

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 14, 2023

CITY OF RIVERSIDE SANTA ANA RIVER PARKWAY IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT

Project No. 19-011-01
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$354,000 to augment the Conservancy grant of \$2,087,500 previously authorized to the City of Riverside for (1) the acquisition of four acres at 5200 Tequesquite Avenue in the City of Riverside in Riverside County, and (2) the preparation of designs, engineering, and environmental documentation for nine projects along 4.7 miles of the Santa Ana River Parkway, from Fairmount Park to Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park, in the City of Riverside in Riverside County.

LOCATION: Various locations within the Santa Ana River Parkway, along the Santa Ana River in the City of Riverside

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [August 22, 2019 Conservancy Authorization](#)

Exhibit 3: [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 fifty-four thousand dollars (\$354,000) to augment the Conservancy grant of two million eighty-seven thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,087,500), previously authorized to the City of Riverside for (1) the acquisition of four acres at 5200 Tequesquite Avenue in the City of Riverside in Riverside County, and (2) the preparation of designs, engineering, and environmental documentation for nine projects along 4.7 miles of the Santa Ana River Parkway, from Fairmount Park to Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park, in the City of Riverside in Riverside County. This authorization remains subject to the same conditions contained in the Conservancy's August 22, 2019 authorization.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation 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 recreational opportunities and trails, and wildlife habitat restoration, enhancement, and protection.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$354,000 grant to augment the Conservancy grant of \$2,087,500, previously authorized on August 22, 2019, to the City of Riverside (the City) Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department for (1) the acquisition of four acres at 5200 Tequesquite Avenue in the City of Riverside, and (2) the preparation of designs, engineering and environmental documentation for nine projects along 4.7 miles of the Santa Ana River Parkway, from Fairmount Park to Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park, in the city and county of Riverside. Together, the acquisition project and the planning projects constitute the City of Riverside Santa Ana River Parkway Improvements Project.

Of this augmentation, \$24,000 will be applied towards the acquisition for the completion of a Phase 2 Environmental Report and a baseline conditions report bringing the grant total for the acquisition to \$151,000. The City acquired the 5200 Tequesquite Avenue property in 2022 but had not anticipated the cost for these two reports and has requested that the grant be augmented to cover these costs. The remaining \$330,000 will be allocated for plans and designs for the nine project sites, including expenses for compliance with the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, CEQA, and community outreach. A portion of these expenses was expected to be covered by one of the grantee's partners who was later not able to fund these expenses. This would bring the total of the design grant for all nine sites to \$2,290,000.

The Santa Ana River Parkway Improvements Project will achieve the following objectives once implemented:

- Develop the property at 5200 Tequesquite Avenue as a public recreational, open space, and potentially a community agricultural resource. At the time of this recommendation, the City has closed on the acquisition of the property and the Conservancy will reimburse these expenses.
- Plant native vegetation and trees in barren and underutilized public lands to increase the quantity and quality of habitat, including appropriate trees to also sequester carbon.
- Create more parks to improve and expand free or low-cost recreational opportunities that are easily accessible, allowing the community to play, exercise, connect with

nature, and gather as a community. This promotes physical, emotional, and social health and wellness.

- Implement recreational opportunities that will draw tourism to the Santa Ana River area as a destination, boosting the local economy with tourism spending in local restaurants and stores.
- Beautify barren and underutilized public lands to increase property values for adjacent landowners.
- Create a trailhead and other support amenities for the Santa Ana River Parkway and Trail such as drinking water stations, restrooms, a self-service bike repair station, to encourage more active transportation usage, leading to reduced vehicle miles traveled and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- Provide ADA accessible opportunities for the community to access and connect with the Santa Ana River.

The scope of work for the planning projects includes associated community outreach, design, engineering, and environmental review in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act for each of the nine sites within the project suite. At the conclusion of this phase, the City intends to have well-developed and publicly vetted plans to submit for implementation funding.

Conceptual improvements and enhancement opportunities have been identified for each of the nine project sites. These ideas will be refined through community outreach, focus groups, and input from the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program advisory group and technical advisory committee.

The list of potential improvements includes habitat conservation areas, woodlands restoration, parking lots, an amphitheater, restrooms, nature trails, a challenge course, overnight camping facilities, picnic areas, a community garden, vista points, exercise stations, public art, interpretive and wayfinding signage, landscaping, irrigation, lighting, an incubator farm, drinking water stations, shade improvements, equestrian facilities, bike racks, and a bicycle repair station. The City has held several community outreach events allowing residents to provide input on which of these ideas they would like to see in their parks.

The nine project sites include:

- Farimount Park – Camp Evans Master Plan
- Loring Park – Master Plan
- Carlson Park and St. Francis Falls Improvements
- Santa Ana River Trail Improvements
- Tequesquite North Extension – Master Plan and Trailhead Improvements
- 5200 Tequesquite Avenue (APN 187-080-008)
- Tequesquite Extension South – Master Plan and Santa Ana River Trail

- Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park – Riverside Gateway Master Plan
- Jurupa Avenue Trailhead Master Plan

Site Description: The entire 11-mile northern edge of the City of Riverside fronts on the Santa Ana River. The river provides a natural and scenic riparian corridor running through the city. Supporting the riparian habitats serving as habitat to wildlife, recharging the groundwater basins that supply homes and businesses with water, providing recreation and opportunities to connect to nature, the river is a vital component of life in the City of Riverside.

The Jurupa Avenue Trailhead site is located within a disadvantaged community as identified on the State of California Department of Water Resources Disadvantaged Communities Mapping Tool (Arlanza and Airport neighborhoods). The Camp Evans, Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park, Loring Park, Carlson Park, Tequesquite North Extension, and Santa Ana River Trail Improvements sites are within 0.2 miles of the Rubidoux and Grand neighborhoods, and downtown Riverside, all identified as disadvantaged communities on the mapping tool. The Tequesquite South Extension, 5200 Tequesquite Avenue, and Carlson Park sites are within 0.5 miles of a disadvantaged community. There is a need for no-cost and low-cost parks and recreational resources, open space access, and active transportation resources to support the disadvantaged communities surrounding the planning project sites. See Exhibit 1 photographs and locations of each site and Exhibit 2 for a detailed description of each.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: City of Riverside Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department (PRCSD) has more than 40 years of experience successfully completing similar grant-funded projects. The California Department of Parks and Recreation has been their primary source of grant funding, through their various programs and funding sources. The PRCSD’s Senior Management Analyst and Accounting Technician are dedicated to the financial operations of the department, including grant management, invoicing, and reimbursement requests. Three landscape architects serving as park planners and project managers in the department’s Planning and Design Division have the required experience and knowledge to complete the project. This team has and will continue to coordinate and carry out this project.

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

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Strategic Plan” section below.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The proposed project is consistent with the following goals of the 2018 *Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan* prepared by the Conservancy:

- Goal 3 (Education, Recreation, and Access): Provide a range of river-related opportunities for people to be active outdoors.
- Goal 7 (Education, Recreation, and Access): Provide a safe access to the river in appropriate locations.
- Goal 1 (Implementation): Collaboratively design projects and programs to provide multiple benefits that support the water, wildlife habitat, and recreation, education and access goals for the Santa Ana River Parkway.

3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.

The curator at the Sherman Indian Museum and the curator for the Museum of Riverside have expressed interest in helping to design facilities within the project area to host tribal cultural and educational programs in the parks, as an extension of both museums’ outreach efforts. Additionally, the City of Riverside’s tribal contacts have been invited to participate in the planning and design efforts for the proposed project. Three Tribes have expressed interest in consulting on the project.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project, when implemented, will be an opportunity to transform several parks near the Santa Ana River into regional recreation attractions. These parks will increase urban greening, carbon sequestration through tree planting, and provide equitable public access, recreation, and education.

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

The scope of work for the planning projects includes community outreach and design for each of the nine sites within the project suite. Conceptual improvements and enhancement opportunities will be refined through community outreach, focus groups, and input from the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program advisory group and technical advisory committee.

The suite of projects is supported by members of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program’s advisory group which includes representatives of Orange County, Riverside County, San Bernardino County, City of Riverside, City of Anaheim, City of Santa Ana, City of Corona, City of Redlands, Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, The Wildlands Conservancy, Rivers and Lands Conservancy, and Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks. Stakeholders and the community have been engaged using virtual meetings, in-person outreach activities, and online using an interactive map and survey on a website dedicated to the project. The grantee has attended several standing community and neighborhood meetings, and the city’s 2022 World Rivers Day event to provide project update and receive input.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$354,000
Coastal Conservancy (August 22, 2019 authorization)	\$2,025,000

Coastal Conservancy (October 18, 2021 augmentation via Executive Officer delegated authority)	\$62,500
City of Riverside	\$390,000
Project Total	\$2,831,500

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project augmentation is a FY 2021/2022 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund (The Budget Act of 2021, as amended by SB 170, Chapter 240, Statutes of 2021) specifically for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program. This project is located within the geographic boundary and supports the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program (see Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation section, below).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s August 22, 2019 authorization with respect to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (see Exhibit 1).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective 1**, the proposed project will include engagement with and participation by people from systemically excluded communities.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective 5**, the proposed project will plan facilities along the Santa Ana River to enhance recreational opportunities.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s August 22, 2019 findings and authorization with respect to the CEQA compliance (see Exhibit 1). The project has not changed and there are no changed circumstances or information that would trigger the need for additional CEQA documentation.