

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 5, 2024

MARITIME MUSEUM OF SAN DIEGO ENTRANCE BUILDING: MOORING REPLACEMENT AND PLANNING

Project No. 18-033-02
Project Manager: Kellan Warner

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and authorization to disburse up to \$3,457,000 to the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego to replace two mooring dolphins and augment an existing Conservancy grant to prepare design and engineering, environmental compliance documents, and permit applications for the Maritime Museum of San Diego entry building in San Diego County.

LOCATION: City of San Diego, San Diego County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [2018 Project Staff Recommendation](#)
- 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 million four hundred fifty-seven thousand (\$3,457,000) to the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego to replace two mooring dolphins at the Maritime Museum of San Diego and augment an existing Conservancy grant to prepare design and engineering, environmental compliance documents, and permit applications for the Museum's entry building and redesigned exhibition space in San Diego 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.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.

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 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.
3. The San Diego Maritime Museum is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$3,457,000 grant to the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego Maritime (Museum) to replace two mooring dolphins at the Maritime Museum of San Diego and augment an existing Conservancy grant to prepare design and engineering, environmental compliance documents, and permit applications for the Museum's entry building and redesigned exhibition space. The Museum is located at the Star of India Wharf on the Embarcadero in the City of San Diego (Exhibit 1). This recommended grant will augment the grant that the Conservancy authorized on December 6, 2018 for preparation of plans, environmental analysis, and permit applications for the Museum's new entrance building and redesigned exhibition space (Exhibit 2).

The Museum enjoys a worldwide reputation for excellence in restoring, maintaining, and operating historic vessels. The museum has one of the world's finest collections of historic ships, including the world's oldest active ship, the Star of India. In 2023, the Museum welcomed 101,740 visitors, including 15,000 students, who learned about the history and importance of the Museum's vessels. However, one of the problems that the Museum faces is the fact that it is hard to "see." Many people look at the Museum, see what appears to be a fascinating but disaggregated grouping of vessels, and move along after taking a couple of pictures. Currently the Museum has no single, unified point of entry. Therefore, the Museum is not immediately recognized as the cultural and historical resource that it is.

To address this problem, the Museum is redesigning its entrance area and waterside exhibits. The entrance redesign project will include construction of an entry building on the

Embarcadero to incorporate a visitor welcome area, a theater/meeting space, exhibit space, restrooms, a café, and administrative offices. The proposed designs also include an amphitheater adjacent to the entry building that will provide a venue for lectures, presentations, and concerts that will support both educational and entertainment activities within the Museum. Where currently visitors see a collection of ships, the proposed building will serve as the entry point to a museum complex that is immediately recognizable as an institutional destination. The redesign project also includes waterside updates to the Museum that will include a more dispersed series of walkways, updating infrastructure in the water, and repositioning the vessels to make them more visible and assist the Museum in telling a historically coherent story.

The recommended grant will augment the Conservancy's previous grant to the Museum for the redesign project (Exhibit 2). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, project work was significantly delayed and project costs have increased since Conservancy's grant authorization in 2018. This augmentation will enable the Museum to further the designs and engineering, and complete the environmental review documents and permit applications.

This grant will also fund the replacement of two mooring dolphins. Mooring dolphins are used to assist in mooring and securing a ship to a pier or other secure structure via rope. These two dolphin moorings have been used longer than expected and are past their useful life. Replacing these mooring dolphins is part of regular Museum upkeep, but the replaced dolphins will remain viable after the anticipated entry building construction and reconfiguring of the Museum's vessels.

Site Description: The Museum is located at the Star of India Wharf on the San Diego Bayfront (Exhibit 1). The Museum is an integral part of the aesthetic of the Embarcadero, reflecting the region's genesis as inextricably tied to the ocean, and providing a striking visual reminder that, for much of modern human history, ships provided the sole means of collective long-distance transportation. Apart from three ticket kiosks, signage, and a few maritime artifacts on the walkway adjacent to the Bay, the Museum's footprint exists on the Bay waters. The Museum consists of a number of historic ships and replicas, including the Star of India, a massive iron-hulled ship from the 1860s; the Berkeley; the Californian; the Surprise; the San Salvador and others. Each ship features galleries and exhibits relating to maritime history, California history, and local culture. The Museum's footprint on the Bay waters also includes the floating docks, walkways, and barges that provide access to the ships. The Museum's presence in this location is a function of a long-term (40-year) lease with the Port of San Diego, which expires in 2044.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Museum has a demonstrated history of successful administration of State grants, including funding received from the Conservancy. The Museum has received Conservancy grants for several projects including the restoration of the tall ship *Californian*, the construction of the galleon *San Salvador*, and the 2014 Festival of Sail. The Museum has grown over the last several years, including the acquisition of numerous additional vessels, the development of new educational programming and exhibits, and the diversification of the Museum's offerings, from the major Festival of Sail event to environmental programming to enduring partnerships such as that with the National Park Service.

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 project is consistent with the Statewide Historic Preservation Plan for California, which is intended to guide the activities and priorities of agencies, organizations, and the public involved in preservation in the Golden State, in the following ways:

Goal 4: Foster a Preservation Ethic. The improved display and access of the Museum's vessels 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."

Goal 5: Protect Historical and Cultural Resources. The repositioning of the Museum's vessels will preserve examples of California's maritime past, which will "Protect, preserve, restore, and maintain historical and cultural resources ... for the education, enjoyment, and enrichment of present and future generations."

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

Although located at sea level, the facilities of the Maritime Museum of San Diego are all floating and therefore not vulnerable to the flooding and inundation associated with sea level rise. All of the vessels and wharfs of the Maritime Museum are moored adjacent to the Embarcadero, which is currently approximately 2 meters above sea level at extreme high tide. Current estimates of amount of sea level rise in San Diego Bay at the location of the Maritime Museum are approximately 0.5 meters in 2050 to 1.5 meters in 2100 under daily conditions. According to these estimates the facilities of the Maritime Museum would not be vulnerable to flooding or inundation due to sea level rise within this century.

The Museum is redesigning its waterfront elements with careful consideration of projected sea level rise to ensure long-term functionality and resilience. The configuration will take into account extreme water levels, exceeding current predictions from the 2018 State of California Sea-Level Rise Guidance document. The project team is using the Low-Risk Aversion at High Emissions in 2070 Projection of 2.0 ft. These scenarios will ensure that the new infrastructure is designed to accommodate sea level change projections. The museum incorporates floating access barges and ramps, enhancing flexibility to sea level changes. The design integrates adaptive management techniques that will allow for the elevation of vulnerable systems if water levels rise beyond expected projections.

The reconfiguration of the Museum’s waterfront elements will greatly reduce the danger of damage to these vessels, many of which have great historical value. Climate change is increasing the intensity of storm surge in the Bay and, as the ships are positioned currently, almost all of them are near the Embarcadero. When waves strike the Embarcadero wall their power is magnified, creating greater hazards for the ships and the visitors to the Museum. The reconfiguration will reduce the hazards and increase the sustainability of the Museum.

The Museum has a rigorous maintenance plan for all its assets. Maintenance is particularly critical given that the Museum’s assets are in constant contact with the marine environment. The new Museum building will be added to the Museum’s current maintenance plan, with funding budgeted each year for thorough preventive maintenance. The reconfiguration of the waterside features and vessels will make maintenance easier for the Museum’s staff.

The Museum’s redesign project will increase the number of annual visitors, and increase the number of revenue-generating opportunities, which will support the Museum’s long-term sustainability, and provide additional resources to support exhibits, purchase of maritime objects, and expansion of programming.

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

The Museum has been developing the redesign plans with the input and guidance of its all-volunteer Board, its donors, volunteers, and staff. The Museum plans to engage in a community outreach and engagement effort as they continue the engineering and design for the entry building.

The Museum also engages with the community through its multiple educational programs. The Museum provides unique educational opportunities to thousands of schoolchildren annually. At the Maritime Museum, children relive history and learn about the science of the sea. Their ships and collections represent San Diego’s great maritime heritage and bring award-winning educational programs to life for thousands of children each year. The Museum offers a variety of educational programs for K-12 school groups, Scouts, families, and adults. Unique to the Maritime Museum is the ability to set sail and take their ships out to sea for one or multi-day adventures. The Museum’s specialized instructors facilitate education programs and workshops while Museum Guided Tours are led by trained volunteers.

PROJECT FINANCING

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| Current Authorization Amount | \$3,457,000 |
| Prior Authorization Amount | \$1,500,000 |
| Total for Planning and Mooring Dolphin Replacement | \$4,957,000 |

The anticipated source of funds is a FY2022/23 appropriation to the Conservancy from the State’s General Fund (SB 154, Chapter 43, Statutes of 2022, as amended by AB 179, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022, section 19.56) for Phase 2 of the Maritime Museum of San Diego redevelopment project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is consistent with Chapter 7 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding urban waterfront restoration.

Public Resources Code Section 31301 provides that “developing the state’s urban waterfronts into environmentally sound areas through, but not limited to, the creation of parks, open space, visitor serving facilities . . . will promote tourism, public access, and private sector development in these areas.” The San Diego Maritime Museum is an integral part of the City’s waterfront. The addition of an entrance building to the Museum has the potential to enhance the museum itself as a visitor destination as well as promoting tourism in and around the waterfront.

Under Section 31307, the Conservancy may award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the restoration of urban waterfront areas. Under Section 31308, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any urban waterfront project. The proposed project will plan for restoration of an urban waterfront area.

Pursuant to Section 31316, the Conservancy may undertake projects or activities that include “exhibits or events emphasizing maritime history,” and “the development of amenities and infrastructure consistent with [Chapter 7].” The proposed project will facilitate the development of infrastructure that will support maritime history education.

Pursuant to Section 31305, while reviewing grant applications, the Conservancy shall seek to promote “innovation in sensitively integrating man-made features into the natural coastal environment.” Consistent with this section, preliminary designs for the new entrance building envision a combination of glass and undulating roof segments of composite material that together will create the impression of the prow of a massive ship of glass cutting through waves. The intention is to create a striking addition to the aesthetic of the Bayfront, an architectural tribute to the maritime enterprise and the world’s waters. The museum uses the ships themselves to display maritime history. These ships are beautiful and historic and blend well into the land and water of the San Diego waterfront.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.6, Piers and Waterfronts**, the proposed project will plan and implement one project to improve a waterfront facility.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed mooring dolphin replacement is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15302 (Class 2), Section 3.b, which exempts replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure being replaced. The two existing mooring dolphins will be replaced in the same location and the replacement mooring dolphins will have the same purpose and capacity as those being replaced.

The preparation of designs, engineering, environmental analysis, and permit applications for the Museum entry building is statutorily and categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal Code of Regulations sections 15262 and 15306. These exempt planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions which the agency, board, or commission has not approved, adopted, or funded; and data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The current project is limited to the preparation of plans, environmental analyses and permit applications for the possible future construction, reorganization and enhancement of the Museum that has not been approved yet. There will be no disturbance to an environmental resource.

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