

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 28, 2017

SAN DIEGO RIVER PHASE 2 INTERPRETIVE PROJECT

Project No. 14-051-02
Project Manager: Julia Elkin

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$799,845 to the San Diego River Conservancy to implement Phase 2 of the Junípero Serra Museum Interpretive Master Plan.

LOCATION: City of San Diego, San Diego County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Urban Waterfronts Program

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [2013 Junípero Serra Museum Interpretive Master Plan](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters, Resolutions](#)

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 up to seven hundred ninety-nine thousand eight hundred forty five dollars (\$799,845) to the San Diego River Conservancy to implement Phase 2 of the *Junípero Serra Museum Interpretive Plan* subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Coastal Conservancy funds, the San Diego River Conservancy shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Coastal Conservancy a work program including a detailed budget and schedule, and the names of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work.
 2. Coastal Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining at the project site or at other appropriate locations a sign or emblem, the design, placement and duration of which shall be approved by the Coastal Conservancy Executive Officer.
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Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

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

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 7 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding urban waterfront restoration.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$799,845 to the San Diego River Conservancy (SDRC) to implement Phase 2 of the *Junípero Serra Museum Interpretive Master Plan*. This project will realize the vision set forth in the *Junípero Serra Museum Interpretive Master Plan* by completing and producing exhibits that center on telling the story of contemporary San Diego through the history of its namesake river. Phase 2 project work will build on exhibit content designed and installed under Phase 1 (completed in spring 2017) and will consist of designing and installing interactive multi-media exhibits describing the cultural history of the San Diego River as well as acknowledging and honoring the indigenous peoples of San Diego by adding the Kumeyaay Nation’s flag to the existing display of flags. The goal of the project is to educate the general public about the historical, cultural and economic development of the City as it relates to the San Diego River over the past 10,000 years. The project will also provide historical context in regards to the San Diego River including resource management such as flood planning and historical preservation and the effects of development.

The Serra Museum (Museum) and Presidio Park are adjacent to the Old Town State Historic Park, which draws an estimated 7-10 million visitors per year from around the world. A portion of the Phase 2 Implementation plan is to directly link these sites via interpretive tours, community outreach and special events.

SITE DESCRIPTION:

The Junípero Serra Museum sits atop Presidio Hill, a historically significant site with commanding views of the San Diego River – from its entrance to the Pacific Ocean to headwaters in the east through Mission Valley. For thousands of years, Kumeyaay people lived at the base of Presidio Hill and used the San Diego River as their source of water and food.

On May 14, 1769 El Presidio Real de San Diego (Royal Presidio of San Diego) was established by Commandant Pedro Fages for the Spanish Empire, becoming the first permanent European settlement on the Pacific Coast of the present United States. The location was chosen in part for its view to the Pacific and its proximity to the River as the source of fresh water and food. On July 16, 1769, Mission San Diego de Alcalá was established by Father Junípero Serra at the Presidio.

With Mexican independence in 1821, the Presidio came under Mexican control and from 1825-1829 served as the Mexican Governor’s residence. The Presidio was abandoned in 1835 when settlers relocated to today’s Old Town and the adobe buildings fell into ruins. San Diego became part of the United States in 1848 following the U.S. victory in the Mexican-American War.

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In 1907, San Diego businessman and philanthropist George Marston led a movement to preserve the Presidio site. He purchased the land, created Presidio Park and in 1928 began construction of a museum to house the permanent collection of the San Diego Historical Society. Today the historical society is known as the San Diego History Center, which educates the public about San Diego's rich historical heritage. The Museum was built on Presidio Hill, right above Old Town San Diego, to commemorate the site where Franciscan Padre Junípero Serra and Captain Gaspar de Portolá had built the first Spanish settlement in Alta California in 1769.

The Museum is one of San Diego's most venerable museums. The river and estuary are easily visible from the Museum's, windows, tower and surrounding grounds. (See Exhibit 1). This makes this an exceptional site from which to tell the river's history, which originally flowed past the Museum site until rerouted in the mid-19th century. (Exhibit 2).

The Museum and surrounding land, including the sites of the Mission of San Diego de Alcalá and the Presidio, are owned by the City of San Diego and the area is known as Presidio Park (see Exhibit 1). The History Center operates the Museum on behalf of the City under a lease that has no termination date.

The grantee, SDRC, is charged with providing for the public's enjoyment, educational experience and historic interpretation of the river to assist in the protection of land and natural resources in the area. (See Exhibit 3, Resolution 17-07; Pub. Resources Code § 32633). SDRC's enabling legislation recognizes the cultural and historic connections between the San Diego River, Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, the Military Presidio, and the Kumeyaay Nation. (See Pub. Resources Code § 32631). This project will provide the public with the opportunity to appreciate the state's historic beginnings and early interactions with Native Americans as well as help implement SDRC's Strategic Plan. (Exhibit 3).

PROJECT HISTORY:

In 2010, the San Diego History Center and the San Diego River Conservancy (SDRC) began to formulate how the Junípero Serra Museum might serve as a key interpretation point to study the ecological and human history of the San Diego River over time. Through a grant from the Coastal Conservancy, SDRC and San Diego History Center produced the Junípero Serra Museum Interpretive Master Plan in 2013. The Interpretive Master Plan proposed exhibit updates to refresh and modernize the Museum—using current technologies and the San Diego History Center's archival resources to draw more public attention to the historic and cultural importance of the San Diego River and the Presidio site as well as contemporary ecological stewardship and conservation efforts in the watershed. Completing the recommendations of the Interpretive Master Plan that focus on the ecological and cultural resources of the River will help SDRC address its statutory obligations to protect and interpret cultural and historical resources of the river.

In 2015, implementation of Phase 1 of the Interpretive Plan began under a \$250,000 grant from the Coastal Conservancy on behalf of the SDRC, with work completed in the spring of 2017. Phase 1 installed interpretive panels on the north-east corner of the exterior terrace that overlooks the San Diego River and Mission Valley and established an interior "Welcome Center" to orient visitors to the role of the River and the historic nature of the Presidio site.

The goals of the Phase 2 Museum exhibits are to make the insights of historical ecology accessible to students and the general public, informing people that human culture and the

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environment are in a continuous dialogue and that this relationship between people and landscape should be viewed holistically.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$799,845
Private Donations	\$50,000
Barona Band of Mission Indians	\$5,000
Project Total	\$854,845

The expected source for the Conservancy funds for this project is fiscal year 2017/18 appropriations to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of these bond funds for the protection of San Diego Bay and adjacent watersheds consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling statute. (*See* Public Resources Code §75060(f)). Activities that protect a watershed include actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources and include interpretation of the watershed. (*Id.*, §75005(m)). The bond definition of interpretation specifically includes visitor-serving amenities that communicate the significance and value of natural, historical, and cultural resources in a way that increases the public’s understanding of these resources utilizing the expertise of a naturalist or other specialists. (*Id.* §75005(i)). The project will improve public understanding of history and enjoyment by providing expert interpretation of the river’s historic and current significance to San Diego. The project is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation as discussed below.

The San Diego History Center is securing \$50,000 in private donations and will contribute \$50,000 in in-kind services consisting of expertise and volunteer support. The Barona Band of Mission Indians has provided a support letter and \$5,000 cash donation in support of recording Kumeyaay oral histories of various tribal elders to be used on this project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 7 (§§ 31300 - 31316) of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31305 directs the Conservancy to stimulate urban waterfront projects that exhibit “innovation in sensitively integrating manmade features into the natural coastal environment.” The project will highlight and explore the role of the San Diego River in the urban environment, to enhance public understanding of the interconnectedness of urban and natural fluvial waterfront environments.

Section 31308 authorizes the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of any urban waterfront project, taking into account consideration of such factors as the fiscal resources of the applicant, the innovation used in design of the project, and other priorities discussed in the Project Selection section below. Section 31316 authorizes the Conservancy to undertake projects and award grants for activities within urban coastal watershed areas that facilitate environmental education related to these resources; this project will include exhibits that will educate the public about the significance of the San Diego River’s natural resources to the region’s cultural and economic development.

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

Consistent with **Goal 3, Objective B**, this project will enhance an historic cultural resource located on an inland, riverine waterfront.

Consistent with **Goal 9, Objective B**, this project will provide interpretive and educational displays related to coastal and watershed education.

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 October 2, 2014, 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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:**
 - *California Water Action Plan (2014): Action #1 Make Conservation a California Way of Life.* Educational exhibits produced under this project will increase awareness of past and present water uses to promote understanding and adoption of sustainable practices.
 - *Sustainable Preservation: California’s Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, 2013-2017 Goal IV: Foster a Preservation Ethic.* Interpretive signs relating to the San Diego River will “cultivate a sense of stewardship for historical and cultural resources, and the belief that these resources, and the stories they can tell, enrich our lives and our communities.”
4. **Support of the public:** SDRC and San Diego History Center received broad public support for the Interpretive Plan and work completed under Phase 1 of the project. Support for Phase 2 of the project has been expressed by Members of Congress, members (present and past) of the California State Legislature, the Kumeyaay Diegueno Land Conservancy, San Diego City and County elected officials, Old Town State Historic Park, Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, Kumeyaay Heritage Preservation Committee and the San Diego History Center’s Serra Museum Interpretive Plan Advisory Council (See Exhibit 3, Project Letters).
5. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal-draining San Diego River watershed directly overlooking the San Diego River. Phase 2 of the Serra Museum Interpretive Plan includes the overarching theme of the San Diego River, its habitat, ecology and the importance of coastal resources in San Diego history.
6. **Need:** This project will improve visitors’ experience at the Museum by providing important esthetic and educational interpretive exhibits. Funding from the Conservancy will help both the Museum and SDRC reach their respective goals for public education and outreach about the San Diego River. If funding is not received, the project will not proceed without significant private donor support.

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7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Educating the public on the history and importance of the San Diego River and the Museum site to the creation of California will serve visitors from the entire County and beyond. The San Diego River Area boasts no less than twenty-nine State Historic Landmarks, four National Historic Landmarks, three State Parks, twenty local and municipal parks and public open spaces, as well as rich cultural resources.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Serra Museum is located on a promontory at an elevation of 137 feet above sea level, and approximately 4.5 miles from the Pacific Ocean, so it is not vulnerable to sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** The authorization is time sensitive for project startup as existing matching funds includes a \$5,000 commitment from the Barona Band of Mission Indians, and another \$5000 match from another Band from the Kumeyaay Nation which could be lost if Conservancy funding is not available as match.
11. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
14. **Readiness:** The grantee is ready to implement Phase 2 of the Museum project upon securing Board approval.
15. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
17. **Cooperation:** The San Diego History Center, a non-profit organization, will work in cooperation with members of the Kumeyaay Nation, SDRC, the City of San Diego, and other partners along the river to complete the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

This project is located just outside of the coastal zone; however, the implementation of Phase 2 will have a positive impact on the coastal resources within the coastal zone of the City of San Diego as the area is within a coastal-draining watershed.

By facilitating education about the River and its historical importance, the project will inspire current and future generations to “preserve the natural features and beauty of the coastline adjacent to Ocean Beach [San Diego]”, as identified in the Ocean Beach Precis Plan and Local Coastal Program (LCP) addendum (adopted November 25, 1980). This document serves as the City of San Diego’s certified LCP for the area of the San Diego River Estuary/flood-control channel adjacent to the project site.

The Serra Museum project will help implement the Mission Bay Park Master Plan (adopted 1994, last amended 2002), which serves as the City’s certified LCP for the Mission Bay area. The Master Plan recommends that, “Environmental education should not be restricted to the habitat areas of the Park. A program of Park-wide interpretive signs should be conceived and implemented, to inform the public of Mission Bay's unique environment.” Because visitors can see Mission Bay from the Serra Museum, and will learn about the River’s previous connection to the Bay, Phase 2 of the Museum Interpretive projects will effectively expand the environmental education program of Mission Bay Park.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

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The Serra Museum project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act, pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations §§15301(a) which exempts minor alterations to existing public structures or facilities. The project involves minor alterations to an existing public structure, involving no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of review. Development of the museum exhibits are part of past historical use of the project involving not expansion of use of the facility. It is thus exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations § 15323 (normal operations of facilities for public gatherings). The project improvements are within and on the exterior of the Museum and consistent with its historic uses and purposes.

Upon approval, staff will file a notice of exemption.