FIRST 5 LA

SUBJECT: Tot Parks and Trails

RECOMMENDATION: Approval of a one-time $50 million countywide park and trail enhancement campaign.

BACKGROUND: The Tot Parks and Trails program is designed to provide grant funding to upgrade or enhance existing playground facilities as well as upgrade or create stroller trails within and connecting to community parks. Grants would be provided to non-profits that would be used to upgrade or “re-imagine” existing play facilities. These new facilities would be state-of-the-art, ADA compliant and certified developmentally appropriate structures designed to encourage greater use of the park and provide opportunities for physical activities for children 0-5.

The grantee would identify a park deficient community and work with a local public agency to provide access to a portion of the park for the new play structure and/or stroller trail. The non-profit would provide the expertise to design and implement the improvements, working with the community to ensure that the new facility meets their needs.

The grant would be focused on providing upgrades to park deficient communities (including disadvantaged communities using per capita income) with a dedicated percentage within First 5 LA place-based sites. The sites would be distributed across the County at existing parks or vacant lots that have already been acquired with potential exceptions for place-based sites where some land acquisition may be necessary. Parks and trails developed pursuant to this grant would include First 5 LA signage and logo. All parks would be required to have ADA compliant restroom facilities.

This proposal would primarily support the First 5 LA Priority Measures of Children Maintain a Healthy Weight and Children are Ready for Kindergarten. Studies by both the California Endowment (“Preventing Obesity in California: A Call for Policy and Community-Based Approaches”)1 and the Trust for Public Land (“The Health Benefits of Parks”)2 establish a relationship between childhood obesity and a lack of physical activity to “a lack of easily accessible places for physical activities such as safe parks. . . .” Studies have also shown a psychological benefit of being outdoors and providing a safe and developmentally appropriate activity for children.3

DISCUSSION:

Feasibility: The program would be implemented through a series of grants pursuant to the First 5 LA RFP process. The grantees would likely be non-profit agencies who would partner with a local public agency to provide park space.

Sustainability: The program would provide short-term funding to non-profits to develop projects that have a long-term benefit. The non-profit would need to ensure both that the project is

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designed and implemented within the guidelines, but also that the project would be maintained either by the non-profit or by the local agency where the park is located.

**Countywide Impact:** This program would provide one-time funding for park facility upgrades throughout the County (using a mechanism to be determined), with a percentage of monies reserved for First 5 LA Best Start communities. The grants would require that the facility be developed within park deficient communities.

**Dollar amount to be expended by June 30, 2011:** The project is designed to provide grants in total of $50 million within the current fiscal year. Actual amount to be expended would depend on the actual capacity of the non-profit/local government community to implement and submit feasible projects. Projects would be completed within a reasonable timeframe established by the First 5 LA RFP process, but with a focus on providing immediate funding for projects.

**Effectiveness of the approach related to goals identified:** Numerous studies, including the cited report by the California Endowment, recommend addressing childhood obesity by increasing access to and improving the conditions of “facilities, playgrounds and recreation areas” and “developing policies and programs that provide safe parks and outdoor activities.” This project provides long-term access to safe park facilities. Moreover, the Trust for Public Lands study found “a correlation among poverty, minority status, obesity, ill health and neighborhood factors that discourage exercise, including the absence of parks and recreation facilities.” This program is designed to address these needs by providing funding to park deficient communities throughout the County.

**Risk/Benefit to the Commission as it relates to First 5 LA's mission, goals and strategic plan:** Risks include a potential lack of capacity of non-profits and public agencies to implement the proposed projects within the targeted timeframe. There is also a risk that the local communities will not have the resources to provide maintenance over the life of the improved park/facility. Benefits include a long-term, increased physical activity for the Target Population over multiple generations, thereby reducing childhood obesity, and provide an opportunity for a gathering spot for children and their families, increasing a sense of community.

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**For Office Use**

Board Action Taken:

- [ ] Yes  
- [ ] No  
- [ ] Further Discussion

Referred to Committee/Work Group: ____________________________