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In 'unusual' public-private partnership, City of LB teams with SH Petroleum to open park

Willow Springs Park features 7,850-sq.-ft. map of region

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Photos by Cory Bilicko/Signal Tribune
From left, Signal Hill Petroleum COO/Executive Vice President David Slater, Fourth District Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, 7th District Long Beach Councilmember James Johnson and Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster at Wednesday's

dedication of the 7,850-square-foot map of the region at the new Willow Springs Park

Cory Bilicko
Managing Editor

On its way to becoming the largest development of new park space in Long Beach since 1952, Willow Springs Park now boasts a 7,850-square-foot topographical map of the city as the ground-covering for its plaza. The circular map is made of decomposed granite and tumbled glass, and it details the area's watersheds and terrain, including prominent peaks and points, within 50 miles of the park.

On the morning of Oct. 31, the City of Long Beach hosted a dedication of the plaza in the park, which is located at 2745 Orange Ave. Fourth District Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster, 7th District Councilmember James Johnson and Signal Hill Petroleum COO/Executive Vice President David Slater were all at the unveiling, which took place the day before the park's official grand opening for the public.

"I'm always excited to announce new parks," Foster said. "We live in a built-up, urban area, so getting this new, green space is really terrific." The mayor briefly described the map, on which he and the other officials were standing, by saying, "It's an integrated map of the watersheds of Southern California, and all the prominent locations are marked out with their longitude and latitude."

Johnson thanked Foster for being supportive of the park, which is in the councilmember's district and has been a pet project of his. "For over a hundred years, the city has had several large parks, all on the east side of town," Johnson said. "This is the first regional park for the city west of Redondo Avenue."



The circular, topographical map is made of decomposed granite and tumbled glass, and it shows the region's watersheds and terrain within 50 miles.

Johnson acknowledged Supervisor Knabe's role in getting the park opened, and he also thanked Slater and Craig Barto of Signal Hill Petroleum, echoing an earlier remark of Foster's that the park is a product of the private sector as well as government planning. "This is unusual, because it is a public-private partnership," Johnson said. He also thanked the Arts Council of Long Beach, which sponsored the Nov. 1 jazz concert there the next day. "One thing I think this site is going to be [is a] great performance site," Johnson said. "Right here at the highest point in the city, next to the highest tree in the city, you can come, watch the sun set, listen to great music, and see, on a clear day, the Hollywood sign, Catalina Island, the Pacific Ocean— it's a tremendous opportunity, to see from downtown LA to downtown Long Beach."

He then reflected on the long journey it has been to open the public space. "You know, we bought this land over 130 years ago, in 1882, and, after decades of talking about what to do with it, and over a century of ownership, tomorrow

we'll finally open it up for public access," Johnson said. "Tomorrow will be the first phase of what will eventually be Willow Springs Park, a 47-acre, regional, open-space opportunity– not just for one part of Long Beach, but for Long Beach, Signal Hill, Cerritos, Lakewood, and all our surrounding cities, and southern Los Angeles County and northern Orange County. Tomorrow, after 130 years, we'll finally dedicate this beginning, this four acres, as a park of perpetuity. Tomorrow, we celebrate not just the opening of this highest point in the city of Long Beach, but the beginning of wetlands restoration, the beginning of access to open space for all communities in Long Beach and beyond, and the beginning of water-quality improvement, not just of this area, but the Los Angeles River, and our beaches and beyond." Johnson explained that Willow Springs Park is home to two of the historic Southern California wetlands that have diminished over the years. "This entire property drains to the LA River and then to the beaches," he said. "When we improve this property, and improve some water retention, we will clean up the LA River and our beach front."

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