

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 23, 2026

**SAN DIEGO MARITIME MUSEUM ENTRANCE BUILDING DESIGN AND PERMITTING  
AUGMENTATION**

Project No. 18-033-01

Project Manager: Kellan Warner

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,543,000 to the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego to 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

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [2018 Project Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 3: [2024 Project Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

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**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 one million five hundred forty three thousand dollars (\$1,543,000) to the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego to 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, subject to the same conditions as the Conservancy's September 5, 2024 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 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.

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$1,543,000 grant to the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego (Museum) to 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).

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. However, it is difficult to tell that the amazing collection of ships is a museum. Currently the Museum has no single, unified point of entry and is not immediately recognizable as a cultural and historical resource.

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. 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 previously authorized grant to the Museum for the entrance redesign project. On December 6, 2018, the Conservancy authorized the original grant for preparation of plans, environmental analysis, and permit applications for the Museum's new entrance building and redesigned exhibition space (Exhibit 2). On September 5, 2024, the Conservancy authorized additional funding of \$3,457,000 to augment the grant in light of cost increases due to the Covid 19 pandemic and to replace two mooring dolphins.

Recently, as a result of regulatory input, the previously planned overwater entry building design has evolved to be land-based instead. Because the grantee leases the project site, certain

SAN DIEGO MARITIME MUSEUM ENTRANCE BUILDING DESIGN AND PERMITTING  
AUGMENTATION

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components of permitting were handled by the landowner, and the timeline was not under the control of the Museum and they were not notified of the rejection of their overwater design until they had finished the design development drawings. Moving the project on land required the team to essentially start over, though some of the research and reports are still valid and can be used on the new design. Some of the components of the design that can be repurposed for the new design are the kitchen design, utility connections, security considerations, over water studies, some floor plan information, soil studies and the environmental report work done for the previous design. Construction to replace failing mooring dolphins, which accounts for \$1.5 million of the grant funding authorized in 2024, is slated to begin summer 2026.

This augmentation will enable the Museum to account for the additional costs required to adapt the entry building designs and engineering, and complete the environmental review documents and permit applications that need to be updated to account for the new design.

**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 recommended authorization is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria last updated on September 23, 2021, as described in the September 5, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3).

SAN DIEGO MARITIME MUSEUM ENTRANCE BUILDING DESIGN AND PERMITTING  
AUGMENTATION

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**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy (<i>This Authorization</i>)</b>	<b>\$1,543,000</b>
Coastal Conservancy ( <i>Previous Authorizations</i> )	\$4,957,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$6,500,000</b>

The above table includes the \$1.5 million cost to replace the two mooring dolphins.

The anticipated source of funds for the augmentation 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.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. 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:**

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

*SAN DIEGO MARITIME MUSEUM ENTRANCE BUILDING DESIGN AND PERMITTING  
AUGMENTATION*

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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 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 recommended authorization is to increase funding for 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.