

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 2, 2023

DISCOVERY CUBE SCIENCE PARK

Project No. 21-073-01
Project Manager: Danh Lai

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to three hundred and eight thousand, seven hundred dollars (\$308,700) to the Discovery Cube of Orange County to produce a conceptual design and a feasibility study for an outdoor science park along Santiago Creek in the City of Santa Ana in Orange County.

LOCATION: City of Santa Ana, Orange County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Santa Ana River Conservancy Program

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Santa Ana and the Discovery Cube of Orange County](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Project Area Concept Map and Images](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed three hundred and eight thousand, seven hundred dollars (\$308,700) to the Discovery Cube of Orange County (“the grantee”) to design an outdoor science park along Santiago Creek in the City of Santa Ana in Orange County.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.

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2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

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 Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of the recreational and educational experience on program lands in a manner consistent with the protection of land and natural resources and economic resources in the Santa Ana River area and its tributaries.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Discovery Cube is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize a \$308,700 grant to the Discovery Cube of Orange County (Discovery Cube) to produce a conceptual design and feasibility study for an outdoor science park along Santiago Creek.

The conceptual design will include the following elements: landscape, architectural, and engineering concept design for the park, and conceptual exhibit design. The feasibility study will include a permitting strategy informed by pre-permitting consultations with the City of Santa Ana (City) and regulatory agencies and will include an initial study to inform next steps for complying with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City is expected to be the CEQA lead.

The City has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) granting Discovery Cube the right to apply for grants to develop the project area into an outdoor science park. The MOU stipulates that once the permits and funding are in place for park development, the City will explore an arrangement with the Discovery Cube to develop, manage, and maintain the Science Park (See Exhibit 2).

The project will develop a design to transform this neglected area into a recreational and educational amenity, an outdoor classroom focused on science education related to Santiago Creek and the Santa Ana River watershed. The project will also design for habitat value for wildlife such as butterflies and riparian birds.

Santa Ana is one of the most densely populated cities in the State. It is a park poor community with little more than one acre of public park land for every 1,000 residents. Santiago Creek is one of the City's best natural amenities. The project goal is to provide a new recreational and

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learning opportunity for the community that will help them enjoy and appreciate natural lands and native species. While the outdoor science park is envisioned to be accessible only to museumgoers, the Discovery Cube offers programs for Santa Ana residents, Title 1 schools, and other underserved communities that bring 50,000 visitors to the museum annually at no cost. The Discovery Cube provides free public access to the facility through the monthly Santa Ana Free Days. Community groups can schedule one day each year based on availability or be given an allotment of individual tickets that are passed out to individuals to come to the Discovery Cube on their own time.

Tribal consultation letters were sent via postal mail and email to nine local tribes as an invitation to be involved with the project planning. There has been no response to date.

Site Description: The project area is owned by the City and located across Main Street from Santiago Park. It currently suffers from illegal camping, dumping, unsafe conditions, fires, and illegal activities. Santiago Park is a 35-acre park adjacent to Santiago Creek in the City of Santa Ana, Orange County. Santiago Creek is a tributary to the Santa Ana River. The park includes a regional bike trail that connects adjacent cities to the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway. Across Main Street from the Discovery Cube, the park also includes the Santiago Creek Wildlife and Watershed Center, a log cabin, a playground equipment area, two lawn bowling greens, the Lawn Bowling Center, an archery range, tennis courts, a ballfield, picnic areas, parking, and restroom facilities.

Santiago Park is heavily used by residents and visitors that enjoy the passive and active recreational elements in the park. The Santiago Park Nature Reserve, viewing areas, walking paths and riparian areas along Santiago Creek provide a feature for the public to enjoy bird watching and other wildlife that live in the park.

Santiago Park is one of the City of Santa Ana's oldest parks and many of the park amenities were built during the Work Projects Administration of the last half of the 1930s and early 1940s. Park areas immediately adjacent to the project area are heavily used and community members approached the city to encourage making improvements to the park a priority so that people can enjoy the park and native habitats in their entirety.

Grantee Qualifications: The Discovery Cube has a \$17,000,000 annual operational budget over two museum sites. They are routinely awarded State and Federal Capital Grants since 1998. Grants managed by the Discovery Cube in the last 4 years include the following:

- \$10,000,000 Parking Expansion (State Budget, Local Assistance Grant, 2019)
- \$3,800,000 Proposition 83 Cultural, Community, and Natural Resources Program Grant for Exhibit Expansion (2018)
- \$5,000,000 Natural Resources Capital Project at DCLA (State Budget, Local Assistance Grant, 2019)

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The Discovery Cube has available a \$1,000,000 Line of Credit that is not tapped and has \$1,500,000 in reserves set aside to implement projects with the intention that the reserve get paid back. Additionally, 64% of the Discovery Cube’s staff live in the immediate city of Santa Ana and Discovery Cube’s Board is composed of individuals throughout the many cities of Orange County, a testament to their familiarity with the local community.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$308,700
Project Total	\$308,700

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is an FY 2021/2022 appropriation from the General Fund specifically for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program (Budget Act of 2021, Section 19.56 as added by SB 170, Chapter 240, Statutes of 2021). The proposed project is consistent with the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy program, as discussed in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section, below.

The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with the provisions of Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31170 to 31174 regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for recreational opportunities within the Santa Ana River region.

The Santa Ana River region includes lands on either side of the Santa Ana River or its tributaries (Section 31172(c)). The proposed project is located adjacent to Santiago Creek, which is a tributary of the Santa Ana River.

Section 31173 states that the Conservancy may undertake projects and award grants to nonprofit organizations to help achieve the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program, including recreational opportunities and trails, and wildlife habitat and species restoration, enhancement, and protection (Section 31173(a)). It further states that the Conservancy may undertake projects for public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of recreational and educational experience on program lands in a manner consistent with the protection of land and natural resources and economic resources in the area (Section 31173(b)).

Section 31174(c) states that the Conservancy shall “Give priority to river-related projects that create expanded opportunities for recreation, greening, aesthetic improvement, and wildlife habitat along the corridor of the river and in parts of the river channel that can be improved without infringing on water quality, water supply, and necessary flood control”.

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The proposed project will help achieve the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program by funding a conceptual design plan for an outdoor science park, which will provide greening, aesthetic improvement, and recreational and educational opportunities along Santiago Creek.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with Goal 1, Objective 1 of the Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will benefit disadvantaged communities by planning for park facilities that will support recreational and educational opportunities for local disadvantaged youth.

Consistent with Goal 2, Objective 4, the proposed project will plan improvements to trail accessibility and safety along the Santiago Creek, a tributary to the Santa Ana River and linked to the Santa Ana River Trail and Santa Ana River Park way.

Consistent with Goal 2, Objective 5, the proposed project will plan improvement to interpretive signage and trail amenities such as seating and lighting along the Santiago Creek, a tributary to the Santa Ana River and linked to the Santa Ana River Trail and Santa Ana River Park way.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

This project is an opportunity for the state to be involved in the development of a segment of an important tributary to the Santa Ana River, thus the Conservancy can ensure the public's best interest is integrated into the plans. The Conservancy will be making progress towards completing the agency's goal to restore these waterways. The project will design to optimize utilization of the land for recreation in a manner that would not be offered through typical local governmental planning departments alone. The Discovery Cube of Orange County Science Park project presents the added benefit that the project will create a unique educational experience that genuinely engages youth; this exposure can result in appreciation that is embodied either through recreational behavior that preserves ecological integrity or even future stewardship.

4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

The Memorandum of Understanding includes a requirement that the outdoor science park be designed with the flexibility to adjust seasonally, thus the components of the park will be maintained throughout the year.

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From a business perspective, it is also important for the Discovery Cube to maintain a presentable aesthetic, which will ensure that the habitat is kept in functional condition. This design and upkeep of cleanliness and flora health will strengthen the watershed's resilience to extreme heat, wildfire, flood, and drought.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

This project will produce plans that lay the foundation for future ecological and educational benefits. The future science park will be an immersive educational experience that will expose local youth to riparian habitat in real-time, a learning exercise that cannot be replicated in the classroom. The habitat restoration will ultimately increase urban greening, open space, and tree canopy.

6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

The Discovery Cube has developed a connection with the local community and Santa Ana residents to provide free access to the facility through the monthly Santa Ana Free Days. Community groups can schedule one day each year based on availability or be given an allotment of individual tickets that are passed out to individuals to come to the Discovery Cube on their own time. These tickets have no blackout dates and can be used anytime. The Discovery Cube will include a community support consultant in their budget to ensure community outreach and engagement. The consultant will identify critical community organizations and entities, create an engagement strategy, manage the engagement implementation, create any necessary materials to explain the project, track and compile community comments and prepare a summary document.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed planning project is statutorily exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14 California Code of Regulations Chapter 3 (CEQA Guidelines), Article 18, Statutory Exemptions, Section 15262, which states that a project involving only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved does not require the preparation of an environmental document but does require the consideration of environmental factors. The proposed planning project consists of planning and design, will consider environmental factors, and will be subject to CEQA review and analysis prior to implementation. No potential improvements will be approved without undergoing environmental review under CEQA.

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.