

APPROVED

DEC16 2021

BOARD OF RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSIONERS

BOARD REPORT

NO. 21-216

DATE December 16, 2021

C.D. 4

BOARD OF RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSIONERS

SUBJECT: VAN NUYS SHERMAN OAKS WAR MEMORIAL PARK – NAMING OF GYMNASIUM BUILDING AS “RAFER JOHNSON GYMNASIUM” – CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION FROM THE PROVISIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA) PURSUANT TO ARTICLE III, SECTION 1, CLASS 11(5) [SIGNS LOCATED ON CITY PROPERTY MANAGED BY A CITY DEPARTMENT WHICH HAS A SIGN POLICY ADOPTED BY ITS BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS] AND CLASS 11(6) [PLACEMENT OF MINOR STRUCTURES ACCESSORY TO EXISTING OR INSTITUTIONAL FACILITIES] OF CITY CEQA GUIDELINES AND ARTICLE 19, SECTION 15311 OF CALIFORNIA CEQA GUIDELINES

AP Diaz M. Rudnick
H. Fujita C. Santo Domingo
J. Kim N. Williams

M. Slue
General Manager

Approved X Disapproved Withdrawn

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. Approve the renaming of the gymnasium at Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park as “Rafer Johnson Gymnasium” as more fully set forth in this Report;
2. Authorize the installation of appropriate park signage;
3. Determine that the proposed project , consisting of the installation of signs located on City property managed by a City department which has a sign policy adopted by its Board of Commissioners, is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Article III, Section 1, Class 11(5) [Signs located on City property managed by a City department which has a sign policy adopted by its Board of Commissioners] and Class 11(6) [Placement of minor structures accessory to existing or institutional facilities] of City CEQA Guidelines and Article 19, Section 15311 of California CEQA Guidelines and direct staff to file a Notice of Exemption (NOE) with the Loa Angeles County Clerk;
4. Authorize the Department of Recreation and Parks’ (RAP’s) Chief Accounting Employee or designee to prepare a check to the Los Angeles County Clerk in the amount of \$75.00 for the purpose of filing an NOE; and

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5. Authorize RAP Staff to make technical corrections as necessary to carry out the intent of this Report.

SUMMARY

VNSO War Memorial Park

Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park (VNSO Park) is located at 14201 Huston Street in the Van Nuys – North Sherman Oaks community of the City. This 65.2-acre recreation center includes a picnic area, tennis and basketball courts, soccer fields, swimming pool, children's play area, ball diamonds, and a gymnasium. Approximately 3,200 City residents live within a one-half mile walking distance of this recreation center. Due to the amenities this park provides, it is classified as a Community Park.

VNSO Park is currently named geographically in accordance with RAP's Naming Policy, as it is located within the Van Nuys and Sherman Oaks communities. A map of the location and boundaries of VNSO Park is attached to this Report as Attachment 1.

Background on Rafer Johnson

Rafer Johnson was a former Olympic gold medalist who was an athletic icon that broke racial barriers, played a role in Cold War politics in the 1960's, and helped bring the 1984 Summer Olympic Games to Los Angeles. He won many accolades and recognitions during his tenure as an athlete and was a proud member and representative of the Los Angeles community.

Johnson was born in Hillsboro, Texas, in 1934. His family moved to California when Johnson was still young, where he excelled at sports such as football, basketball and track throughout middle and high school. He competed for both track and basketball while he attended UCLA, leading the track team to its first NCAA title in 1956. He then went on to compete in the Summer Olympics, earning a silver medal in the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, and a gold medal in the 1960 Olympics in Rome, Italy. Johnson also made history as the first Black American to be a U.S. flag bearer during the 1960 Olympic Games' opening ceremony.

Following his impressive athletic career, Johnson worked as a news anchor and experimented with acting, landing some television and movie roles. He also worked closely with Robert F. Kennedy during his presidential campaign and subdued the gunman responsible for Kennedy's assassination in 1968.

In 1979, Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley asked Johnson to join the Board of the Olympic Committee bringing the 1984 Summer Olympics to the City. Johnson had the honor of lighting the Olympic flame in the opening ceremony. He also helped launch the California Special Olympics and later served as the President of the Special Olympics of Southern California from 1983 to 1992. He was recognized as a member of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Hall of Fame as well as the National Track and Field Hall of Fame.

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Johnson passed away in his home in Sherman Oaks on December 2, 2020.

Naming Request

In May 2021, an administrative proposal by RAP staff was introduced to rename VNSO Park to "Rafer Johnson Park."

The proposed naming was presented by RAP staff to three community meetings for public input. The presentation from these community meetings is attached as Attachment 2.

- On July 12, 2021, RAP Staff presented the renaming proposal to the Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council. At this meeting, a member of the neighborhood council suggested the renaming of the recreation center in honor of Rafer Johnson instead of the whole park in order to preserve the historic name.
- RAP staff also presented to the Van Nuys Neighborhood Council on July 14, 2021. Members of the public as well as the neighborhood council were supportive of the renaming proposal.
- Finally, the renaming was presented to the VNSO Park Advisory Board (PAB) on July 22, 2021. The VNSO PAB's response to the proposed naming was generally unfavorable.
- RAP staff was advised by The Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association that they also heard the renaming proposal, but did not support the motion to rename VNSO War Memorial Park. RAP staff was not in attendance at that meeting.

In summary, public opinion of the proposed renaming has been mixed. RAP Staff has heard comments both in support and in opposition. Additionally, the proposed naming was discussed with the Office of Council District 4 and that office advised RAP that they recommended that the gymnasium rather than the entire park be renamed in honor of Rafer Johnson.

The proposed renaming was presented to the RAP Facility Repair and Maintenance Task Force on October 21, 2021. The commissioners expressed support for the naming of the gymnasium as the "Rafer Johnson Gymnasium."

BOARD NAMING POLICY

On June 5, 2013 RAP adopted a Naming Policy, Procedures and Guidelines for Parks and Recreational Facilities (Policy) for the naming of parks, recreation facilities, park amenities, landmarks and other park assets (Report No. 13-161). This Policy enumerates the criteria and guidelines for use when evaluating proposed park names (Attachment 5). Several of the adopted guidelines applicable to this application are as follows:

- The Naming of parks after individuals shall be limited to those who are deceased and have made exceptional contributions to the park or community within which the park is located.

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- The Naming engenders a positive public image which does not unduly commercialize the park or recreational facility.
- The proposed name for the park or recreational facility, and/or contributor, must be compatible with the Mission of RAP.

Rafer Johnson made exceptional contributions to Los Angeles and proudly represented the City on both a local and international level. RAP Staff is in agreement that it would be fitting to honor Mr. Johnson in the community that he called home. Therefore, RAP staff has determined that the criteria and guidelines of the Policy have been met.

CONCLUSION

For all the reasons stated in this Report, RAP staff recommends the naming of the gymnasium at VNSO Park to the "Rafer Johnson Gymnasium" and installing appropriate signage.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The proposed Project consists of installation of signs located on City property managed by a City department which has a sign policy adopted by its Board of Commissioners and placement of minor structures accessory to existing or institutional facilities.

This site is not within a coastal, methane, or historic zone, so there is no reasonable possibility that the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern or have a significant effect due to unusual circumstances. No other known projects would involve cumulatively significant impacts, and no future projects would result from the proposed project. As of November 18, 2021, the State Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) (Envirostor at www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov) has not listed the Project site or any contaminated sites near the Project area (within 500 feet). According to the Caltrans Scenic Highway Map there is no scenic highway located within the vicinity of the project or within the project site. Furthermore, the project is not located in proximity of a known historical resources and will not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical archaeological or paleontological resource.

As such, staff recommends that the Board determine that it is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Article III, Section 1, Class 11(5) and Class 11(6) of City CEQA Guidelines and Article 19, Section 15311 of California CEQA Guidelines. RAP Staff will file a Notice of Exemption with the Los Angeles County Clerk upon Board's approval.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

There will be a minor fiscal impact to RAP's General Fund due to the cost to purchase and install the new signage.

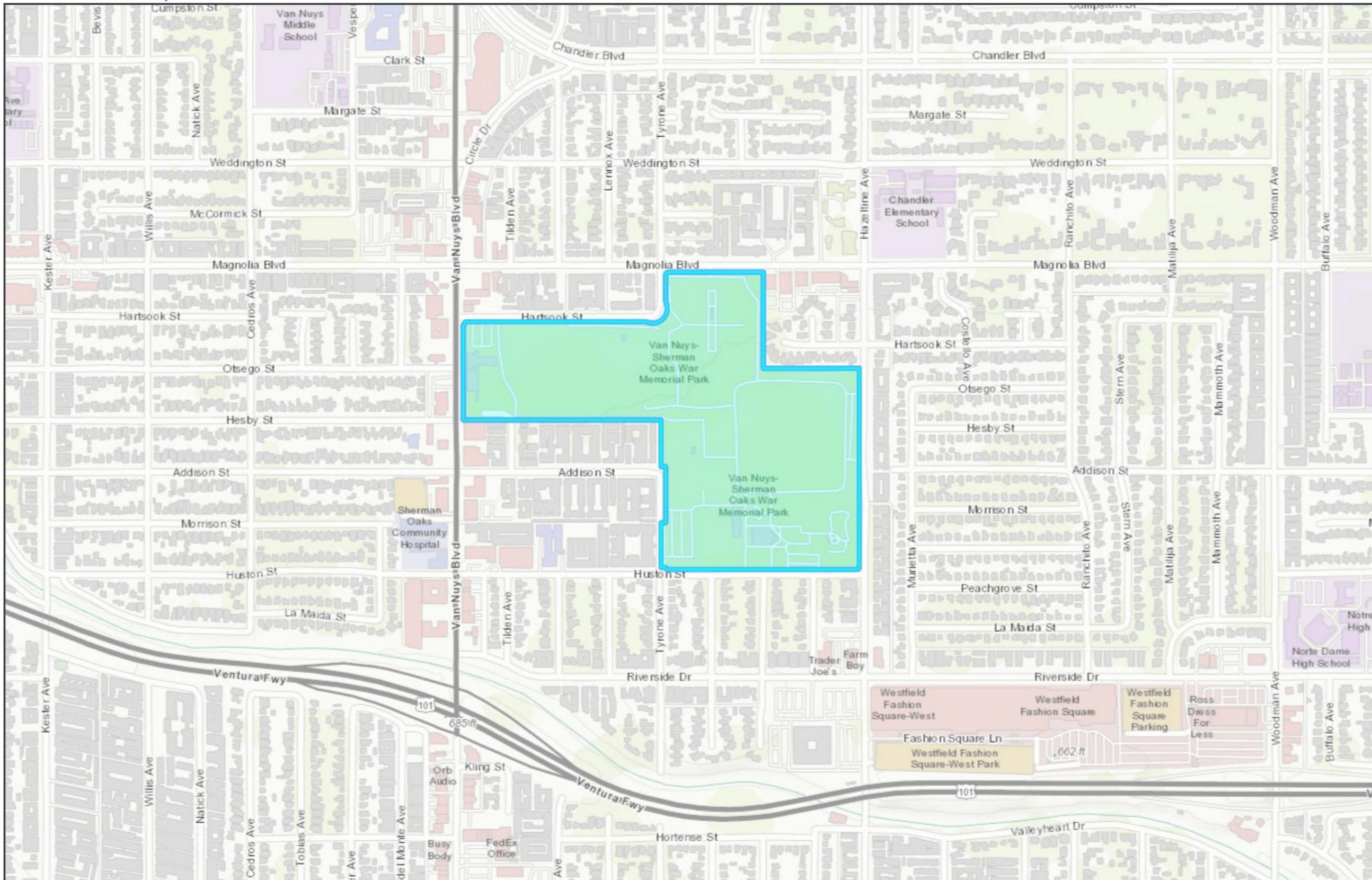
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This report was prepared by Ligaya Khennavong, Management Assistant, Planning, Maintenance and Construction Branch.

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

- 1) Attachment 1 - Map and Boundaries of VNSO Park
- 2) Attachment 2 - Renaming Presentation for the Park Advisory Board and Neighborhood Councils
- 3) Attachment 3 - RAP Naming Policy and Guidelines



LEGEND

- City Limits

NOTES



SCALE 1: 9,028

Disclaimer: This map is for informational purposes only and relies on data from a variety of sources, which may or may not be accurate or current. The City of Los Angeles assumes no responsibility arising from the use of this map. The map and associated data are provided "as is" without warranty of any kind.

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Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park Naming Presentation

Department of Recreation and Parks

July 22, 2021



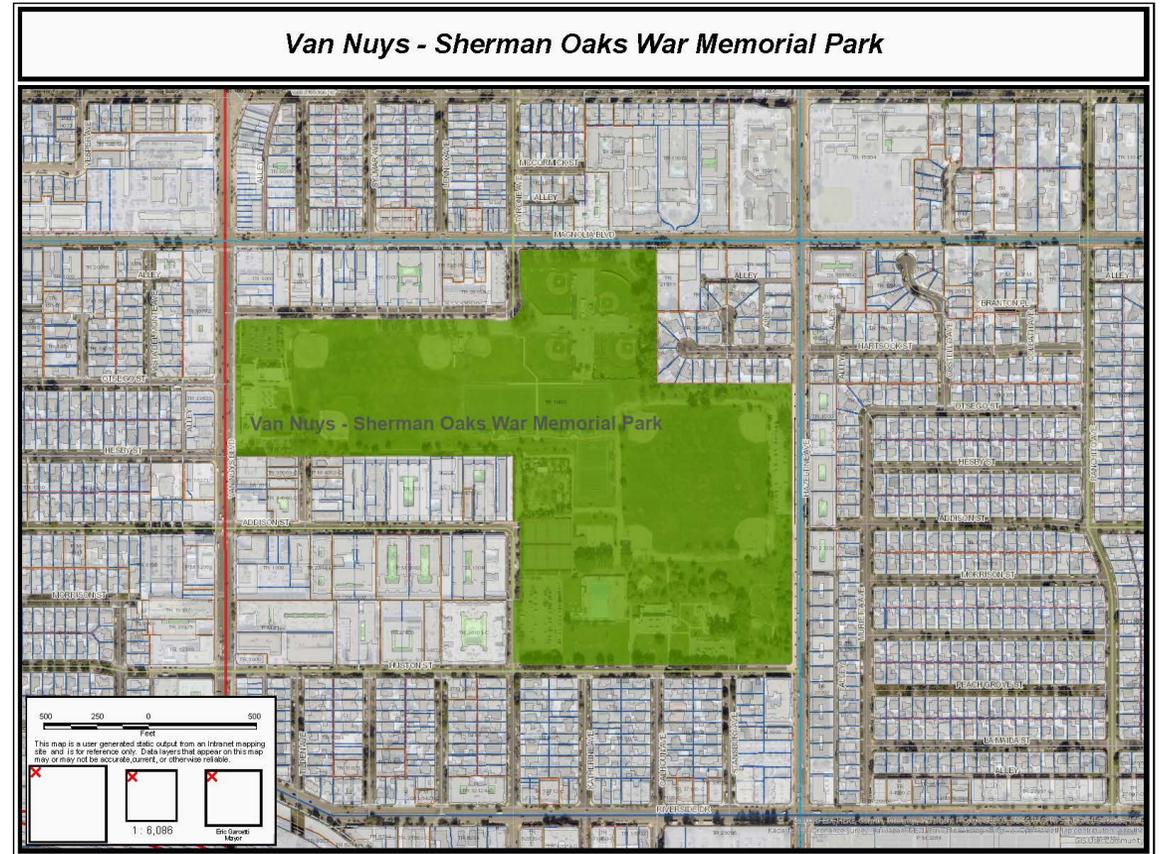
PARK PROUD LA

Agenda

- About Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park
- Surrounding Parks within 2 Miles
- RAP Naming Policy
- Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park Background
- Proposed Names
- Naming Process Next Steps

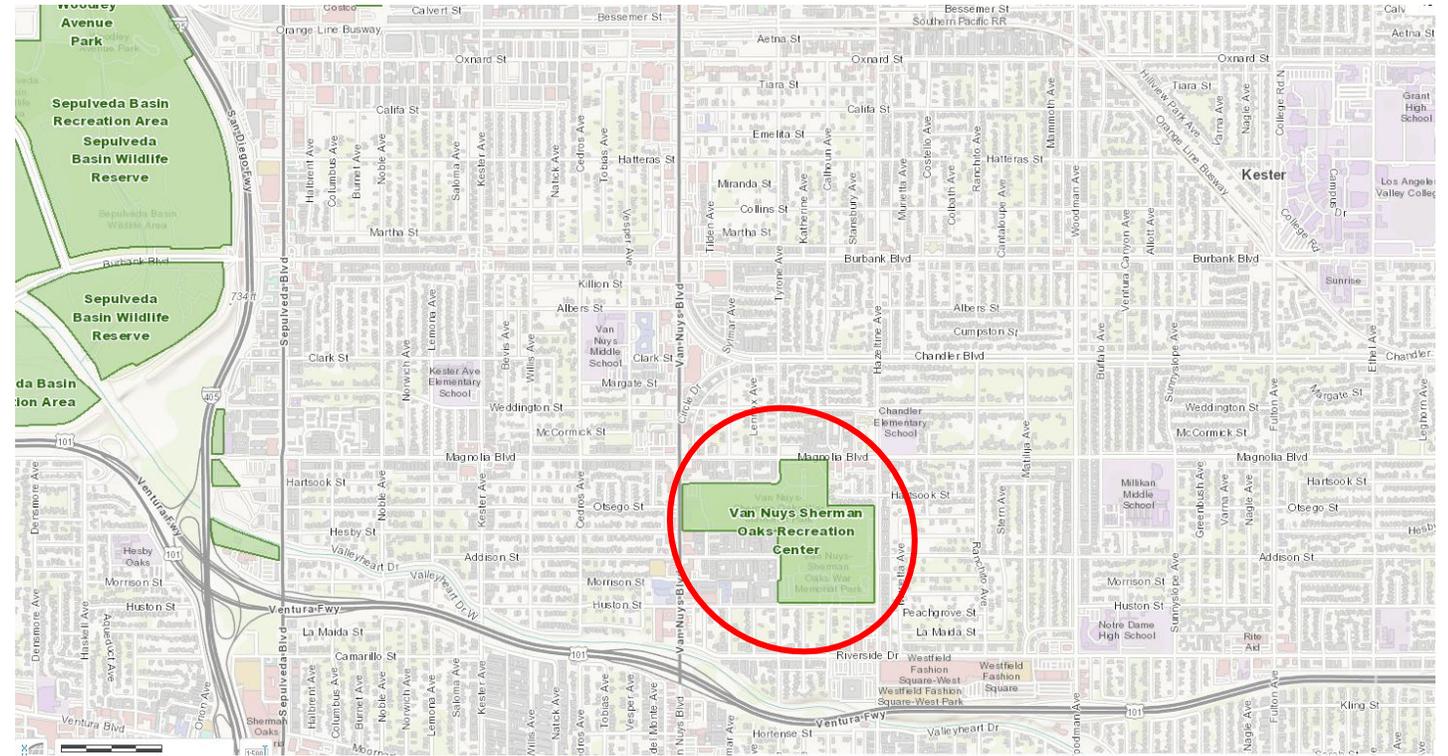
About Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park

- Located at 14201 West Huston Street, Sherman Oaks
- Classified as a Community Park
- Current features of Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park:
 - Recreation Center
 - Aquatic Center
 - Tennis courts
 - Basketball courts
 - Play Area
 - Synthetic Soccer Fields
 - Ball Diamonds



Surrounding Parks within 2 Miles VNSO Park

- Teichman Family Magnolia Park
- Delano Recreation Center
- Deervale-Stone Canyon Park
- Valley Glen Community Park
- Sepulveda Basin Recreation Area
- Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve
- Van Nuys Multipurpose Center
- Woodley Avenue Park
- Sherman Oaks Castle Park
- Studio City Recreation Center
- Tujunga Greenbelt



RAP Naming Policy

- The RAP Board adopted a Naming Policy in June 2013 (Report No. 13-161)
- The Naming of parks after individuals shall be limited to those who are deceased and have made exceptional contributions to the park or community within which the park is located.
- Parks shall only be named after living persons under circumstances requiring such naming as a condition precedent of a grant deed or covenant.
- The Naming of a park after a major historic event must be based on a direct connection between the park and such event.
- The Naming engenders a positive public image which does not unduly commercialize the park or recreational facility.
- The proposed name for the park or recreational facility, and/or contributor, must be compatible with the Mission of RAP.
- Initial Park Names shall be administratively assigned by RAP staff based on geographic features such as street and community names or prominent features

Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park

- Official name of the park is Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park. The park property was deeded to the city with a clause that it must remain as a war memorial park in perpetuity.
- The city acquired the property in 1947 with assistance from the Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park Association, Inc. and funding from the State
- The current name is consistent with the RAP Board's naming policy
- "Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park" shall remain the name of the park site until the RAP Board approves a new name
- The park will remain as a war memorial park in the event of a name change



Proposed Names for Van Nuys – Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park

RAP is proposing the following name(s) for the current park:

- Rafer Johnson Park

Please note: this discussion is not limited to these previously submitted names. Additional naming proposals may be submitted to RAP staff for consideration at rap.commissioners@lacity.org

Rafer Johnson Biography

- Rafer Johnson was a former Olympic gold medalist who was an athletic icon that broke racial barriers, played a role in Cold War politics in the 1960s and helped bring the 1984 Summer Olympic Games to Los Angeles.
- Johnson won the silver medal in the decathlon at the 1956 Olympic Games. He then won the gold medal in the 1960 Olympic Games held in Rome with one of the most memorable finishes to a decathlon in Olympic history over C.K. Yang of Taiwan. Johnson also made history as the first black American to be the U.S. flag bearer in the 1960 Olympic Games' opening ceremony.
- Johnson worked closely with Robert F. Kennedy in his presidential campaign.
- Johnson had the honor of lighting the Olympic flame in the opening ceremony of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.
- Johnson also helped launch the California Special Olympics and, later, served as the President of the Special Olympics of Southern California from 1983 to 1992.
- A member of the US Olympic and & Paralympic Hall of Fame and the National Track & Field Hall of Fame and Sherman Oaks resident, Johnson passed away in his Sherman Oaks home on December 2, 2020.
- **RAP staff has reviewed the proposed name and determined that it is within the RAP Naming Policy**



Photo credit: People.com

Community Outreach for Proposed Renaming

- Sherman Oak Neighborhood Council Meeting – July 12, 2021
- Van Nuys Neighborhood Council Meeting – July 14, 2021
- Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park's Park Advisory Board – July 22, 2021

Next Steps...

- Determine if there is a consensus in the Community on a new name for Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park.
- RAP staff will present the proposed renaming options to the RAP Facility Repair and Maintenance Task Force for preliminary approval
- If/Once a consensus name is identified, staff will prepare a Report to be presented to the RAP Board of Commissioners recommending approval of the renaming for Van Nuys Sherman Oaks War Memorial Park.

City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks
Naming Policy, Procedures and Guidelines for
Parks and Recreational Facilities

The mission of the Department of Recreation and Parks (“RAP”) is to enrich the lives of the residents of Los Angeles by providing safe, welcoming parks and recreational facilities and affordable, diverse recreation and human services activities for people of all ages to play, learn, contemplate, build community and be good stewards of our environment.

One of RAP’s objectives under the Mission is to enhance and expand recreational programs, services, and significant financial support and contributions through public and private collaborations.

Policy:

RAP recognizes that parks and recreational facilities are an essential and integral part of the communities they serve, and that the names of parks and recreational facilities, and park amenities within them, play a significant role in fostering identities in the surrounding communities. This Naming Policy (“Policy”) establishes the criteria and requirements, and sets forth the guidelines and procedures, for the naming and renaming (collectively, “Naming”) of parks, recreational facilities, landmarks and any other assets determined appropriate by RAP (collectively referred to herein as “Park Assets”), which are owned, managed or controlled by RAP.

Pursuant to this Policy, the initial name of a new park or recreational facility, which may be temporary for purposes of administration and accounting, shall be administratively assigned by RAP staff in the traditional manner utilized prior to the establishment of this Policy, based on geographic features such as street and community names or prominent features. In addition, the Naming of existing Park Assets, pursuant to a RAP recommendation relevant to a Naming proposal received from a private or public entity, shall be subject to the approval of the Board of Recreation and Park Commissioners (“Board”), as described herein. In accordance with this Policy and pursuant to RAP recommendations, the Board shall consider the following two types of Naming proposals. The first type encompasses situations in which RAP receives or is offered a donation, gift, sponsorship, and/or other contribution from an outside entity that presents a decisive benefit and shows a direct connection to a Park Asset and serves the interests of the City and its residents. This type of Naming proposal would require a Naming Agreement to summarize the terms and conditions necessary to effectuate the financial or other benefits connected to the Naming proposal with a term (time period) recommended by the GM and approved by the Board, depending on the scope or nature of the agreement, and value, visibility, and lifespan of the donation, gift, sponsorship and or other contribution. The second type comprises Naming proposals to use a major historic event and/or unique significance of a specific place or person, as the basis for the proposed Name; again with the requirement that there be compelling and impressive substantiation demonstrating how the interests of City and its residents were served or impacted. The key in both types of Naming proposals is the importance of demonstrating direct connections to the Park Asset and clear community benefits as a foundation for considering any Naming proposal.

For purposes of this Policy, and with the exception of the temporary Naming of new Park Assets, the authority to approve the Naming of existing Park Assets shall be solely with the Board. Any exceptions to this Policy shall be subject to the prior approval of the Board.

Criteria and Guidelines for Evaluating Park Asset Naming Proposals:

For purposes of this Policy, the following shall be considered when evaluating the appropriateness, feasibility, and implementation of Naming proposals:

- The Naming of parks after individuals shall be limited to those who are deceased and have made exceptional contributions to the park or community within which the park is located.
- Parks shall only be named after living persons under circumstances requiring such naming as a condition precedent of a grant deed or covenant.
- The Naming of a park after a major historic event must be based on a direct connection between the park and such event.
- The Naming engenders a positive public image which does not unduly commercialize the park or recreational facility.
- The proposed name for the park or recreational facility, and/or contributor, must be compatible with the Mission of RAP.
- Park Assets that are held by RAP through a lease or use agreement may be considered for Naming under this Policy, subject to any requirements or restrictions contained in such document.
- RAP reserves the right to limit the duration of time a Name will be in place and/or in effect.
- No specialized signage or advertisement containing a commercial message to purchase a good or service shall be authorized for use on park property.
- All forms of signage placed on or within a Park Asset shall meet RAP's graphic and sign standards.
- There shall be no religious symbols included on Naming signage.
- Park Assets not under the operation of RAP (shared or exclusive), although under the ownership or jurisdiction of RAP, shall not be subject to this Policy; such as for example, the Los Angeles Zoo in Griffith Park.
- Parks should not be subdivided for purposes of Naming, unless there are readily-identifiable physical divisions in the park (major roads, waterways, hillsides, etc.) which facilitate or warrant a subdivision; or there exist other compelling reasons for having more than one name connected to a park. This should not prevent independently Naming a recreational facility or amenity located within a park, as long as the selected name will not cause confusion for park patrons.
- RAP shall seek to inform the public with regard to the Naming of a park in their community.
- Any exception to the above shall be subject to the Naming criteria contained herein, and the Board's prior approval.

Procedures:

The Board retains the authority to name or rename Park Assets situated on park property. The following shall be the protocol for evaluating, considering and denying or approving Naming proposals:

1. A written proposal for the Naming of a Park Asset must be initially submitted to the RAP Board Office, to the attention of the Board Secretary. In accordance with this Policy, the Board Office shall forward the proposal to the RAP General Manager (“GM”) for consideration.
2. Prior to any form of Naming Policy being implemented, sponsorship proposals shall be evaluated by RAP staff, with recommendations to the GM for possible consideration.