

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
October 23, 2003

LIVING CLASSROOM PROJECT: EDUCATION AND INTERPRETIVE CENTER

File No. 03-112
Project Manager: Patrycja Bossak

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$400,000 to Literacy for Environmental Justice to construct a greenhouse classroom that is a model for ecological design, sustainable energy technology, and self-contained wastewater treatment. The facility will be the second environmental education center in San Francisco.

LOCATION: Heron's Head Park in Bayview–Hunters Point, City and County of San Francisco (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Location Maps

Exhibit 2: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following Resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31164 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed four hundred thousand dollars (\$400,000) to Literacy for Environmental Justice for construction of a greenhouse classroom for environmental education at Heron's Head Park in the San Francisco Bayview–Hunters Point District, subject to the condition that no Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy has reviewed and approved in writing:

1. A final work plan, including a final budget and schedule, for the project.
 2. Any contractors or subcontractors to be used.
 3. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation.
 4. An agreement with the City and County of San Francisco and San Francisco Port to protect the public interest in development constructed under the grant and allowing LEJ access for study, construction, and monitoring.
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5. Written evidence that all permits and approvals necessary for the implementation and completion of the project under applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations have been obtained.

The grantee shall ensure that a biologist instruct all excavation crews about any potential for disturbance to biological resources.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the California Public Code (Sections 31160-31164) regarding the Conservancy’s mandate to address the resource and recreation goals of the San Francisco Bay area.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. Literacy for Environmental Justice is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and subject to the Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation Law (commencing with Section 5000 of the California Corporations Code), and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization would grant up to \$400,000 to Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) to construct a greenhouse classroom that is fully powered by solar and wind energy, includes an on-site wastewater treatment system, and utilizes cutting edge sustainable design technologies. LEJ is an urban environmental education and youth empowerment nonprofit organization created specifically to address the unique ecological and social concerns of the Bayview–Hunters Point area of San Francisco. The 1,300-square foot building will be located at Heron’s Head Park and will provide LEJ a base for its existing stewardship program and for K-12 education programs funded by the Port of San Francisco; and will also be used for workshops and trainings for the public in alternative energy and design.

LEJ’s programs were recently recognized for innovative and effective education and community outreach by the Clearwater Award presented by the Waterfront Center, and the Friends of the San Francisco Estuary California Coastal Management Implementation Project. LEJ is leading the campaign to complete the construction of the building and is now seeking funds to construct the facility. The San Francisco Department of the Environment, the Port of San Francisco, and the City’s Board of Supervisors are contributing over \$1,000,000 towards the \$1,569,306 project. Additionally, the Port of San Francisco is providing LEJ with free use of the site and technical support during design, permitting, and construction; and upon completion the Port will take responsibility for building maintenance.

Site Description: The project site is at Heron’s Head Park located along the India Basin Shoreline in the Bayview–Hunters Point neighborhood of southeast San Francisco. Bayview–Hunters Point is predominantly a low-income community of color that has historically served as the site for San Francisco’s most toxic industries. Bayview–Hunters Point residents and public school

teachers often cite the lack of maintained recreational and educational facilities as a detriment to the young people growing up there. Heron's Head Park contains a restored wetland with intertidal ponds, upland areas with native vegetation, and trails, including a connection to the San Francisco Bay Trail. Heron's Head Park is home to over 74 species of birds and more than 30 endangered plant species. The Living Classroom will be constructed in the upland area near the entrance to the park (see Exhibit 1).

Project History: In 1998 the Conservancy, Port of San Francisco, and Public Utilities Commission funded the implementation of the Pier 98 Public Access and Implementation Plan for this shoreline area. The completed project dramatically changed the 25-acre peninsula by transforming a former landfill into a park with public access trails and new and enhanced wetlands. From the air, the shoreline resembles a bird's head, so the name Heron's Head Park was chosen for the site. The restored mudflats, ponds, salt marsh, and tidal channels now offer a haven for birds and other wildlife species such as snowy egrets, cormorants, brown pelicans, mud crabs, and herons.

Since its creation, Heron's Head Park has become a training ground to school children from Bayview-Hunters Point, Potrero Hill, and the Outer Mission. LEJ has been a pioneer in designing and organizing educational programs created specifically to address the unique ecological and social concerns of Bayview-Hunters Point. Since July 2000, the Port of San Francisco has contracted LEJ to conduct all of the K-12 education programs at the park. To fulfill and expand its mission LEJ needs a base to host its stewardship programs and workshops. The proposed Living Classroom will be a self-sustained greenhouse used as an educational model for alternative energy systems and environmental design.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$ 400,000
San Francisco Department of the Environment	897,000
Port of San Francisco	100,000
S.F. Board of Supervisors	25,000
Community Donors	3,800
Solidago Foundation	<u>1,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$1,569,306

It is anticipated that the Conservancy's funding will come from the FY 03/04 "Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002" (Prop. 50) appropriation for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program and will constitute a portion of the funds to be used for grants for development of facilities to promote participation in the conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31164. Implementation of the project is consistent with §31162(a), which states that the Conservancy may award grants to assist and enhance projects that improve public access around the bay and urban open spaces through trails and the provision of related facilities such as interpretive centers.

The proposed project is consistent with §31119(a), which states that the Conservancy may undertake and fund educational projects relating to the preservation, protection and enhancement of coastal resources. The project is also consistent with §31163(d) in the following respects: 1) the project implements the City of San Francisco's 2002 Redevelopment Plan; 2) the project will serve a regional and urban population; 3) work can be implemented in a timely way; and 4) matching funds have been committed by the San Francisco Department of the Environment, the Port of San Francisco, S.F. Board of Supervisors, Solidago Foundation, and other donors.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL (S) & OBJECTIVE (S):

Consistent with **Goal #11 Objective A**, the project will improve public access to urban open spaces, and provide education facilities for urban population.

Consistent with **Goal #11 Objective D**, the facility will be wheelchair accessible and fulfill other ADA compliance elements.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support from the public:** This project has support from the City and County of San Francisco, the Mayor's Office, City Supervisors, State Legislators Leland Yee and Mark Leno, and the Port of San Francisco. See Exhibit 2 for letters of support.
4. **Location:** San Francisco City and County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** The proposed project is an essential part of the City's of San Francisco's 2002 Redevelopment Plan. Literacy for Environmental Justice has completed or nearly completed pre-construction requirements like building design and permits. The Conservancy funds are needed to fill in the gap of the construction costs.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** When completed, the Living Classroom Project will be an inspiring educational model of conservation practices and sustainability, providing a new destination in Heron's Head Park for local schools, community members and national visitors.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** Timing is of the essence; if Literacy for Environmental Justice does not obtain the funds, the project will not be completed. Conservancy funding at this time will ensure that all construction will be completed in time.
9. **Leverage:** Bay Area Conservancy Program funds (\$400,000) will leverage several other funds listed under the Project Funding.
10. **Innovation:** The Living Classroom Project will utilize the most cutting-edge technologies in sustainable design and alternative energy sources as a model for resource conservation.
12. **Readiness:** The project is pending and ready to proceed.
15. **Cooperation:** Literacy for Environmental Justice, the County and City of San Francisco, the Port of San Francisco, and California Conservation Corps have secured monetary and staff cooperation.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL PLANS:

The project is consistent with the City of San Francisco's 2002 Redevelopment Plan in that it will:

- provide a building for community programs
- strengthen collaboration between community organizations by providing meeting space and public programs
- address environmental concerns through education
- provide structured recreational and educational opportunities.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

In November 1997, the City and County of San Francisco issued a Negative Declaration under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for creation of Heron's Head Park on the north side of India Basin. The park was completed in 1999. In 2002, the City analyzed, in an uncirculated "Addendum" to the Negative Declaration for the park, the greenhouse classroom that is the subject of this staff recommendation. The City concluded that the classroom would not have an adverse effect on the environment, but included a requirement that a biologist instruct all excavation crews about the potential for disturbance to biological resources.

Conservancy staff believes that, under CEQA, the greenhouse classroom constitutes a new project. Staff further believes that the project is exempt from CEQA under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15304, which exempts new construction of small structures with certain maximum sizes. The size of the classroom is smaller than the maximums listed as examples. The proposed Conservancy resolution adopts the requirement that a biologist instruct all excavation crews about the potential for disturbance to biological resources. Upon the Conservancy's approval of the project, the staff will file a Notice of Exemption.