

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
April 24, 2008

REDWOOD SHORES COMMUNITY LIBRARY INTERPERTIVE CENTER

File No. 08-005
Project Manager: Michelle Jespersen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to the City of Redwood City for final design, fabrication, and installation of exhibits for the Redwood Shores Community Library Interpretive Center on Belmont Slough in San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Redwood Shores, Redwood City, San Mateo County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Interpretive Center Exhibits Overview

Exhibit 3: Photographs of Project Site

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to the City of Redwood City for final design, fabrication, and installation of exhibits for the Redwood Shores Community Library Interpretive Center on Belmont Slough in San Mateo County. This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of funds, the City of Redwood City shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer for the Conservancy, a detailed work program, budget, schedule and sign plan, and the names and qualifications of any subcontractors that it intends to employ. ”

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 Redwood Shores Community Library Interpretive Center project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
 2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff requests authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to the City of Redwood City for final design, fabrication, and installation of exhibits for an Interpretive Center within a new community library located along Belmont Slough in San Mateo County (Exhibit 1). Redwood City will complete construction of the library in September 2008. The 540 square foot Interpretive Center portion of the new library will focus on the natural history of the southern San Francisco Bay through a series of interconnected hands-on exhibits. The exhibits are designed to highlight aspects of three natural habitats of the southern San Francisco Bay: *Life in the Mud*, *Life in the Water* and *Life in the Air*. Each habitat type in the exhibit will include explanatory graphic rails and panels focused on resident species and biological concepts such as food webs, camouflage, and physical adaptations (Exhibit 2).

In *Life in the Mud*, visitors will be able to walk or crawl through a mud model, use a touch screen computer to magnify living specimens and non-living items found in the Bay mud, and learn about the tidal cycles of the mud floor and adjacent wetlands. *Life in the Water* will have a 300-gallon aquarium containing typical local fish, invertebrates, and plants representing the southern Bay ecosystem. *Life in the Air* invites visitors to discover birds of the south Bay through window railing and outdoor exhibits on the deck. An interactive build-a-bird exhibit will allow visitors to match the legs, torso and head of different birds that are suited to different habitats based on their adaptations. Finally, the Center will include an interactive map that will enable visitors to locate their home in the context of the watersheds of the San Francisco Bay.

The intent of the Interpretive Center is to provide education and activities for people of all ages and abilities. The Interpretive Center’s customized illustrations, photos, and themes will be developed using information provided and validated by local educators and scientists, including staff from the Marine Science Institute, a hands-on environmental education organization that provides “floating” classroom programs aboard the *R/V Robert G. Brownlee* to students throughout the Bay Area. In addition to the permanent exhibit, the Interpretive Center will include special environmental programs that will educate visitors on the Bay wetlands, open water habitats, and upland areas of San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Alameda Counties. The library will also offer numerous weekly and monthly programs, including a monthly program hosted by the Marine Science Institute with story telling using live marine animals. The library also has Memorandum of Agreements with Belmont Shores and Sequoia Union High School Districts, bringing students to the library and Interpretive Center for school programs. Library staff envisions that this programming will eventually expand to include other schools in San Mateo County.

The new 22,558 square foot library building is shaped to follow the curve of Belmont Slough and includes 3,186 square feet of outdoor deck space oriented toward Belmont Slough (Exhibit

3). The San Francisco Bay Trail follows Belmont Slough on the backside of the library building and approximately 1,415 square feet of new pathways leading from the Bay Trail to the library building will draw in Bay Trail users. In addition to the exhibits inside the Interpretive Center, outdoor panel displays on the deck outside the Interpretive Center portion of the Library and along the pathways leading to the Bay Trail will inform the public about the Bay ecosystem and wetland resources. As a result, the location of the library and Interpretive Center along the Bay Trail will increase public access to the environmental education opportunities and programs, as well as encourage library users to walk the Bay Trail.

While the Interpretive Center will be the “hub” of the library as a centrally located feature of the lobby, other building elements include a café, changeable library informational carousels, and 7,000 square feet of community spaces with multipurpose and study rooms. The building itself also incorporates numerous “green building” elements such as the use of natural lighting, interior and exterior materials with high levels of recycled content, and water efficient plumbing fixtures. The building will also comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

The City of Redwood City conducted an inclusive, public participatory process for the development of the library and final design which included the Interpretive Center. The City has secured most of the \$18.74 million in funding for the entire library facility through grants from the State of California Office of Library Construction as well as local funds from the Redwood City General Improvement District and Capital Improvement Program. The City is ahead of schedule for construction of the library facility; upon completion, the City is committed to raising the additional funds needed to secure the library collections, and complete the design, fabrication, and installation of the Interpretive Center exhibits.

Site Description:

Redwood Shores, a community of Redwood City, is a 1500-acre peninsula that juts into San Francisco Bay east of Hwy 101, between Foster City and the Bair Islands, approximately 25 miles south of San Francisco (see Exhibit 1). On its northwest flank is Belmont Slough; Steinberger Slough is located southeast of the area. Marshlands that are part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge occur along the northeast portion of the peninsula. Redwood Shores consists of a series of planned residential communities with a population of about 15,000, shopping centers, and a growing number of high-tech companies in large office complexes. Artificial lagoons and channels run through the center of the peninsula, while sloughs and marshes surround it.

The Bay Trail through Redwood Shores leads over a wide variety of surfaces, from paved bike paths on the side of busy roads to rough, narrow single-track dirt paths along the marshlands and sloughs. The trail can be taken as a loop trip around the Redwood Shores peninsula. From the northwest end of the trail, the Bay Trail can be taken further north into Foster City. From there, it runs nearly uninterrupted along the Bay all the way from San Mateo to Millbrae.

The Redwood Shores Community Library Interpretive Center can be accessed from Highway 101 at the Holly Street/Redwood Shores Parkway off-ramp, near the San Carlos County Airport. A new Samtrans bus stop at the corner of Marine and Bridge Parkways will provide public transportation opportunities from Redwood Shores neighborhoods, downtown Redwood City, and connections to other regional transportation facilities such as Cal Train. A parking lot, with several spaces reserved for trail access, will also serve those who drive to this destination.

Project History:

The Conservancy has previously provided funding to support the development of the Bay Trail, a portion of which is located immediately adjacent to the new library. Pathways from the Interpretive Center will connect to the Bay Trail. This proposed project will build on past Conservancy investments by greatly expanding the opportunities for public education about the San Francisco Bay, Belmont Slough, and other wetland resources in the area.

The Interpretive Center is also in within reasonable proximity to the Bair Island property of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge where Conservancy funding has supported long-term habitat restoration. Bair Island is a similar habitat to Belmont Slough and will be interpreted at the new Interpretive Center.

PROJECT FINANCING:

(Interpretive Center Only)

Coastal Conservancy	\$150,000
PG&E (pending approval)	15,000
Moore Foundation (pending approval)	25,000
Federally Funded Library Services and Technology Act (pending approval)	100,000
Other Sources	<u>2,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$292,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds is the “Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Fund of 2002” (Proposition 50), which allocates some Conservancy funds specifically for “the acquisition and development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water and wildlife resources.” Eligible projects include training and research facilities for watershed protection and water conservation including “nature centers that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands.” Consistent with the purposes of Proposition 50, the proposed project is located adjacent to the wetlands associated with Belmont Slough and will provide for the interpretation of wetland resources of south San Francisco Bay. The indoor exhibits and outdoor displays along pathways leading to the Bay Trial will also provide for wildlife viewing and outdoor experiences, along with the conservation education programs for the public and students.

The Library Services Technology Act is a Federal grant program administered by the California State Librarian that supports innovative library services technology development, services for underserved populations, library networking and resource sharing.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Section 31160-31165, to address resource and recreation goals in the San Francisco Bay Area. In particular, the Conservancy may award grants that serve to achieve goals identified in Section 31162. This project achieves the goal of improving public access to the Bay through the provision of facilities such as interpretive centers and staging areas (Section 31162(a)); The proposed project also assists in the implementation of the adopted plans of local

governments and special districts (Section 31162(c); specifically, the City of Redwood City's General Plan (1990) identifies future needs for Redwood Shores including a library and "ways to draw other residents of Redwood City to the Shores for recreation." The Redwood City Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan (1989) also identifies the need to develop facilities at Redwood Shores including a community center for programs, library, and meeting rooms. The proposed project also meets multiple objectives of the Redwood City Public Library Strategic Plan (1989). Finally, to the extent that the pathways from the Interpretive Center to the Bay Trail will draw visitors to and from Belmont Slough, the proposed project will promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes (Section 31162(d)).

This project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) in that: (1) it is supported by adopted local or regional plans, as explained above; (2) it includes multi-jurisdictional participation from, state, county, and city agencies, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and serves a regional constituency from the south San Francisco Bay and beyond; (3) it can be implemented in a timely way because of the support from all jurisdictions and the planning that has already been completed; and (4) includes matching funds from other sources as described under "Project Financing" above.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective B** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the Redwood Shores Community Library Interpretive Center project will implement a project that provides interpretive signs for an interpretive center about the San Francisco Bay ecosystem and wetland resources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, 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 of the public:** The project is supported by the Redwood City Library Foundation as well as local environmental organizations such as Marine Science Institute and Sequoia Audubon Society. The project also has support from State Senate Member Joe Simitian and Assembly Member Ira Ruskin. See Letters of Support, Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The project is located within the nine county Bay Area, along Belmont Slough and immediately adjacent to the Bay Trail and San Francisco Bay in San Mateo County.

5. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, the opportunity to procure the exhibits which are critical to an interpretive center along the Bay Trail will be lost.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Interpretive Center exhibits will highlight San Francisco Bay habitats and wetland resources from San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Alameda Counties. The location of the Bay Trail behind the library building will draw regional visitors from throughout the Bay Area. Finally, the Redwood Shore Community Library has formal agreements with organizations like the Marine Science Institute and Sequoia Audubon Society, Belmont Shores and Sequoia Union High School and is pursuing a partnership with the Save San Francisco Bay Association (Save the Bay) to attract visitors from throughout the Bay Area for environmental education programming, to highlight wetland restoration work going on through the Bay, and to create a volunteer docent program for the Interpretive Center.

Additional Criteria

7. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
8. **Innovation:** This project offers a unique opportunity to combine environmental education at the Interpretive Center in conjunction with a community library. Other nature centers in the South Bay such as Don Edwards San Francisco Bay Headquarters and Education Center, the Coyote Point Museum for Environmental Education, or the Baylands Nature Preserve Interpretive Center offer environmental education programs and informal interpretive activities but do not have an associated library to enhance education and additional research that visitors may want to pursue after seeing the exhibits.
9. **Readiness:** Construction of the library is ahead of schedule and nearing completion. The grantee expects to begin image acquisition and graphic production for the Interpretive Center exhibits in April with completion and grand opening of the facility in September 2008.
10. **Cooperation:** The City of Redwood City has agreements with Marine Science Institute and Sequoia Audubon Society to support formal and informal education programs for people of all ages at the library and Interpretive Center. Both organizations are providing guidance and assistance in development of the environmental education text for the Interpretive Center exhibits. In addition, Belmont Shores and Sequoia Union High School Districts have Memorandums of Understanding with the Library for school programs.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Conservancy funding will help the City purchase exhibits and displays for the Interpretive Center and is exempt under CEQA because it does not constitute a project as defined under CEQA: it will not lead to direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. 14 Cal. Code of Regulations §§15061(b)(3), 15378. Staff will file a “Notice of Exemption” upon Conservancy approval of the project.