

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
January 23, 2014

DEL MAR SHORES STAIRWAY REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Project No. 13-034-01
Ariadne Reynolds

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$200,000 to the City of Solana Beach to reconstruct the Del Mar Shores beach access stairway at the southern end of the City of Solana Beach in San Diego County.

LOCATION: Del Mar Shores, City of Solana Beach, San Diego County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to sections 31400 - 31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$200,000 to the City of Solana Beach to reconstruct the existing stairway that provides public access to the beach at Del Mar Shores, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, the grantee shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. A work program, budget, schedule for the project
 - b. The names of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project
 - c. A signage plan including acknowledgment of Conservancy participation, and designation of the project as a segment of the California Coastal Trail system.
2. The grantee shall provide evidence that all permits and approvals necessary to the completion of the project have been obtained.

3. The grantee shall enter into an agreement with the Conservancy sufficient to protect the public interest and provide for maintenance of the access project.
4. The grantee shall implement the special conditions identified in Coastal Development Permit #6-10-037 in development and construction of the stairway.

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 authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The proposed project serves greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$200,000 to the City of Solana Beach to reconstruct the Del Mar Shores beach access stairway which provides public access to the beach at the southern end of the City of Solana Beach. The Del Mar Shores Stairway is one of only four beach access points in the City of Solana Beach. The entire city is lined with coastal bluffs, with an average height of 70 feet, limiting beach access to points where stairways or ramps have been built for public access. Because the Del Mar Shores Stairway is currently closed, public access points are now limited to two publicly-owned stairways and one concrete ramp.

The original Del Mar Shores stairs were built in the 1970s and served as a major coastal accessway until 2012. On November 13 2012, the City’s structural engineer determined that the condition of the stairs did not meet the minimum building code requirements for public use because of severe deterioration. The stairs have been closed since the determination to ensure the public’s safety. The City of Solana Beach has been raising funds to replace the stairway since its closure.

The City has already completed the engineering and design work to reconstruct the stairway. The new stairway will be constructed out of wood timbers for the steps and colored concrete for the columns and stair supports. In order to minimize potential effects on the surrounding coastal bluffs, the lower portion of the existing 16-inch diameter concrete columns and piles will remain in place. Since the new stairway will be built along the alignment of an existing stairway, no new disturbances along the bluffs will be created.

All concrete used will be colored to match the surrounding bluffs. The replacement stairway system will be built entirely within the existing easement owned by the City of Solana Beach, except for the portion where the stairs meet the beach on lands under the jurisdiction of the California State Lands Commission. The State Lands Commission was notified of the project and has determined that no further authorization is needed in order to proceed. The City of

Solana Beach has already received approval for a Coastal Development Permit from the California Coastal Commission, which will be issued once the special conditions relating to construction specifications have been met.

The project will also include construction of a lifeguard observation station situated on the second landing of the new stairs. A lifeguard station at this site will provide lifeguards with unobstructed views of the beach and water along the entire stretch of the beach for public safety purposes.

Site Description: The Del Mar Shores access stairway is located at the southern end of the City of Solana Beach, in San Diego County. Access to the stairway is from a public access point that originates on Del Mar Shores Terrace road. There are two small public parking lots nearby at the intersection of Del Mar Shores Terrace and South Sierra Avenue, and free street parking on South Sierra and Del Mar Shores Terrace. The access point is clearly visible from the main road and the Del Mar Shores stairway is listed as a main beach accessway on the City of Solana Beach’s website. The stairway is also listed as an access point to the California Coastal Trail on Coastwalk California’s website.¹

Project History: The City of Solana Beach submitted a grant application to the Coastal Conservancy for the replacement of the stairway in 2008. At that time, the stairway was in disrepair but still functional and safe for use. The application was not deemed a high priority at the time, and was denied funding. Since 2008, the condition of the stairway has deteriorated such that those maintenance efforts could no longer keep the stairs in a usable condition. This resulted in the City determining that the stairs were no longer safe and the closure of the stairs to the public in November 2012. In addition, the City has since raised significant matching funds to repair the stairway.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$200,000
City of Solana Beach	\$1,300,000
Project Total	\$1,500,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds will be the fiscal year 09/10 appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (“Proposition 84”). This funding may be expended, in accordance with the Conservancy’s enabling statutes, “for the protection of San Diego Bay and adjacent watersheds” as specified in section 75060(f) of the Public Resources Code. “San Diego Bay and adjacent watersheds” includes all coastal and bay watersheds within San Diego County (*Id.* § 75072.6). In addition, Proposition 84 funds may be used to “promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state” in accordance with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (*Id.* § 75060 (b)). This project is located in a watershed adjacent to San Diego Bay and will restore public

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http://californiacoastaltrail.info/hikers/hikers_main.php?DisplayAction=DisplaySection&CountyId=20&SectionId=423.

access to the coast in the City of Solana Beach. As discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400 *et seq.*) relating to the provision of public access to the coast. Section 31400 of the Code states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for development of accessways to and along the coast that serve more than local public needs. Consistent with this section, the proposed access improvements will support access to Del Mar Shores Beach that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors from throughout the region, the state and beyond.

Section 31400.2 requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for an access project. Consistent with this section, the proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal access projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, and the Conservancy’s project selection criteria (see Consistency with Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines, below).

The project is also consistent with section 31400.3, which allows the Conservancy to “provide assistance as is required to aid public agencies in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division.” The proposed project will further these goals by improving and enhancing public access in a heavily-visited coastal region as part of a regional, comprehensive public access plan. The proposed project is consistent with the City of Solana Beach Local Coastal Program as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

The project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development as follows:

Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources: The project will be designed and located to minimize impact to coastal resources. The stairway will minimize alteration of natural landforms, be subordinate to the setting’s character, and prevent unwarranted hazards to the land and public safety.

Standard No. 3, Access Easements: Construction and Location: The accessway will be constructed on an existing, established right of way to the beach and will use the minimum footprint necessary to construct a safe and accessible trail to the beach. Due to the high and steep cliff at this access site, wheelchair access is not feasible.

Standard No. 7, Vertical Accessways: Construction and Location: This project will utilize a stairway to re-open an otherwise inaccessible vertical accessway to the beach below.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will promote use of the California Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective F** of the Strategic Plan, the proposed project will improve support facilities at an existing coastal accessway.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B** of the Strategic Plan, the proposed project will open a coastal area that is currently inaccessible or closed to public use.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Strategic Plan, the project will fund reconstruction of dilapidated and unsafe facilities to increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities.

**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 November 10, 2011, 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 will reinstate public access to the beach and build a lifeguard station for public safety purposes. See Exhibit 3 for letters in support of the project.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the City of Solana Beach, San Diego County.
5. **Need:** The proposed project will not occur without Conservancy participation to fund the remaining costs of stair construction.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The City of Solana Beach is a destination for hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the State of California and beyond. Annual beach attendance for the City is estimated to be 124,000 people per year. Public access to the coastline supports a major part of this tourist industry in the City of Solana Beach and the four stairways providing beach access serve both visitors and residents alike.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed beach access stairway is designed to accommodate for fluctuating sand and sea levels, since the stairs will be exposed to hazards from waves, bluff retreat, and erosion. The columns constructed to support the bluffs will be secured to the bedrock formation. By doing so, the stairway will be able to withstand rising sea levels and the erosion of the bluffs.

The lower landing of the new stairs is to be considered “ephemeral” per Coastal Development Permit No. #6-10-037, and thus will not qualify for shoreline protection. Due to this special condition, the lower landing is expected to need repairs every 20 years. This landing will be constructed so that if damaged by erosion or rising sea levels, the landing can easily be repaired or replaced. The expected lifespan of the remaining stair construction is 60 years.

Additional Criteria

- 8. **Urgency:** There is a pressing need to repair the stairway, as it is presently closed due to unsafe conditions and is one of only four beach access points in the City of Solana Beach.
- 10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
- 13. **Readiness:** The City of Solana Beach is ready to begin construction in January 2014.
- 18. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** Although this project is not expected to create significant amounts of greenhouse gas emissions, the city has taken several steps to lower or reduce any GHG emissions to the greatest extent possible. Best management practices will be incorporated into the project specifications that cover the Pre-Project Planning and Project Selection Category, the Construction Activities Category, and the Water Conservation Category.

In the Construction Activities Category, specific language will be incorporated into the project tasks that encourage the reduction of unnecessary idling of equipment, the use of an electric generator instead of a gas generator, and regular equipment and engine maintenance. In addition, as is required on all city projects, the contractor will be required to prepare a Construction and Demolition Waste Management Plan that requires a minimum of 50% diversion from the landfill of all waste generated on the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The City of Solana Beach Local Coastal Program (LCP) identifies policies relating to public access and recreation in Chapter 2. In this chapter, the LCP identifies public access to beaches and parks as a priority by stating that “[r]ecreation and access opportunities at existing public beaches and parks are protected, and where feasible, enhanced as an important coastal resource.”

In regards to maintenance and upkeep of public access ways, the LCP states, “Continued maintenance and improvement of the eight existing public access points are needed to ensure that safe access and recreational opportunities continue to be provided in the City. Maintaining multiple public access points to the coast is necessary to provide sufficient access to meet demand and to avoid over-utilization of any one access point. It is the goal of the City to promote, enhance and maintain safe public access to the beach while minimizing the physical and visual impact to bluffs from private access trails and stairways.”

The proposed project will contribute to fulfilling these goals by repairing and replacing a public stairway to the beach in the City of Solana Beach.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

On June 28, 2013, the City of Solana Beach, as the lead agency and landowner of the property, found the project to be exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15301 as replacement of an existing facility, and under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15302 as replacement and reconstruction of an existing structure. Section 15301 of the Guidelines exempts replacement of existing structures which involve negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination. The types of "existing facilities" include, as an example, existing pedestrian trails and rehabilitation of deteriorated or damaged structures to meet current standards of public health and safety.

Section 15302 exempts projects which replace or reconstruct existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced.

Staff concurs that the project is exempt under sections 15301 and 15302 because the project will reconstruct an existing stairway on the same footprint as the previous stairway, and the additional lifeguard tower will not create an additional environmental impact or add to this footprint. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption following the Conservancy's approval of the project.