WILLOWICK: OPPORTUNITY TO USE PUBLIC LAND FOR PUBLIC GOOD

A report by the Rise Up Willowick Coalition around resident needs for the future of the 102 acre Willowick public site and recommendations for the cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove
ABOUT RISE UP WILLOWICK

The Rise Up Willowick Coalition is a coalition of residents and organizations formed in April 2019 to create a collective vision and strategy to assure that the Willowick site becomes a community asset that helps address the needs of current residents. The Coalition recognizes that parks, areas for recreation and open spaces are crucial to the health of the community and seeks to prioritize the well-being of families and children in the area. The Coalition exists to demand a true community vision and use of Willowick that benefits the local economy and local people, including deeply affordable housing (defined as housing accessible to extremely low and very low income families), open space, and community centers and spaces.

Rise Up Willowick is made up of local residents, and the following organizations: OCCORD, The Kennedy Commission and Chispa.

Founded as a community-labor alliance in 2005, Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development (OCCORD) combines community organizing, civic participation, strategic research, and advocacy to engage residents, workers, and stakeholders in local government decisions that impact economic opportunity, community health, and overall quality of life.

The Kennedy Commission, formed in 2001 and based in Orange County, is a community-based non-profit that works with residents and community organizations to increase the production of homes affordable to lower income households in Orange County.

Chispa, formed in 2017 and based in Orange County, strives to be a brave organizing political home for young Latinx identifying peoples. Chispa seeks to engage with excluded peoples to uproot systems of oppression and cultivate systems grounded in community accountability, solidarity, and self-determination for communities to thrive.

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Drone photos courtesy of Ralph D'amato at OC Drone Company
The Rise Up Willowick Coalition is a coalition of residents and organizations that are concerned about the planned development of 102 acres of publicly owned open space in Santa Ana - that is currently the Willowick Golf Course. The cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove are working together to attempt to turn one of the last remaining open spaces in central OC into a massive development while ignoring residents needs for parks, affordable housing, and community centered spaces. Our coalition formed in April 2019 to create a collective vision and strategy to assure that Willowick becomes a community asset that helps address the needs of our current residents. As a coalition, we value the wellbeing of our families and children, and know that the parks, areas for recreation and open spaces are crucial to the health of our community. Finally, we know that our community often struggles to make ends meet. We need to assure that development benefits the local economy and local people, including deeply affordable housing and support for local businesses.

I want to advocate for development projects that benefit underserved communities. In the case of Willowick, the development there should serve the needs of its surrounding residents and businesses."

"As a 34 year resident of the neighborhood where Willowick is located and a member of Rise Up Willowick, I hope the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana take the input of my neighbors and my community into their consideration for the vision and future development of Willowick with full transparency.

It is my goal and dream to have a safe space where my children can reap the benefits of investments in our youth and have the same opportunities to create lifelong memories just like my parents did with me."

Rise up Willowick Member Jennifer Velazquez

Rise up Willowick Member Laura Perez
With around half a million residents collectively, the Cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove are throwing away one of the last remaining large-scale opportunities to meet their residents’ needs.

The Willowick Golf Course, an approximately 102-acre site, is one of the last remaining large-scale, open space, public lands in Orange County and, instead of prioritizing open space, affordable housing, and other community benefits, the Cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove are looking to dispose of Willowick for a massive development project.

Willowick, located in the City of Santa Ana and legally owned by the City of Garden Grove, is in close proximity to predominantly low-income, working class communities of color. Both cities are located in the middle of Orange County and are mostly built-out cities where large open space land is scarce, making opportunities for large-scale projects for community benefit rare. Additionally, both Cities have majority people of color and lower-income residents, compared to the rest of the county.

The Cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove need to ensure that Willowick becomes a community asset that helps address the needs of their current residents. In order for residents in these cities to truly thrive, the Cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove need to prioritize creating additional affordable housing units and open space.

With the Surplus Land Act, California has established that the development of open space and affordable housing, along with other benefits, need to be prioritized on public surplus lands. Not only does the City have a moral obligation to ensure the Willowick site use benefits the community, but there is a legal obligation to do so. Willowick is public land and it should be used to serve and meet the needs of the public.
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When public land and public funding are involved, any proposed development should benefit the public.

That is not the direction that the Cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana seem to be taking. As early as 2011, Santa Ana Mayor Pulido had meetings behind closed doors promising the Chivas USA soccer team that the Willowick site would be transformed into a stadium. Though a contract with the Chivas dissolved, a recent consulting process between Garden Grove and Santa Ana that took place in late 2018, resulted in a visioning process that provided three potential projects -- a tech station, a stadium, and a mixed use development project with commercial and luxury market-rate housing, none of which truly reflect the neighboring community's vision and needs.

Many urban areas throughout the United States are experiencing rapid growth, and as a result, gentrification and displacement of their long-time, primarily low-income and people of color residents. As Santa Ana and Garden Grove continue to experience growth and development, it is important for elected officials, planners and other decision-makers to prioritize retaining public good on their public lands.
**History**

**The Willowick site is an approximately 102-acre greenfield owned by the City of Garden Grove and located in the City of Santa Ana.**

Originally owned by a private landowner, George K. Thompson from 1929 - 1964, the City of Garden Grove purchased the site in 1964 for around 3 million dollars. The Willowick site is currently a golf course, and it has been a golf course since 1929. The City of Santa Ana was first offered to purchase the site at 1.5 million dollars, but it declined and the City of Garden Grove purchased it at a higher price of 3 million dollars\(^4\). The site is currently zoned as Open Space.

Since at least 1973, the City of Garden Grove has made efforts to incorporate Willowick into its city boundaries. In 1973, the Cities were in negotiations to potentially incorporate Willowick into Garden Grove. This would have required Santa Ana to de-annex the site through a city council vote and then Garden Grove City Council would vote to annex the site. This attempt at annexation though put an easement, or a condition on the future use of the land, which required that the site remained as open space for the following 50 years. However, Santa Ana ultimately rejected the proposal and the Willowick site remained in Santa Ana’s city boundaries.

Garden Grove’s 2008 Land Use Element report also provides guidance to its city council to consider negotiations with the City of Santa Ana to annex an area of Garden Grove in exchange for the Willowick site. The Land Use Element is part of a city’s General Plan, which is a long-term document that provides direction through goals, policies and programs for a city’s long-term urban development and planning. The Land Use Element specifically establishes goals, policies and programs for how a city will develop and redevelop its land.

**Policy LU-14.6** of the Garden Grove Land Use Element reads:

> Consider negotiations with the City of Santa Ana to annex that portion of Garden Grove lying east of Ward Street and south of Hazard Avenue in exchange for Garden Grove's annexation of that portion of Santa Ana that lies south of Westminster Avenue, east of Harbor Boulevard, including the site of the Willowick Municipal Golf Course.

The goal of **Policy LU-14.6** is as follows:

The City seeks rationalized corporate boundaries and may choose to annex or de-annex areas of the City that have a closer relationship either with the City of Garden Grove or adjacent cities.
Current and Historical Use

The Willowick site is zoned as Open Space Land (O), which is intended to provide permanent open spaces in the City of Santa Ana. Zoning is used to regulate land use, which means the structures that can be built, and if an existing structure can be repurposed or replaced with a different use.

Open space land allows:

- Open-air recreational and entertainment uses, including bike or bridle trails, and buildings and uses accessory thereto
- Government buildings, school buildings and facilities, public utility facilities, quasi-public and service facilities, flood-control structures, and uses accessory thereto.
- For “open air recreational uses, government buildings, quasi-public and service facilities, and other uses whose purpose is to provide open space.”

Willowick also has O-S (Open Space) General Plan Land Use designation, which allows for “compatible uses, such as park land, golf courses, and other similar opportunities for active and passive open space.” Because the Willowick site is located in Santa Ana, any zoning changes fall under the City of Santa Ana’s jurisdiction. This means that if any development occurs that is not compatible to open space use then the City of Santa Ana must approve any new zoning change.
Public land in Orange County is becoming scarcer and scarcer. Historically, communities of color and lower to middle working class neighborhoods have had less access to public recreational spaces, with cities divesting residents of assets such as open space and affordable housing. Willowick, an approximately 102 acre site, is one of the last remaining publicly owned parcels located within the boundaries of the City of Santa Ana. It is a community asset that needs to be thoughtfully developed with the needs of residents’ as first priority.

As noted in our community profiles, the neighborhoods and cities surrounding Willowick are predominantly working class communities of color. Studies show a need for more than 111,996 units of affordable housing in Orange County alone. This need is even more acute near Willowick, where more than 50% of households in Santa Ana and more than 42% of households in Garden Grove are rent burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on housing. At the same time, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and a variety of other organizations have noted that a key strategy to increase affordable housing production is to lower the cost of building affordable housing by building on public land. Willowick represent a clear opportunity to address the glaring need for affordable housing in our communities.

Open space is also scarce in both of these cities. Parks make up only 4% of the total land in Santa Ana and only 1% of the total land in Garden Grove. We know that access to parks and open space holds tremendous potential for addressing some of our greatest public health concerns, including obesity and the prevalence of asthma attacks. Studies have consistently found that proximity to parks can also increase mental health.

In July of 2019, the City of Garden Grove issued a proclamation that July would be designated as “Parks Make Life Better” month. Mayor Steve Jones has also “Endorsed a Vision that everyone deserves a park or open space within a 10-minute walk of home.” We need these proclamations to turn into tangible outcomes for the residents of his city.

With 102 acres of land on the Willowick site, larger even than the entire area of Disneyland, Willowick offers policy makers in both Santa Ana and Garden Grove sufficient land to meet both of these important needs.

The need for affordable housing and open space in and around Willowick is only likely to increase in the coming years as the Santa Anita neighborhood we know now is slated to change. The cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove and the Orange County Transportation Authority are installing the OC Streetcar with a stop on the Willowick site. Locally, many residents and planning experts have voiced concerns about the potential impacts of development and residential displacement along the route. Recent studies on transit oriented development have found strong associations between residential and commercial displacement of existing residents along new transportation routes, if specific mechanism and policies for protecting existing residents are not in place. These same studies have found that the impacts of displacement are particularly acute in neighborhoods with heavily foreign born populations, which is particularly worrisome when foreign born residents make up more than 40% of the population of both Santa Ana and Garden Grove.

The current plans for Willowick from the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana risk widening an already park-deficient area’s environmental inequities with massive development just in time for transit-oriented gentrification to price out current residents and small businesses.
Community Profiles and Landscape Analysis

Garden Grove and Santa Ana are cities that represent largely working class and immigrant communities and are two of the largest cities in Orange County. However, both cities also have a drastic need for affordable housing and lack open spaces adequate for their population sizes.
According to the most recent 2017 American Communities Survey, Santa Ana has a total population of 334,493 people, making it the second most populous city in Orange County. However, it is by far the most densely populated and youngest city in the County, with nearly 12,266 people per square mile and a median age of just 31 years. The city of Los Angeles, by comparison, has just 7,852 people per square mile. The city is one of the most heavily Latino cities in the country with 77.3% identifying as Hispanic / Latino. Another 11.4% of the population is Asian and .8% African American, meaning 9.4% of the population is white while 90.6% of the population is people of color.

Santa Ana is also a largely working class community, where median household income is $57,151 and 28.7% of children live in poverty. Housing is a major challenge for residents of Santa Ana, with 64.9% paying more than 30% of their income for housing, the federal designation for being rent-burdened. The majority of residents in Santa Ana are renters as well, with 54.6% of residents renting their housing. Renter occupied units have an average household size of 4.36, which is significantly higher than most other areas in Orange County. The median rent in Santa Ana is $1,416 and has been rising consistently over the past 10 years.

According to the Trust for Public Land, Santa Ana is also one of the more park poor major cities in America. In their ranking of park accessibility, they have Santa Ana ranked as 84th of the 100 largest US cities. They also found that Santa Ana is in the bottom 20% in terms of park investment and uses just 4% of total land in the City for Parks, compared to a national median of 15% and wealthier cities like Irvine with nearly 30% of land being used for parks.

This development will affect residents living in districts represented by Councilmembers Jose Solorio and Juan Villegas.

"Santa Ana is also one of the more park poor major cities in America."

Map of where Santa Ana parks are needed most. Santa ana dedicates just 4% of city land for parks and recreation compared to the national median of 15%. Image source: The Trust for Public Lands ParkServe
Garden Grove

In Garden Grove, we see similar patterns to that of Santa Ana with a largely immigrant population with a lower median income than Orange County. According to the American Communities Survey data from 2017, Garden Grove has a population of 174,812 people giving it a population density of 9,723 people per square mile. Garden Grove is the heart of Orange County’s “Little Saigon”, home to the largest population of Vietnamese people outside of Vietnam. More than 54,505 ethnically Vietnamese residents live in Garden Grove, making up 31.2% of the population. Asians as a whole are 39.8% of population, while 36.6% are Latino, 20.7% are white and 1.5% are African American.

Median incomes for Garden Grove is $62,675, and 17.4% of households with children living in poverty. Housing is a major challenge for residents of Garden Grove as well, with 42.2% of residents paying more than 30% of their income for housing. Garden Grove has a large renting population as well, with 46.2% of residents renting their housing. Renter occupied units have an average household size of 3.64. The median rent in Garden Grove is $1,421 and has also been rising consistently over the past 10 years.

Park access is also a major challenge for Garden Grove residents. According to the Trust for Public Land, just 43% of residents in Garden Grove live within a 10 minute walk of a park, well below the national average of 54% for large cities. Just 1% of land in Garden Grove is used for parks and recreation, four times lower than Santa Ana 15 times lower than the national average.

This development will impact residents living within Garden Grove Councilmember Kim Nguyen’s district.
Census Tracts Closest to Willowick

In the Census tracts closest to the Willowick site, we see many of these same socio-demographic trends repeated and even heightened. Census tracts 891.04 and 891.05 represent the roughly 2,500 residents living in closest proximity to the Willowick site, and likely those that will face the largest impact of any development project.

According to the American Communities survey, for the 1,361 households in census tract 891.04, 30.5% are Asian and 65.4% are Latino and just 4.1% are white. The median income in this census tract is just $46,949, nearly half of the $81,851 median income in Orange County as a whole. In census tract 891.05, of the 1,180 households 86% are Latino, 12.1% are Asian, 1.3% are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and just 1.3% are White. The median income is slightly higher at $54,318, but we still see neighborhoods that have lower incomes and are more proportionally people of color, than either Santa Ana or Garden Grove as a whole.
Introduction of Survey

The Rise up Willowick Coalition wanted to assure that our demands were firmly based on the desires and needs of local communities. Knowing that there were limited number of participants and awareness about the “Envision Willowick” process and a lack of transparency around the development priorities for the area, we believed that surveying area residents was essential to assuring more broad scale education about the potential development. We are using this survey to ground our coalition’s demands not just in the desires of community members attending our monthly coalition meetings, but from the broader neighborhood as well. With this goal in mind, we surveyed 324 local residents and knocked on more than 1200 doors in and around Willowick from February to July of 2019.

"Residents have shown strong support for using the publicly owned land for public benefits."

Surveys were conducted in both Garden Grove and Santa Ana and were done in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Results of Survey - Summary

The survey results, detailed below question by question, pack a stark contrast to the two cities’ current plans and the actual desires of local community residents. In our survey results, residents have shown strong support for using the publicly owned land for public benefits. More specifically, parks and open spaces or affordable housing receive the highest support (see pg. 14). In the “Envision Willowick” report, the two cities have floated projects that emphasize a large scale sports stadium, retail and commercial space, or market-rate housing. These ideas were the types of development that received the most significant opposition.

These results also paint a picture of a community that is already feeling the stress of development. Across the board, residents had both experienced rising housing costs and reported being concerned about the cost of housing. Concerns were also clear around the potential impacts of large-scale development on taxing already limited public services, including traffic congestion, parking and even community centers and schools in the area.
“Have you heard about the plans for developing the Willowick golf course?”

This question was designed to gauge the community’s awareness of the pending proposal and RFP process for the site. Responses included, yes, maybe, no or refused question.

Nearly 83% of respondents had not heard of the plans for development, 4% maybe had heard of the plans, and just 13% had heard of the project. This number suggests that the vast majority of community members around Willowick have not yet heard about potential plans, even though an RFP has already been issued.

When this data is broken down to just Garden Grove residents, we see an even lower rate of knowledge of the plans for Willowick. For Garden Grove residents, just 4% had heard of the plans for development, 4% maybe had heard of the plans, and a staggering 92% had not heard of the plans at all. Despite the massive scale and impact, few of the residents of Garden Grove closest to the development had heard of the development proposal before the survey.

Similar trends to the overall results exist for the Santa Ana data where 81% of respondents had not heard of the plans for development, 4% maybe had heard of the plans, and just 15% had heard of the project.
“If you could choose, what would you like to see happen to the land at Willowick?”

After a brief explanation that the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana were considering exploring the development of the 100+ acre property, participants were then asked what their priorities for development on the land would be. The purpose of this question was to gauge what the residents living closest to the site would want to see on this publicly owned land. Respondents were able to answer any way they wanted to, but responses were categorized into the following areas: stadium, market rate housing, affordable housing, office space, commercial/retail, manufacturing, parks/open spaces, schools, community garden/community agriculture, community center/community facility, or other with space for a specific answer. Except for a small subset of an electronic survey, the vast majority of respondents were able to answer with multiple responses.

The responses to this question were relatively consistent, given the large sample size. Parks and open space were the clear favorites, with more than 62% of respondents saying they would like to see parks/open spaces. Affordable housing was the second-largest priority, with 54% of respondents saying they wanted to see affordable housing. Next up were community center/facility at 35%, a school at 25%, and community gardens at 20%. Every other response was at 10% or less. These trends continued within the Garden Grove and Santa Ana subsets. In Garden Grove, 73% of respondents said they preferred parks/open spaces, and 58% wanted affordable housing. Community centers, schools, and community gardens had between 25 - 35% support.

In Santa Ana, 60% preferred open space/parks, 54% affordable housing, 36% community centers, and 25% schools.
“The two cities have discussed a few options for the land already, including a stadium, office space, commercial space and / or market rate housing. If you could choose, what would you not want to see happen to the land at Willowick??”

This question, in contrast to the above, was designed to assess what local residents didn’t want to see developed at the Willowick site. The results followed a similar pattern to their wants, but show where there is the clearest opposition.

The development idea that residents expressed the clearest opposition to was the stadium, with 45% of respondents identifying a stadium as something they didn’t want to see. The next largest type of development that residents opposed was nearly 40% saying they didn’t want to see market-rate housing. The remaining answers were more scattered, with 13% not wanting to see manufacturing and 8% opposed to both office space and retail. Other responses were at 6% or below.

As residents shared their concerns about these developments, they frequently noted that existing challenges around a lack of affordable housing, a lack of parking, and traffic conditions would only be exacerbated by large scale development, luxury housing and especially a stadium.
“Because this is publicly owned land, state law may require that it is prioritized for open space (like parks) and/or affordable housing. Would you like to see either of those, both or neither?”

This question was designed to highlight that the California Surplus Land Act may require the two cities to prioritize development on the land of affordable housing or parks and open spaces. Given this information, we wanted to gauge if residents would be interested in these two specific options. The results showed a clear openness to these two uses.

97% of respondents favor parks space, affordable housing, or both, while just 3% were opposed to either affordable housing or parks. The data shows an overwhelming openness from nearby residents to these two uses. Specifically, 66% were open to both affordable housing and parks, 10% only affordable housing, 21% only parks/open spaces, and just 3% said neither.

Large scale development projects often have a multi-layered impact on the cost of housing in surrounding neighborhoods. In the lead up to or in anticipation of large scale development, real estate speculation often increases in surrounding neighborhoods. After a project is completed, it can often increase the cost of housing, especially for renters, in the surrounding neighborhood.

Given this reality, we wanted to gauge whether residents in the neighborhood had seen increases in the cost of their housing in the last five years. Specifically for renters, we then wanted to gauge by how much rent had increased in the past year. After the first question was asked, respondents were able to answer yes, maybe, no or refused question.

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If the respondent answered yes and that they were a renter, they were then asked the follow-up question of how much their rent had increased by in the last year with possible responses of $0, $1 - $100, $101 - $250, or more than $250.
“Have you experienced rent or housing cost increases in the last 5 years?”

- 60% Yes
- 30% $1-$100
- 5% $101-$250
- 5% Maybe
- 35% No
- 50% More than $250

“Do you see paying rent/housing as a key problem for you, your family or your community?”

- Yes 71%
- No 16%
- Maybe 12%

“How much has your rent or housing increased in the past year?”

About half of the respondents reported one-year rent increases of between $1 and $100. However, 30% of residents reported increases of $101-$250, and 19% reported increases of more than $250. These types of large rent increases are most worrisome, as they can be a catalyst for displacement among renters.

In addition to getting objective data around the increases of rent and housing costs for local residents, we also wanted to measure residents’ own perceptions of housing costs and whether they see it as a concern. With this in mind, the above question was asked, and potential answers included yes, maybe, no, or refused question. Overall, the respondents seemed to be concerned about housing costs. 71% responded yes, and 12% responded maybe, while just 16% said no. With just 60% of respondents saying they personally had experienced rising costs of housing, this data shows that at least some residents recognize the problem either as a future personal challenge or a current challenge for their neighbors and family.
Methodology of Survey

In this survey, we measured what the residents surrounding Willowick want to see developed at the Willowick site. The survey was conducted from February 12th, 2019 until July 26th, 2019. The first question measured the residents’ knowledge of the project. Questions two through four measured the resident’s priorities and desires for the Willowick project. Questions five through seven measured how rent and housing costs impact the household and their community.

For sampling, we were only interested in households located within the cities of Garden Grove or Santa Ana, and all responses had addresses within those cities. About 95% of the surveys were from respondents who live within a half-mile of the Willowick golf course. We targeted those areas since those residents would be most affected by the development.

The questionnaire was conducted by asking participants questions, and the surveyor marked their responses on either a paper form, using the Political Data Inc (PDI) mobile application, or in a Google forms document. Most surveys allowed for multiple choices, however, surveys from PDI only allowed one choice. PDI surveys responses make up just 15% of the overall data. Convenience samples for the paper and Google form surveys were created by selecting the residential streets closest to the park and then rotating by starting South of the park and going through each residential street in a counterclockwise direction. Convenience sampling for the PDI surveys was created through PDI by finding residents living in the precincts nearest to Willowick park. In most cases, while surveying, an informational flyer was provided which contained the location of Willowick and community meeting dates and locations for the coalition.

1,270 doors knocked on in the neighborhoods surrounding Willowick
324 local residents/households were surveyed
6 months of outreach from February 2019 to July 2019
The survey was conducted in multiple languages in an attempt to speak the native language of the residents. We knocked on more than 1270 doors and received 324 responses, which is a response rate of roughly 25% of households. Garden Grove residents completed 55 surveys while Santa Ana residents completed 269 surveys.
After completing this surveying process, our coalition is prepared to make recommendations around principles and values for the development of Willowick as well as specific recommendations for the site. These recommendations are based on the overwhelming and clear desires of residents in the surveying process, as well as a clear lack of information, transparency and public involvement in planning a future for this public land.

The following are principles that we propose in order to ensure equitable development on the Willowick site:

- **Public Lands for Public Good**
- **Community Visioning & Community Informed Land Use Determination**
- **Equitable Land Use Analysis**
- **Transparent Decision-Making Process**
Public Lands for Public Good

Public land is an incredible community asset. Rather than being used to subsidize the profits if developers, the land we own as citizens is a crucial resource that can be used to meet community needs. Simply put, if it is our land, than it should be used to benefit the public.

Community Visioning & Community-Informed Land Use Determination

Too often, decisions around land use and development are made behind closed doors. The city’s own “Envision Willowick” process involved less residents than we were able to survey on our own as a grassroots community coalition. More than 80% of residents in Santa Ana and more than 90% of residents in Garden Grove within a half mile of the Willowick site didn’t even know that there were plans in the work to develop a massive development project! For development to meet the needs of community, it first needs to engage them in creating a vision that aligns with the needs, values and ideas of current residents.

Equitable Land Use Analysis

Land use decisions have a deep and long lasting impact on the neighborhoods and people surrounding them. Applying an equity framework, and understanding how land-use decisions impact our communities with a specific analysis around gender, renters, homeowners, income, race, ethnicity, immigration status and other factors is essential to developing a more nuanced understanding of how development can impact our communities. As we move forward with development decisions, particularly on publicly owned land, it is essential that the analysis around these decisions looks at a range of factors with an understanding of how it will impact more vulnerable populations.

Transparent Decision-Making Process

As decisions are made around public assets and land use, it is essential that the public is fully engaged and decisions are made in a clear and transparent way. Already, Garden Grove and Santa Ana have taken steps that limit transparency in this process by creating sub-committees in city council that are small enough so that they don’t have to comply with the state’s transparency legislation - the Brown Act. With the additional confusion around jurisdiction with the land being owned by Garden Grove but located in Santa Ana, the lack of transparency around meeting schedules for joint decisions between the cities, and the cities refusing to share which developers have submitted RFPs, there is even more risk than usual that decisions are not made in a transparent way. With 102 acres of public land at stake, it is essential that decisions are made with the publically fully engaged.
Based on the results of our community surveys, our members ideas and vision, and our principles stated above, the RiseUp Willowick’s vision for the future of Willowick includes:

1 **Well maintained parks and open space**

   Willowick should remain as open space for an easily accessible, public, recreational, and safe place to play. Amenities should include, but are not limited to, restrooms, playgrounds, community gardens, and a system for facility maintenance.

2 **Affordable Housing that actually meets community income levels**

   To address the incredibly need for affordable housing options, this public land should be used to leverage the development of affordable housing that is accessible for current residents so there are more opportunities to remain and thrive. Any housing should include a majority number of housing units with deep affordability levels that meet the income levels of current residents and multi-bedroom units. This means affordable housing with the majority of units at the very low income level or VLI (50% of AMI) and extremely low income level or ELI (30% of AMI), with an emphasis to ELI levels.

3 **A community center with community focused programming and activities**

   A community center to invest in youth, provide community-led programming, cultural related education and activities, community fields for sports, sober activity spaces, gardening spaces, a skate park, rehabilitating spaces, mental health support services, and technology-focused programs.

4 **Support small and local business**

   Rather than working to bring in giant retailers and chain stores on the development site, development proposals, community center training activities should seek to uplift and create opportunities to support small and local businesses, such as co-op businesses that hire locally and cater to local residents by providing occasional use of space for such vendors. An example of a local co-op is El Mercadito Carusel, which is based in Santa Ana, and consists of local, mostly immigrant, food and cultural products vendors. El Mercadito Carusel meets once a month at El Centro Comunitario de Mexico in Santa Ana. These types of community led businesses could be a focus for the future of Willowick.

5 **Increased educational opportunities and schools**

   Another use for Willowick can support the creation of a preschool or other types of facilities that provide free and/or low-costs educational programs and resources.
Residents and community members must be involved in a transparent process.

To create real systemic change, we must radically shift how we think about the availability of developable land, prioritizing our fundamental rights to land and housing over displacement, exclusion, and disempowerment driven by commodifying housing and land. We must ensure the stability and sustainability of our communities and demand public lands are used as a public good.

Our report is a collective effort of residents, advocates, and community organizations working together strategically to challenge the development status quo of disinvestment then gentrification that middle/lower income communities of color have experienced historically.

Other municipalities such as the City of Portland have made commitments to address socio-economic inequities and ensure that residents are involved in a transparent development process, including equal access to affordable housing and open, green spaces.

There is still time for both Garden Grove and Santa Ana to make a collective commitment to prioritizing the needs of their residents in publicly owned land. We hope this report can be a step in that process by sharing the importance of this public parcel, community desires for development on the land, and recommendations and principles on how to move forward in an open, transparent and responsible way.

For more information or to get involved with the RiseUp Willowick coalition, please visit http://riseupwillowick.org/ or email Cynthia Guerra at ruwillowick@gmail.com
ENDNOTES


