

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

# Nearly half of L.A. County's pavement may be unnecessary, new map finds



Students and families take part in a "Trees and Seeds" planting day at Esperanza Elementary in Los Angeles. (Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)

By Meg Tanaka

Feb. 16, 2026 3 AM PT

Los Angeles is often described as a concrete jungle, a city shaped by asphalt, parking lots and other hardscape. Now, for the first time, researchers have mapped that concrete in detail, and they claim a lot of it doesn't need to be there.

A new analysis finds that some 44% of Los Angeles County's 312,000 acres of pavement may not be essential for roads, sidewalks or parking, and could be reconsidered.

[The report, DepaveLA](#), is the first parcel-level analysis to map all paved surfaces across L.A. County, and to distinguish streets, sidewalks, private properties, and other areas. The researchers divided all pavement into "core" and "non-core" uses. A street, for example, is core. Then they paired that map with data on heat, flooding and tree canopy, creating what they intend as a new framework for understanding where removing concrete and asphalt could make the biggest difference for people's health and the climate.





Principal Brad Rumble visits an area where students are restoring natural habitat at Esperanza Elementary. (Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)

Paved surfaces get hotter than those with plantings, absorbing and radiating out the sun's energy rather than converting it into plant growth, which in turn creates shade. Hotter areas also create more ozone smog. Greener areas are known to bring people psychological relief as well.

The authors are the nonprofit Accelerate Resilience L.A., founded by Andy Lipkis, who also founded TreePeople, the Los Angeles tree planting organization, and Hyphae Design Laboratory, a nonprofit that works to bridge health and the built environment.

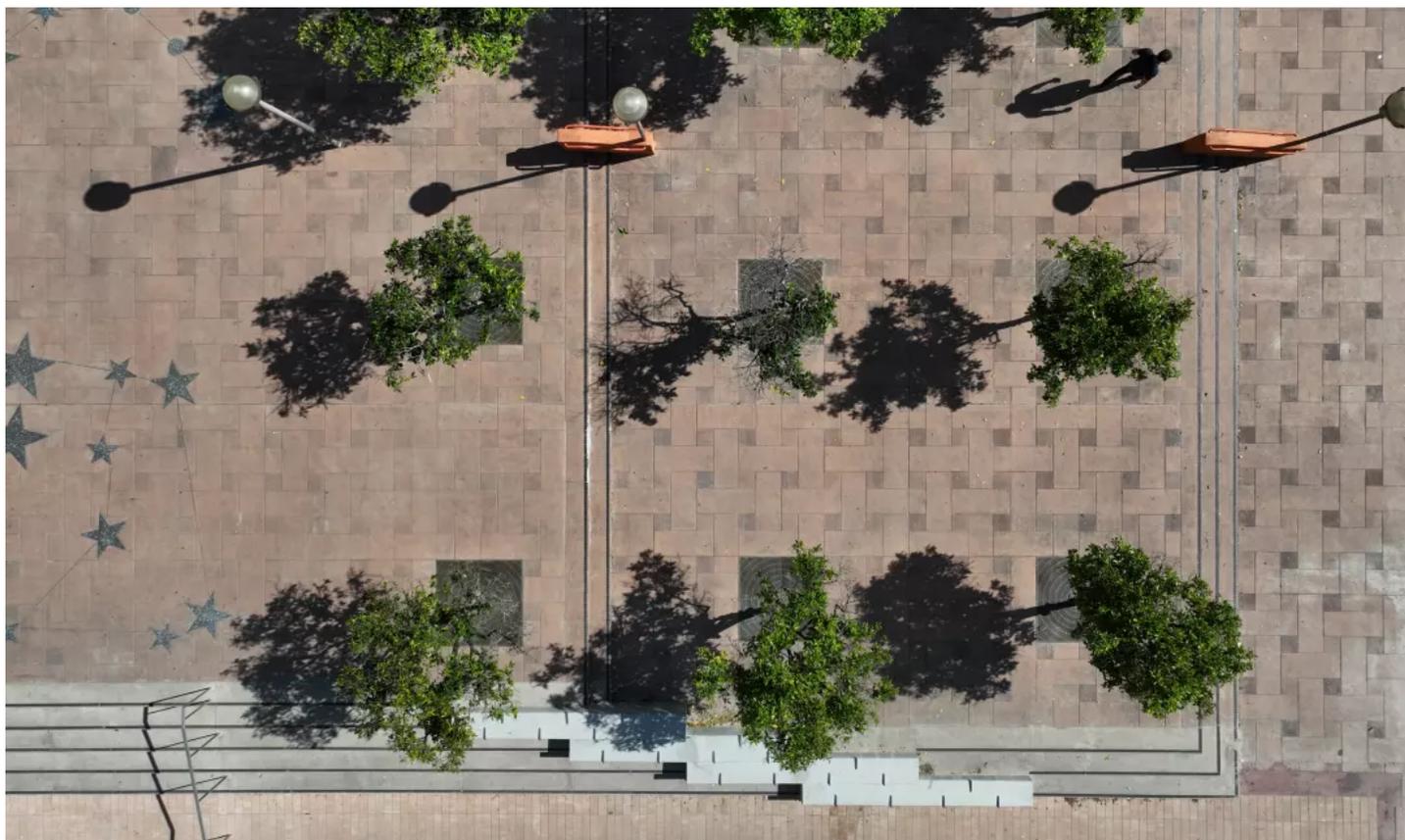
What surprised them most, said Brent Bucknum, founder of Hyphae, was seeing where the pavement is concentrated. Nearly 70% of what they deemed non-core pavement is on private property.

Rather than a sweeping removal of pavement, the report highlights small changes that could add up.

The most potential they found was in parking areas, especially large, privately owned commercial and industrial lots. Redesigning 90-degree parking into angled parking could get rid of up to 1,600 acres, creating room for trees and stormwater capture, without reducing the number of parking spaces.

Parking lots, Bucknum said, are one of the clearest examples of how excess pavement has become accepted, even as it makes everyday life worse for residents.





Aerial view of hardscape area inside Pershing Square in Los Angeles. (Allen J. Schaben/Los Angeles Times)

“I’m often amazed — I’ll drive into a parking lot and there’s beeping, bumper-to-bumper traffic, you’re under this sweltering heat trying to get out of the grocery store,” he said. “And the reality is, we can make it a lot nicer with more thoughtful design.”

Ben Stapleton, chief executive officer of the U.S. Green Building Council California, pointed to parking requirements that long tied the number of spaces to a building’s size and use.

“The natural solution was to just pave things over, because it’s cheaper, it’s less maintenance,” he said. “It’s not very expensive, especially asphalt.”

Residential property, including apartment complexes, are another place with potential.

If each residential parcel cut a 6-by-6-foot tree well in their patio, Bucknum said, it would amount to 1,530 acres of pavement removed, while on average only reducing patio space by 3%.

Emily Tyrer, director of green infrastructure at TreePeople, said pavement is expanding in residential yards.

“What we’re seeing is that a lot of residential yards are moving toward more paving and less lawn,” she said. “Rather than replacing it with shade trees and native plantings and low water use plants, they’re paving over.”

In many cases, she said, homeowners are responding to drought messaging and rising water costs.



A person walks their dog past native plants and flowers planted along the Merced Avenue Greenway in South El Monte, where they are rethinking how urban infrastructure can simultaneously serve pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists while

providing essential environmental benefits. (Allen J. Schaben/Los Angeles Times)

“Paving does reduce water use, and it can reduce people’s water bills,” Tyrer said. “But it comes with trade-offs.”

The report also identifies schools as places where there could be less concrete or asphalt. On average, school campuses across L.A. County are [approximately 40% covered in pavement](#), leaving students exposed to extreme heat.

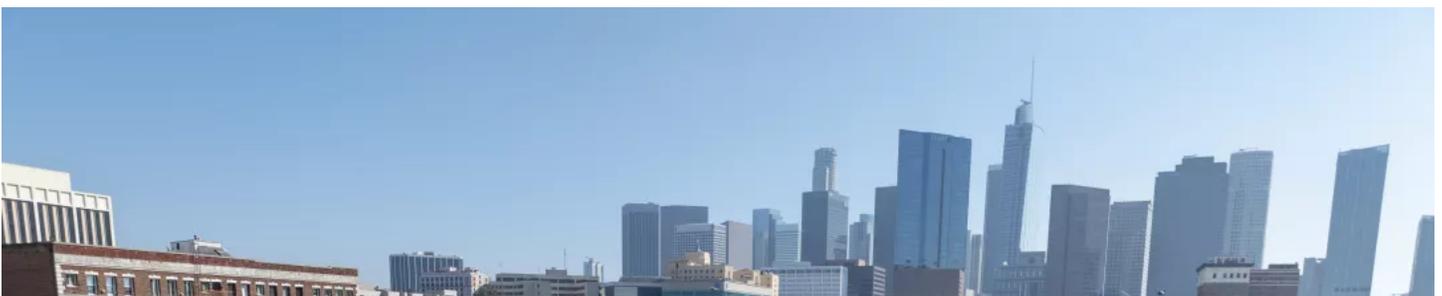
At Esperanza Elementary School, near downtown Los Angeles, the campus was “just a sea of asphalt,” said Tori Kjer, executive director of the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust, which is overseeing a transformation at the school. Children ran across blacktop that could reach over 120 degrees on warm days.

It will soon have new California native plants and shade trees, stormwater capture features, grassy lawn, natural play elements, outdoor classrooms and more.

Many of the school families live in small apartments.

“People don’t have any open space,” Kjer said. “They leave their home, and they’re basically just on concrete streets and sidewalks.” Once the asphalt is removed and the trees go in, and rainwater is guided away, it will be a “place for quiet, imaginative play and active play.”

The idea for the Depave report grew out of years of work on tree planting and green infrastructure projects that repeatedly ran into the same barrier.





Installation of natural landscaping is currently under at Esperanza Elementary in Los Angeles. (Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)

On project after project, pavement emerged as the central problem, according to Bucknum. “We were trying to plant trees, but so much of the city is paved that there was nowhere to put them,” he said.

The team realized they needed better data to understand the problem, down to the block and neighborhood scale. Something more sophisticated than what is pavement and what is trees.

“This is a first step,” said Devon Provo, senior manager, planning and program alignment at Accelerate Resilience L.A. “It’s an opportunity assessment, not a prescriptive plan for what should 100% be removed.”

Olivier Sommerhalder, a principal and global sustainability leader at the design and planning firm Gensler, pointed out businesses that have paid out the money to pave something would need an upside to replace it.

“There are no incentives for property owners to reduce hardscape,” Sommerhalder said. “The municipality does not incentivize the removal of parking to mitigate urban heat hot spots.”

Sommerhalder said sustainability is increasingly part of design conversations with clients, particularly as tenants ask about comfort and environmental performance. But without policy or financial incentives, he said, surface parking often remains untouched until redevelopment.





This innovative 1.1-mile greenway in South El Monte offers not only safe and accessible paths for walking and biking but also serves as a sustainable approach to managing stormwater, restoring habitats, and reducing urban heat. (Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)

As for what an incentive might look like, “we think a really good analogy is the lawn replacement program,” Bucknum said, referring to rebate programs that helped shift Southern California away from water-intensive turf. “People didn’t know there were other options until there was education and financial support.”

It’s important to take into account what is underneath the pavement, said Carlos Moran, executive director of North East Trees, especially in areas with industrial histories.

In some neighborhoods, he said, pavement caps contaminated soil that cannot safely be disturbed. “We can’t just rip it out.”

But he agreed there’s too much pavement. “The hottest blocks in Los Angeles, they’re not just lacking trees,” he said. “They’re overbuilt with asphalt.”

The goal of the report, Provo said, is to give Angelenos and decision-makers a shared starting point for conversation.

“This data is relevant to anyone who wants to have a say in reimagining the future of Los Angeles to be cooler, healthier and more vibrant,” Provo said.

“My hope is that it opens the eyes of people who are building projects who may not have ever even thought about pavement in this way,” Stapleton said. “Once you learn something, you don’t unlearn it.”

By reframing pavement as a design choice rather than a default, Stapleton believes that the analysis could prompt developers and property owners to rethink how much concrete their projects really need, and what they might gain by replacing it.

### More to Read

**Voices**

**Contributor: L.A. is ripping up 1,600 acres of pavement — but is it too little, too late?**

Jan. 28, 2026



**Voices**

**Contributor: Los Angeles is sabotaging itself on housing**

Jan. 27, 2026



**Voices**

**Contributor: You’re not imagining it. L.A. has surrendered to the potholes**

Dec. 29, 2025





## Meg Tanaka

Meg Tanaka is a journalist and researcher covering technology, health and the creative economy, with a focus on how complex systems shape people's lives across borders. Raised between Silicon Valley and Tokyo, her work often examines the intersections of technology, culture and power through a global lens. She is currently a fellow with the Stanford Health Equity Media Fellowship. Her reporting has appeared in the Wall Street Journal, Capital & Main, Forbes and more.

**From:** [Mark Nelson \(Home Gmail\)](#)  
**To:** [CityClerk](#); [James Light](#); [Paige Kaluderovic](#); [Chadwick B. Castle](#); [mike.witzanzky@redondo.org](#); [Joy Ford](#); [Brad Waller](#); [Scott Behrendt](#); [Zein Obagi](#)  
**Cc:** [Kevin Cody](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Blue Folder Item - Non-Agenda Items - Existing BCHD Damages to Surrounding Property Values  
**Date:** Tuesday, February 17, 2026 6:44:08 PM  
**Attachments:** [image.png](#)  
[image.png](#)

**CAUTION: Email is from an external source; Stop, Look, and Think before opening attachments or links.**

At the next meeting, I will go deeper on the loss-of-value study, as well as, the organizing efforts of the surrounding 6000+ residents and property owners who have faced inverse condemnation from value loss caused by proximity to the failed South Bay Hospital site that was co-opted by BCHD.

On Tue, Feb 17, 2026 at 1:54 PM Mark Nelson (Home Gmail) <[menelson@gmail.com](mailto:menelson@gmail.com)> wrote:  
Update on current loss-of-value study for the surrounding residents of BCHD/514 N Prospect Ave.

**Based on litigation standard literature review and modeling methods, the current draft estimated loss-of-value to surrounding property values from the existing BCHD facility with FAR square footage of 250,000, setbacks of over 100-feet to all tall buildings, a maximum building height of 51.5-feet for 99.7% of the campus floor space, and an average floor space height of less than 40-feet is over \$200M to the surrounding 1-mile radius. THIS IS VERY CONSISTENT, IF NOT CONSERVATIVE, COMPARED TO THE LITERATURE.**

**This custom hedonic price model (HPM) analysis is the litigation standard, especially when coupled with the rich, location specific dataset of housing values and characteristics for the surrounding area. The Council should carefully consider how much additional loss-of-value it will cause by shrinking BCHD site existing setbacks, increasing square footage of floorspace, and increasing building heights.**

**SUMMARY OF DRAFT LITERATURE REVIEW AND CUSTOM HPM OUTPUT**

The attached draft literature demonstrates how peer-reviewed studies primarily using hedonic pricing models demonstrate significant loss of value to surrounding neighborhoods. That loss of value exceeds any estimated benefit provided by the BCHD facility based on any litigation quality studies by BCHD.

**Peer-reviewed studies provide the following estimate of loss values:**

<b>Impact Zone</b>	<b>Distance (Miles)</b>	<b>Estimated Value Loss</b>	<b>Primary Drivers &amp; Externalities</b>
<b>Primary Impact Zone</b>	0 – 0.25	<b>8% to 15%</b>	High-frequency sirens (24-hour), daily bus traffic, "looming" visual scale, and reduced privacy/quiet enjoyment.
<b>Secondary Impact Zone</b>	0.25 – 0.50	<b>3% to 6%</b>	Overflow street parking from staff/visitors and increased congestion at local intersections.

<b>Buffer Zone</b>	0.50 – 1.0	<b>0% to 2%</b>	Neutralized impact; disamenities are balanced by the convenience of nearby medical services and health clubs.
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Based on the average property value of \$1,619,467 in the dataset, the literature estimates loss-of-value ranges listed in the table, and the custom hedonic price model's results are very similar.

Distance from 514 N Prospect	Loss Range		Loss Estimate per Property		Draft HPM Result
	Low	High	Low	High	
0-.25 mi	8%	15%	\$ 129,557	\$ 242,920	7.1%
.25-.50 mi	3%	6%	\$ 48,584	\$ 97,168	5.1%
.50-1.0 mi	0%	2%	\$ -	\$ 32,389	3.2%

**Custom hedonic price model analysis of the area loss-of-value are very consistent with the literature review, lending strong support to the model form and use of over 5,000 sets of residential housing price and characteristics data for loss-of-value modeling.**

The surrounding residential units in Torrance and Redondo Beach within 1-mile of 514 N Prospect are summarized below from the draft study results. They are significant and exceed \$200M of damages and lost value.

DRAFT - REDONDO BEACH AND TORRANCE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY VALUE					
IMPACTS OF BEING LOCATED WITHIN 1-MILE OF BCHD					
Within Feet from 514 N. Prospect (BCHD)	Total Residential Units	Total Value Reduction (Loss)	Per House Value Reduction (Loss)	Distance Ring from BCHD	Per House Incremental Value Loss
1,000	246	\$ 31,596,935	\$ 128,443	0-1000 Ft	\$ 128,443
2,000	757	\$ 76,018,842	\$ 100,421	1-2000 FT	\$ 86,931
3,000	1,702	\$ 125,994,972	\$ 74,028	2-3000 FT	\$ 52,885
4,000	2,993	\$ 172,021,021	\$ 57,474	3-4000 FT	\$ 35,651
5,000	4,364	\$ 202,037,457	\$ 46,296	4-5000 FT	\$ 21,894
<b>Maximum Value Loss</b>	\$ 230,724				
<b>Minimum Value Loss</b>	\$ 14,332				