

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 27, 2004

THE SEA CENTER ON STEARNS WHARF, PHASE II

File No. 04-013
Project Manager: Janet Diehl/Carol Arnold

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$350,000 to the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History to construct a new and expanded marine educational Sea Center building on Stearns Wharf, including interactive exhibits and hands-on displays for kindergarten through 12th-grade school children, as well as visiting tourists and local residents.

LOCATION: Stearns Wharf, City of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Education and Public Access

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map
 - Exhibit 2: Sea Center Design and Exhibits
 - Exhibit 3: Letters of Support
 - Exhibit 4: City Resolution, Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
 - Exhibit 5: Addendum to Mitigated Negative Declaration
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31119 and 31400-31409 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$350,000) to the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History (Museum) to be used for the construction of the Sea Center on Stearns Wharf in Santa Barbara, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds for construction, the Museum shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. A work program, including project schedule and budget, and the names of any contractors and/or subcontractors to be employed on the project; and
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- b. Evidence that all permits and approvals necessary to implement the project have been obtained.
2. The Museum shall enter into an agreement with the Conservancy sufficient to protect the public interest in any improvement or development constructed as part of this proposed project in accordance with the requirements of Public Resources Codes Section 31116(c).”

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 project is consistent with the purposes and criteria of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31409) regarding public coastal access and with the purposes and criteria of Section 31119 of the Public Resources Code regarding educational projects.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Mitigated Negative Declaration and the Addendum to Mitigated Declaration for the Sea Center project, attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4 and Exhibit 5, respectively, and finds that the project, as mitigated, avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This project will nearly double the number of visitors to the Sea Center on Stearns Wharf, and upgrade the Center to a world-class marine research and education facility. The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History has raised \$8.1 million of the \$8.5 million budget, and has already torn down the old building and strengthened the pier to support the new one. A \$350,000 grant from the Conservancy at this point would provide the last funding needed to complete this ambitious four-year project.

One of the few ocean-related museums on the Pacific Coast, the Sea Center used to be housed in a small, wooden building set over the waves at Stearns Wharf. It attracted about 70,000 visitors a year, including more than 7,000 school children. Every fifth-grade student in Santa Barbara used to visit the Sea Center as part of his or her experience with the Museum’s award-winning science education program linked to all of the city’s public schools.

But each year, the Center had to turn down requests for visits from teachers of more than 2,000 students because the small, old building couldn’t hold them. It also had to turn away all but a small fraction of the thousands of daily visitors to the Wharf itself. That’s why the Museum’s board of trustees approved an ambitious fundraising campaign in October of 2000 to raise the funds necessary to expand and modernize the facility.

The new building will be constructed as a single unit, within the footprint of the building that housed the old Center and the Nature Conservancy building that used to adjoin it. It will more than double the size of the Center's exhibit, working, and educational space, from about 3,000 to 7,000 square feet (Exhibit 2). Recreational and educational opportunities for the disabled will be increased with the construction of new public restrooms, a viewing platform, and an elevator. The old outdoor touch-tank will be replaced with a 614-square-foot oceanography lab designed to engage the public directly in active research activity.

The Museum has successfully managed the Sea Center since it was built in 1986. In raising about \$7.6 million in non-governmental funds for this project, the Museum has demonstrated a stable funding base and a dynamic vision that will sustain the new Sea Center in the future. Conservancy support is crucial at this point in the campaign to provide the final funds now that construction is underway.

Site Description: The Sea Center is one of a handful of buildings on historic Stearns Wharf at the Santa Barbara waterfront. Most of the buildings on the Wharf are commercial—restaurants and gift shops. The Sea Center is the only public education facility on the Wharf. It lies about half-way out on the 2,300-foot-long wharf, on a small shoreward spur jutting out from the bulk of the wharf.

Stearns Wharf is one of the city's biggest coastal attractions, located at the foot of its main commercial thoroughfare, State Street, and in the middle of a popular public beach. More than a million people visit the Wharf each year. The Wharf is owned by the City of Santa Barbara. Space is leased to the Museum and other tenants.

Project History: The proposed project would build on the Coastal Conservancy's years of working to improve public access opportunities on Stearns Wharf. Conservancy grants to the City of Santa Barbara in 1979 and 1980 helped rebuild the Wharf after a major fire had closed it for eight years. The plans devised by Conservancy and City staff allowed the pier to be rebuilt so that it would be financially self-sustaining while maintaining its historic character.

The old Sea Center was built on the Wharf in 1986, and was originally operated jointly by the Museum and the Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary. The Center became a satellite operation under the sole direction of the Museum in 1995. Over the years, the Sea Center has evolved from a casual, walk-in visitor center into a dynamic education resource, serving more than 70,000 visitors each year. Two separate buildings housed the Sea Center and exhibits, a Nature Conservancy office, and an outdoor touch tank (all of which were recently demolished). Those buildings provided about 3,000 square feet of space.

The inadequacies of that space and the buildings' natural deterioration inspired the Museum board to launch a fundraising campaign for expansion four years ago. The Conservancy helped to support the project in its early phases, granting \$250,000 to the Museum for planning and project design in May of 2001. The plan the Conservancy helped fund is now complete, the permits have been obtained, and almost all of the funding is in place.

Over the years, the costs have increased as the plans were more finely developed. Seismic upgrading of the wharf near the buildings was recently identified as a necessity, which increased the original construction budget estimate. While the Museum had originally planned to raise \$6 million, the budget now stands at \$8.5 million. The Conservancy was asked by the museum to help cover the funding gap.

PROJECT FINANCING:

The project is expected to cost approximately \$8,500,000, including wharf refurbishments, exhibit design and construction, building construction and project management. The Conservancy's contribution (including the 2001 planning grant) would be about seven percent of the total cost.

Committed Funding Sources

Museum Trustees	\$2,492,037	
Individual Donors	3,211,863	
Private Foundations	1,762,000	
Public Grants	550,000	
Corporations	<u>153,100</u>	
Total committed funds:		\$8,169,000

Anticipated Funding Sources

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$ 350,000</u>	
Total anticipated funds:		<u>350,000</u>
Total Project Costs:		\$8,519,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the FY 03/04 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50). Proposition 50 specifically authorizes the use of funds for development of facilities to promote public access and participation in the conservation of land, water, and wildlife (Water Code, Section 79571). Eligible projects under § 79571 include both research facilities for watershed protection and conservation and nature centers that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands and provide wildlife viewing, outdoor experiences, and conservation education programs. Funding priority is to be given to nature center projects operated by a non-profit organization that provide educational opportunities to children from urban areas that lack access to such opportunities.

Consistent with these requirements, the new Sea Center will provide a facility for both research and education, focusing on marine habitat, wetlands, water quality, and other conditions within the Santa Barbara Channel. It also will provide educational opportunities for students/children from inland, rural Santa Barbara County, an area that generally does not have access to coastal natural areas and associated educational programs

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This education and public access project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 3 and Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Section 31119 (regarding K-12th grade education projects), and Sections 31400-31409 (regarding public access).

Under § 31119, the Conservancy may undertake education projects for pupils in kindergarten to grade 12, inclusive, relating to the preservation, protection, enhancement, and maintenance of coastal resources, and may award grants to nonprofit organizations for those purposes. The upgraded Sea Center will focus on marine and related resources and will target school children within this grade range.

Under Chapter 9, the Conservancy is to have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public coastal accessways. In undertaking that role pursuant to § 31400.1, the Conservancy may award grants to a nonprofit organization to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. In addition, § 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is required to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet that objective.

The Sea Center, a facility located on and an integral part of the popular Stearns Wharf coastal accessway, will be able to offer greater public access because of the increased size of the new building. It will fully accommodate people with disabilities, with an elevator to the second floor. Development of the expanded Sea Center, including hands-on research and interpretive facilities, will expand public access opportunities along the Santa Barbara coast, while increasing the public's knowledge of important resource protection needs for the ocean and shore.

The proposed project is consistent with the City of Santa Barbara Local Coastal Program as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B**, the proposed project will enable the public to access the Sea Center building and the surrounding sections of Stearns Wharf, which are currently closed to the public.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective D**, the proposed project will result in increased recreational opportunities for residents and visitors by completing the construction of a regional environmental education center.

Consistent with **Goal 3 Objective A**, the proposed project will increase and promote public access on a coastal waterfront, with a world-class marine research and educational center that previously had to turn away thousands of visitors a year due to limited space and facilities. The new buildings will promote tourism and excellence in urban design. Strengthening the pier below historic Stearns Wharf to support the project promotes the restoration of cultural and historic resources, also consistent with this goal.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, 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. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by Congressmember Lois Capps, Assemblymember Hannah-Beth Jackson, Santa Barbara County Supervisor Naomi Schwartz, Santa Barbara Mayor Marty Blum, Santa Barbara Region Chamber of Commerce Executive Direc-

tor Steve Cushman, Santa Barbara School Districts Superintendent Deborah A. Flores, and Santa Barbara Maritime Museum Executive Director Norma Bishop (Exhibit 3).

4. **Location:** The project is located within the coastal zone of the City of Santa Barbara.
5. **Need:** Funding from the Conservancy is needed to bridge the small gap left in construction funds. The Conservancy's proposed grant represents only about seven percent of the total cost of the project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Sea Center is located on Stearns Wharf, which is a state, national, and international tourist attraction

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** After years of planning and fundraising, construction is finally underway, and is scheduled for completion by the end of this calendar year. The funding gap that remains must be closed within the next few months.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The project will resolve both the need for additional coastal public access and marine educational facilities. A public safety concern is also resolved with this project, as it includes seismic retrofitting of Stearns Wharf.
9. **Leverage:** The project is highly leveraged, with approximately 93 percent of the funds being provided by sources other than the Conservancy.
11. **Innovation:** Building a new state-of-the-art research facility and interpretative exhibits on a historic wooden wharf called for innovative approaches, both in building design and pier strengthening.
12. **Readiness:** The grantee has finalized plans, obtained all necessary permits, and raised almost all of the funds. Demolition of the old structures and seismic rehabilitation of the wharf is completed. Construction of the new facility is scheduled to begin shortly. The project is expected to be completed within six months, with an opening celebration this December.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the "Project History" section above.
15. **Cooperation:** The project represents an excellent example of a cooperative effort between private donors, local and state agencies, and a dedicated nonprofit organization staff.

Consistency with Conservancy Access Standards

The proposed Sea Center facilities to be developed under this project are consistent with the Conservancy's "Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development." In particular, the new facilities will be accessible to persons with disabilities (Standard 13) and will be reconstructed predominantly on the existing footprint on Stearns Wharf, so as to minimize any impact on coastal resources or landforms (Standard 1).

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the City of Santa Barbara's Local Coastal Plan, which includes policies encouraging adequate public access to the coast and coastal-related facilities. Stearns Wharf is specifically identified as an important historic resource. One of the appropriate uses identified for the Wharf is "ocean and engineering research" which will be incorporated into

the research and educational projects at the new Sea Center. The project is also consistent with Policy 3.10, which states that “[t]he City shall seek funding to provide interpretive centers at public parks and beaches where recreational use is heavy regarding the City’s tidepool resources.” Heavy use of tidepools in this area occurs, and the Center will contain an interpretive exhibit displaying the dynamics of tidepool resources and functions.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

On January 24, 2002, the City of Santa Barbara adopted the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Stearns Wharf Revitalization Project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), having determined that the project, with mitigation measures incorporated, would not have a significant effect on the environment, and approved the project. The Negative Declaration identified mitigation measures associated with potential air quality, hazards, noise, public services, recreation, and traffic impacts, all of which were incorporated into the project as a condition of approval. In addition, the City adopted a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) with respect to these mitigation measures. (Exhibit 4, consisting of the resolution adopting the Mitigated Negative Declaration and MMRP, the Negative Declaration and the MMRP).

On March 20, 2003, the Museum submitted an application for an amendment to the approved project. During the final design stage of the project, the applicant was informed that certain design elements were omitted in the preliminary structural analysis of the Wharf, and that the section of the Wharf in the project location was structurally inadequate to support the proposed building. The applicant requested an amendment to the approved project to include the demolition and reconstruction of the Wharf section required to support the proposed structure and for construction of a temporary staging area to be maintained for the duration of the construction period and to be removed upon completion of construction. The amendment request also included shifting the proposed building footprint approximately eight feet to the north (toward the shore) to ensure that the proposed building will be supported entirely on the new Wharf structure. No additional changes were proposed for the previously approved structures.

On June 19, 2003, the City of Santa Barbara determined through an Addendum that in accordance with CEQA Guidelines, 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15612, no subsequent Negative Declaration or Environmental Impact Report was required for the amended project, because new information and changes in circumstances, project description, impacts and mitigations were not substantial and did not involve new significant impacts or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified impacts (Exhibit 5, “Addendum to Mitigated Negative Declaration MST2000-00324”). The City concluded that with application of identified mitigation measures, all project impacts will be less than significant and that the Addendum, together with the Mitigated Negative Declaration constituted adequate environmental documentation in compliance with CEQA for the current project. No changes have been made to the project since the City approved the Addendum on June 19, 2003.

Staff has reviewed the City’s Mitigated Negative Declaration, Addendum and Monitoring Program and concurs that the portion of the construction project to be funded by the Conservancy will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment. Thus staff recommends that the Conservancy find that there is no evidence that the project has the potential for a significant effect on the environment as defined in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15382. Staff will file a Notice of Determination upon the Conservancy’s approval of the project.