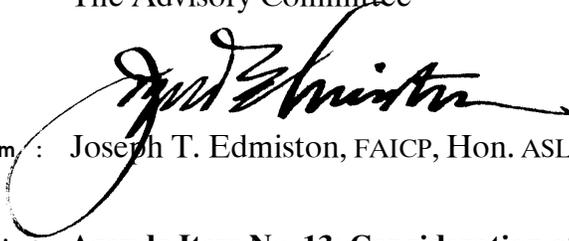


Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: April 28, 2014

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item No. 13: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 50 funds to the Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation, a non-profit organization, for project planning of the Los Angeles River Greenway, Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution recommending the authorization of a grant of Proposition 50 funds to the Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation, a non-profit organization, for project planning of the Los Angeles River Greenway, Los Angeles County, in the amount of \$150,000.

Legislative Authority: Public Resources Code Section 33204.2(a) provides that the Conservancy may award grants to non-profit organizations.

I. Background

Stretching 51 miles from the confluence of Bell and Calabasas Creeks at the western end of the San Fernando Valley, to the Pacific Ocean in Long Beach, the Los Angeles River passes through thirteen cities and numerous jurisdictions. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy has been part of the effort to transform the Los Angeles River into a continuous 51-mile recreational greenway since the creation of Elysian Valley Gateway Park in 1996. Working with cities, Los Angeles County, community groups, local public agencies, private corporations and nonprofit organizations, the Conservancy has committed to implementing the Los Angeles River Greenway (Greenway). Many parks and trail segments are now in place.

The Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation (RRC) has submitted a grant application for project planning and design of Greenway 2020, an aggressive effort to fill in the gaps so the Greenway would run continuously from San Fernando Valley to Long Beach, complete with amenities along the way. The Greenway will also create greater access and linkages to State resources and investments like the State Historic Park, Rio de Los Angeles Park, and Marsh Park. The focus of this grant funding will be to study how to best complete as much of the missing trail segments as possible, as well as to create public amenities and enhancement of the Greenway. This type of strategic overview is needed to ensure that the next generation of river projects addresses the current status of the river. For example, kayaking through the Glendale Narrows was only allowed for the first time in summer 2012, so past projects did not consider that type of user.

RRC will oversee a diverse team of professionals including architects, landscape planners, private contractors and technical experts, while engaging diverse community stakeholders and Los Angeles River landowners, to develop feasible plans and strategies to implement the project. RRC will leverage innovative community engagement strategies to develop public and private partnership, and to prioritize policy relative to River improvements. RRC will develop and implement a strategy to execute Greenway projects, including identifying feasible sites; securing appropriate partners; co-ordinating design, planning, and engineering of projects; community engagement, and leveraging funds from city, state and federal sources.

The RRC was established in 2009 as a result of the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan to promote responsible development, redevelopment, and revitalization of properties along the Los Angeles River corridor. This includes parks, open space, mixed-use buildings, retail opportunities, housing, and business space. The RRC has strong ties to government agencies because it was established by the City of Los Angeles, but is a non-profit developer working independently on sustainable river development. The RRC is uniquely positioned in alliance with government to negotiate strategies that prioritize the goals of river revitalization above all else.

II. Analysis–Proposition 50 and the Common Ground Plan

Proposition 50 makes available \$200 million “for expenditures and grants for the purpose of protecting coastal watersheds, including, but not limited to, acquisition, protection, and restoration of land and water resources and associated planning, permitting and administrative costs.” (Water Code, Section 79570.)

Water Code Section 79570 (c) allocated the sum of \$40,000,000 to the Conservancy “for protection of the Los Angeles River watershed upstream of the northernmost boundary of the City of Vernon.” (Water Code, Section 79570 (c).) Water Code Section 79751 allocates that 10% of Section 79570 shall be used for grants for the development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water and wildlife resources. The subject study area is within the Los Angeles River Watershed. Proposition 50 provides that “[w]atershed protection activities in the San Gabriel and Los Angeles River watersheds shall be consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles River Watershed and Open Space Plan*” (Water Code 79508.)

A. The Los Angeles River Greenway Project Constitutes Watershed Protection Activities Within the Watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River, as Required by Section 79570 (c)

The Los Angeles River Greenway Project lies within the Los Angeles River Watershed, and

the property and its facilities are resources for public recreational use. As outlined in the application, the proposed project is consistent with Proposition 50's policy to promote the protection of land and water resources. RRC is requesting a grant to plan and design for the conservation and restoration of the Los Angeles River Greenway.

B. The Los Angeles River Greenway is Consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan* as Required by Section 79508 of the Water Code

The *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*,¹ also known as and hereinafter referred to as the "Common Ground" plan, was jointly developed by the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, or Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC). The purpose of the plan is to “articulate a vision for the future of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watersheds” and “provide a framework for future watershed and open space planning.” The plan outlines a holistic approach to watershed protection and development, organized by a set of Guiding Principles.² These broad principles are designed to accommodate the varying priorities and needs of projects in the region.

To help guide decision making in watershed planning and project selection, the Common Ground plan includes a set of Project Evaluation Criteria (Appendix F), developed to help the agencies determine “regionally significant” park, trail, and restoration projects. The Los Angeles River Greenway scores highly as a project in the following categories: Trail Resource Value, Urban Resource Value, Access Value, Partnership Value, Scenic Resource Value, and Other Recreational Resource Value. Specifically, the Greenway is a significant, irreplaceable link in a major trail along the Los Angeles River and is a significant contribution to that corridor. The Greenway’s location in an urban community makes it easily accessible. The site is of significance to one or more partner government agencies, including the County of Los Angeles and the City of Los Angeles. The entire length of the trail offers viewshed of a major public use area, the Los Angeles River, and provides multiple opportunities for smaller-scale recreational amenities. The project also has good economic value because unlike single-purpose public agencies (*e.g.* Flood Control, Sanitation, Recreation and Parks) RRC can consider and incorporate economic development measures into their projects.

Based upon its high scores in the selection criteria, as well as its consistency with the Guiding

¹A copy of the Common Ground Plan can be accessed online at http://www.rmc.ca.gov/plans/common_ground.html

²The Guiding Principles are outlined in Page 2 of the Executive Summary, or discussed with greater depth on Page 47 of the Plan.

Principles, the Los Angeles River Greenway Project is consistent with the Common Ground Plan as required by Section 79508 of the Water Code.

III. Analysis - General Obligation Bond Law

The General Obligation Bond Law provides that bond funds may be used for the construction and acquisition of "capital assets." Capital assets include major maintenance, reconstruction, demolition for purposes of reconstruction of facilities, and retrofitting work that is ordinarily done no more often than once every 5 to 15 years or expenditures that continue or enhance the useful life of the capital asset (Government code Section 16727 (a)). Capital assets also includes equipment with an expected useful life of two years or more. Section 16727 (a) also allows bond funds to be used for costs that are incidentally but directly related to construction including costs for planning, engineering and other design work.

This project is for the development, preservation, protection and restoration of a capital asset, that is, a land and water resource in the Los Angeles River watershed. As such, it is a proper expenditure of bond funds. In addition, the activities that this grant will fund will enhance the useful life of the facilities and on that basis as well qualify as capital assets for purposes of the General Obligation Bond Law.