meeting where Council adopted Resolution No. 11026 to close the Airport, effective midnight on December 31, 2028.
01/24/2023 (Attachment A)	Staff Report from the meeting where Council directed staff to begin working on the Future of the Santa Monica Airport
10/10/2023 (Attachment B)	Meeting Minutes showing Council direction to reject the Lottery Selected Panel
12/19/2023 (Attachment C)	Staff Report showing City Council awarding the SP2641 RFP to Sasaki by Sasaki to envision three scenarios without reducing the scope of the uses that the scenarios study.

### Financial Impacts and Budget Actions

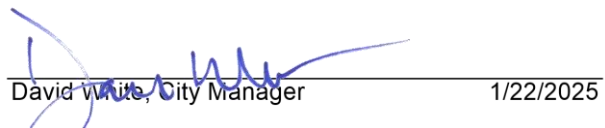
There is no immediate financial impact or budget action necessary as a result of recommended actions. Staff will return to Council if specific budget actions are required in the future. The project budget remains at \$2,070,000 as per the Sasaki agreement in account C1008280.689000. For example, when the project is ready to commence the CEQA/EIR process, staff will request additional appropriation.

**Prepared By:** Amber Richane, Principal Design and Planning Manager

**Approved**

**Forwarded to Council**

  
Rick Valte, Public Works Director 1/17/2025

  
David White, City Manager 1/22/2025

### Attachments:

- A. January 24, 2023 Staff Report to City Council - Project Authorization (Web Link)
- B. December 10, 2023 Staff Report to City Council - Lottery Selected Panel (Web Link)
- C. December 19, 2023 Staff Report to City Council - Sasaki Authorization (Web Link)

- D. February 28, 2017 -Staff Report to City Council - Resolution 11026
- E. Memo re Airport Closure and Measure LC