

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 2, 2010

**MONTEREY BAY NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY EXPLORATION CENTER  
INTERPRETIVE DISPLAY CONSTRUCTION**

Project No. 10-036-01  
Project Manager: Kate Goodnight

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$500,000 to the City of Santa Cruz for the construction of interpretive exhibits within the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center.

**LOCATION:** City of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Urban Waterfront Restoration

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Conceptual drawings of interpretive exhibits](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31300-31316 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) to the City of Santa Cruz for the construction of interpretive exhibits within the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds for construction, the City shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
  - a. A work program, including project schedule and budget, and the names of any contractors and/or subcontractors to be employed on the project; and
  - b. Evidence that all permits and approvals necessary to implement the project have been obtained.
2. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining at the project site a sign or signs, the design, placement and duration of which shall be approved by the Executive Officer.

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3. The project shall be maintained in operable condition for a period of no less than 20 years.”

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 current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
  2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 7 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding restoration of urban waterfronts.”
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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize up to \$500,000 to the City of Santa Cruz for the construction of interpretive exhibits within the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center.

The City of Santa Cruz, in a public-private partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) and the private nonprofit National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, is building the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center, a highly anticipated new nature education facility for the community and its visitors. The interactive exhibits in this 12,333-square-foot facility will introduce visitors to the Sanctuary, its significance, the importance of watersheds, and the role people have in protecting the ocean.

Located next to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk and Wharf, not far from downtown, this part of the City draws over 4 million people per year from the very diverse regions of California’s Bay Area and Central Valley, as well as many tourists from other states and countries. It is estimated the bilingual Exploration Center, which will be open to the public free-of-charge, will attract over 200,000 people per year, including many from California’s growing Latino population.

The proposed project will fund part of the interpretive exhibits located within six galleries: Introduction to the Sanctuary, Watersheds, Geology, Exploration Theater, Biodiversity (Intertidal Touchpool, Kelp Forest, Submarine Canyon), and This is Your Sanctuary (see Exhibit 2). These unique, hands-on exhibits will illustrate the importance of our land and ocean resources, demonstrate how we are all connected with the ocean, explain the challenges in maintaining these vital resources, and provide solutions for visitors to take action. The Center will also feature a state-of-the-art classroom, a small theater, administrative offices, a gift shop, and views of the Sanctuary. The exhibits in the galleries include interactive video kiosks and a live underwater feed to the theater from the Sanctuary, providing real-time views of the ocean floor and marine life within the Sanctuary.

The Center will be a model for sustainable, environmentally sensitive design, construction, and operation—a primary goal of both the NMSP and the City of Santa Cruz. This type of construction helps create healthier and more comfortable indoor environments and more livable cities, while minimizing adverse impacts on the natural systems that support life on land and in the ocean. The Center will demonstrate a variety of strategies to achieve these goals, using the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria, and is expected to achieve, at the minimum, Silver certification. In addition, the building will be ADA-accessible.

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The City of Santa Cruz has been the recipient of many Conservancy grants awards over the last 20 years, particularly related to watershed restoration, urban waterfront restoration, and public access. They have demonstrated their ability to manage grants and projects effectively.

**Site Description:** The Exploration Center will be situated just a few hundred feet from the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary in the City of Santa Cruz. Stretching along California's Central Coast from Marin to San Luis Obispo County, the Sanctuary encompasses more than 5,300 square miles of ocean with more than 275 miles of shoreline and is one of the largest protected areas in the world. Supporting one of the world's most diverse marine ecosystems, it is home to thousands of species including mammals, seabirds, fishes, invertebrates, and plants, as well as 150 documented shipwrecks.

Located at the corner of Pacific Avenue and Beach Street, the Center will occupy the 0.70 acre site formerly known as the Fun Spot. It is adjacent to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk and Wharf, Depot Park, the Coastal Trail, and just a few blocks from the Downtown area (see Exhibit 1). With over four million visitors a year, this is a very active section of Santa Cruz with heavy vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic moving to and from key attractions along the water's edge. A key feature of the site is the Howe Truss Bridge, which borders the property to the west. The bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 as part of Caltrans' study of historic bridges in California and views of the structure must be protected.

The site provides a perfect venue for interpreting watersheds and human impacts on water quality within the Sanctuary. The site is in the vicinity of Neary Lagoon and the mouth of the San Lorenzo River. Roaring Camp Railroad utilizes an active rail line bisecting the site and carries passengers up and down the San Lorenzo Valley watershed.

The Exploration Center will be built on a previously developed, paved site owned by the City of Santa Cruz and leased to the NMSP. It is within a quarter mile of bus lines and along existing bike trails, which will provide easy access and preserve open space while minimizing site disturbance. The building will be an architecturally distinct, two-story building with a gently rounded roofline, a highly visible interior, and second-floor views to the ocean (see Exhibit 2).

**Project History:** In 1992, the federal government established the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) for the purpose of research, education, and protection of the natural and cultural resources found within this national treasure.

In 1998, the Santa Cruz City Council adopted the Beach and South of Laurel (B/SOL) Comprehensive Area Plan, which was incorporated into the City's General Plan as well as its Local Coastal Plan. One of the central components of this plan was the creation of the Sanctuary visitor center to enhance the area for tourists.

Currently, there is no central physical location for information on the Sanctuary. After studying 23 locations along the Central Coast for the best place to situate a visitor center focusing on Monterey Bay and the Sanctuary, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF) selected the City's 0.70 acre Fun Spot property in the Santa Cruz Beach area as the most appropriate.

On January 11, 2005 the City Council adopted a resolution authorizing and directing the City Manager to execute a Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Santa Cruz and NOAA to provide for the design and development of the MBNMS Exploration Center. Since that time, the

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City’s Economic Development and Redevelopment Department has served a lead project management role with respect to the design, permitting and construction of the Exploration Center on behalf of NOAA. In addition, the Department has worked collaboratively over the last several years with NOAA and the NMSF to secure project funding.

The funds for building construction have been obtained and a groundbreaking ceremony was held on July 12, 2010. The Exploration Center is anticipated to be complete by December 2011.

This project builds on a \$3,000,000 Conservancy grant awarded to the City in 2003 as part of the \$10.8 million dollar Depot Park project to purchase and redevelop the site adjacent to the Exploration Center into a coastal-related park featuring pedestrian and bicycle paths, open space, reconstructed historic buildings, athletic fields, a multi-modal transportation center, and beach parking for about 200 cars.

Taken together with the Santa Cruz Wharf, Boardwalk and Coastal Trail (see Exhibit 1), these two projects help revitalize the area and to connect the Downtown area with the coast. The Exploration Center will be a key focal point to educate visitors about the significant resources of Monterey Bay.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

The interpretive displays are expected to cost approximately \$3,790,000. The Conservancy’s contribution would be about 13% of the total project cost.

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	\$500,000
NOAA	\$790,000
National Marine Sanctuary Foundation*	<u>\$2,500,000</u>
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	\$3,790,000

\*The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation has committed to raise \$2,500,000 for exhibit construction. To-date over \$1.6 million has been raised with the rest anticipated to be secured by Summer 2011.

The proposed source of Conservancy funds for this authorization is an appropriation to the Conservancy from Proposition 84, “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006.” These funds are allocated to the Conservancy for development, restoration and protection of land and water resources, and promotion of access to and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 75060(e) of the Public Resources Code specifically allocates Conservancy funding for Monterey Bay and its watersheds, which is defined in Section 75072.5 to include the Carmel River watershed.

The proposed project will help promote access to and enjoyment and protection of coastal resources by creating interpretive exhibits that educate an estimated 200,000 regional, national, and international visitors annually regarding the valuable natural, recreational, and commercial resources of Monterey Bay and what can be done to help protect them.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 7 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, related to the restoration of urban waterfronts (California Public Resources Code Sections 31300-31316).

Section 31301 sets forth the legislative finding that California's urban waterfronts are in need of restoration in order to remain a vital economic and cultural component of the community and establishes the promotion of urban waterfronts, including visitor serving facilities that enhance tourism and public access, as the purpose of Chapter 7. The Exploration Center exhibits will enhance the quality of coastal public access at the Santa Cruz Main Beach area and will increase the public's knowledge of the natural and commercial resources of Monterey Bay.

Section 31305 directs the Conservancy to promote excellence of design and to stimulate projects which show innovation in sensitively integrating man-made features into the natural coastal environment. As described in Exhibit 2, the interpretive displays provide a unique, interactive experience in both English and Spanish that engages visitors in the appreciation of the treasures of the marine environment as well as the threats posed by human actions and steps visitors can take to help reduce them. In addition, the building the exhibits will be housed in uses the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria for construction.

Pursuant to Section 31307, the Conservancy may award grants to public agencies for the restoration of urban coastal waterfront areas. The City of Santa Cruz is a public agency.

Pursuant to Section 31308, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any urban waterfront project. The estimated cost for construction of the exhibits is approximately \$3,790,000. The project partners have secured more than 63 percent of the project funding and expect to secure another 24 percent by Summer 2011. The Conservancy would provide the remaining 13 percent, or \$500,000, toward the project. Also consistent with this section, the level of Conservancy funding for this project has been determined through consideration of the total amount of funding available for urban waterfront projects, the financial resources of the grantee, and the relative urgency of the project.

Consistent with Section 31316, which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants for activities that facilitate environmental education including exhibits emphasizing coastal, watershed, or ocean resource education or maritime history, the project will provide an important educational opportunity for the general public, including students, low income and minority visitors, regarding the natural, recreational, and commercial resources of the ocean and what can be done to protect them.

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

The proposed project is consistent with multiple goals and objectives of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan:

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Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B**, the proposed project will enhance waterfront parks by providing an interpretive display component of the Exploration Center, which is adjacent to Depot Park, the Santa Cruz Boardwalk and Wharf, and connected to the Coastal Trail and lateral trails, drawing visitors to the coast from the Downtown area.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective E**, the proposed project will promote the goal of the Exploration Center to educate residents and visitors regarding coastal recreational opportunities.

Consistent with **Goal 3, Objective B**, with a location adjacent to the Santa Cruz Wharf and Boardwalk, the Exploration Center exhibits will encourage and promote public access to developed waterfront areas, promote excellence and innovation in urban design by serving to enhance the area using ADA-compatible, environmentally-friendly construction and by creating unique, hands-on exhibits promoting the area's natural, cultural and commercial resources.

Consistent with **Goal 3, Objective C**, as described in the Project Summary, the proposed project will implement interpretive display exhibits emphasizing coastal, watershed, and ocean-resource education, maritime history, and climate-change impacts.

Consistent with **Goal 3, Objective D**, the interpretive exhibits will allow the public to learn more about environmental issues affecting the coast and inland watersheds, including climate change and human impacts on coastal 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 June 4, 2009, 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:** In addition to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the National Sanctuary Foundation, and the City of Santa Cruz, the project has won support from the City of Monterey, the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a number of elected officials including Senators Barbara Boxer and Diane Feinstein, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, Congressman Sam Farr, State Senator Joseph Simitian, Assemblyman Bill Monning, County Treasurer and former Assemblyman Fred Keeley, and former Secretary of State and State Senator Bruce McPherson.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the City of Santa Cruz.
5. **Need:** Currently, there is no central physical location for information on the Sanctuary. The City and Sanctuary partnership has already raised all funds needed for building construction. The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation has committed to raise \$2.5 million of the \$3,790,000 cost for construction of the exhibits and has secured over \$1.6 million of that. Funding from the Conservancy is essential to help close the remaining funding gap.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Situated in a coastal location attracting over 4 million regional, national, and international visitors a year, the Exploration Center exhibits will offer important information regarding the natural, cultural, and commercial resources of Monterey Bay, the threats of human impacts, and how people can be better stewards of the land and ocean.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Conservancy funds are being used for the construction of exhibits that the City will be required to maintain for 20 years. The anticipated useful life of the project is shorter than the time horizons of 2050 and 2100 set forth in this criterion regarding vulnerability to sea level rise.

**Additional Criteria**

8. **Urgency:** Without funding from the Conservancy, there would be at least a delay in providing the proposed exhibit displays for the project and, at worst, a significant delay in project completion while funding for the exhibits was solicited. Manufacturing and installing the exhibits after the building construction is completed could add to the total cost and further delay the project.
10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Innovation:** The Exploration Center exhibits have many innovative features (see Exhibit 2), including their unique, interactive approach to engage visitors and the use of bilingual interpretation. Additionally, the building housing the exhibits will be environmentally-friendly and LEED--certified.
13. **Readiness:** Construction of the building is already underway. Exhibits will be constructed at a separate location in parallel with building construction until they are ready for installation.
14. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
16. **Cooperation:** The project realization is being accomplished by a partnership of the City of Santa Cruz, NOAA’s National Marine Sanctuary Program, and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. In addition, many schools and non-profits will participate in the Center.
17. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The City is preparing a Climate Adaptation Plan in conjunction with the University of California Santa Cruz. Regional predictions and trends include increases in temperature extremes inland, increases in wildfires, and increased severity of storms. As the site is on the coast, increases in temperature extremes would not be significant since the coastal location would mitigate such extremes. While wildfires may be a problem on the urban/wilderness border areas, this site is within an urbanized area and would not be vulnerable to wildfires. Increased storm severity may affect the site; however, the building design is anticipated to withstand current storm severity predictions. In addition, the site is somewhat protected by the topography of the area, with significantly higher ground to the northwest, from which direction the most severe storm systems are anticipated to come. This would protect the site from the worst of the severe storm impacts. Should it prove necessary in the future, the building would be modified to provide additional protection from the elements.
18. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The project’s estimated contribution to greenhouse gas emissions was not calculated and is presumed minimal for the construction of

the exhibits; however, in considering the sustainable design of both the Center and the exhibits, the City and NOAA focused on using the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria. NOAA and the City of Santa Cruz both have initiatives to build green facilities. As a result, the Center will be a model for sustainable, environmentally-sensitive design, construction, and operation and is anticipated to achieve a minimum Silver LEED certification.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Beach/South of Laurel (B/SOL) Area Plan, which is incorporated into the City's General Plan as well as its Local Coastal Plan. Section B, Goal 2 discusses the need for a healthy year-round tourist industry to grow local businesses and provide more jobs. The Sanctuary visitor center is specifically listed in this section as an amenity that will greatly enhance the area's attraction to tourists. The City's Zoning Administration also reviewed the project for consistency with the City's Local Coastal Land Use Plan on March 5, 2008, and found to be consistent with the plan by the Coastal Commission as part of the Coastal Development Permit process.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The construction and installation of display exhibits is categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15301(a) in that these actions involve only interior alterations that will have no impact on the environment.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.