

NEED A BREAK? TAKE A SHORT WALK TO A PARK

Parks and other green spaces are essential to physical, emotional, and mental health and well-being—especially now. BY CLEMENT LAU, AICP

Think about a short walk around your neighborhood. Does it include a park? It should.

The “10-Minute Walk Campaign” is a nationwide movement to ensure that everyone has safe access to a quality park or green space within 10 minutes of home. It is rooted in the belief that parks are essential to the physical, social, environmental, and economic health of a community, and the movement seeks to improve park access through local policy changes, master planning efforts, and increased funding opportunities. The program was established in 2017 by the National Recreation and Park Association, the Trust for Public Land, and the Urban Land Institute.

The Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), a campaign member, is working to advance park access and equity. Its Woodcrest Play Park opened to the public in late 2019. The innovative project transformed an underused space at Woodcrest Library into a small but vibrant public park, with a book-themed children’s play space, seating with laptop charging stations, outdoor exercise equipment, and drought-tolerant plants.

Created through a collaboration between DPR and Los Angeles County Library, Woodcrest Play Park is located in the unincorporated community of Westmont, which has about 33,000 residents and a “Very High” level of park need according to the 2016 Los Angeles



Residents try out the interactive musical play units (temporarily off-limits) at Woodcrest Play Park in Los Angeles County.

Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment. Thanks to the new park, 57 percent of Westmont residents now live within a 10-minute walk of a park. That number was just 35 percent before. It means that an additional 7,000 residents, including 2,000 young

people, can access a nearby park. The 10-Minute Walk Campaign complements various planning efforts, including the *Pedestrian Plan*, *Vision Zero Action Plan*, *Transit-Oriented District Specific Plan*, and the *Countywide Sustainability Plan*, which seek to get more people walking and make it safer to do so.

During the COVID-19 crisis, we are asked to stay home as much as possible, but we can walk in our

neighborhoods, including nearby parks, as long as we practice physical distancing. Access to parks is critical

for our physical, emotional, and mental health and well-being, especially during these trying times—and particularly for those without a car. In LA County, parks remain open during the pandemic, but certain amenities are off-limits. At Woodcrest Play Park, exercise and playground equipment are taped off to encourage physical distancing and decrease spread of the disease.

It is important that local jurisdictions pursue creative partnerships and projects to provide public spaces where residents can exercise, recreate, and relieve stress close to home. Park planners must also adopt an intersectional approach that requires us to look beyond park boundaries and collaborate with partners to address important factors like safety, land use, and transportation that affect how and whether residents travel to and use existing and future parks.

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10-MINUTE WALK

The 10-Minute Walk Campaign has joined forces with mayors around the country to ensure that everyone has safe, easy access to a quality park within a 10-minute walk from home by 2050.

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