

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 27, 2006

URBAN WATERSHED GARDEN

File No. 05-034

Project Manager: Christopher Kroll

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse funds to TreePeople to assist in the development of an environmental education exhibit as part of the development of the Center for Community Forestry and to enter into a joint powers agreement with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

LOCATION: Los Angeles, Los Angeles County (See Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Coastal and Marine Resources

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Urban Watershed Garden exhibit

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

Exhibit 4: Joint Powers Agreement

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Section 31220 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of up to three hundred thousand (\$300,000) dollars to TreePeople, a nonprofit organization, to assist in the development and construction of the Urban Watershed Garden, a new environmental education exhibit at the Center for Community Forestry. The State Coastal Conservancy also authorizes the Executive Officer to enter into a joint powers agreement with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) to further this purpose. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to disbursement of Conservancy funds to TreePeople for this project, the Conservancy and SMMC shall have entered into a joint powers agreement.

URBAN WATERSHED GARDEN

2. Prior to disbursement of any funds, TreePeople shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. A work program, including schedule, budget and detailed site plans.
 - b. A sign plan to acknowledge Conservancy funding for the project.
 - c. The names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed on the project.
 - d. Documentation that all permits and approvals necessary to the completion of the project have been obtained.
3. TreePeople shall develop a monitoring and evaluation component for the project.
4. TreePeople shall enter and record an agreement pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 31116(c) sufficient to protect the public interest and provide for maintenance of the project.”

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 set forth in Chapter 5.5 of the Public Resources Code (Section 31220) regarding the protection of coastal and marine resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. TreePeople is a nonprofit organization, existing under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy provide a grant of \$300,000 to TreePeople to assist in the development of the Urban Watershed Garden as part of the TreePeople Center for Community Forestry. The center is currently being developed on a four-acre site within Coldwater Canyon Park in the City of Los Angeles. A state-of-the-art “green” conference center and a 225,000-gallon underground cistern (which will hold stormwater from the site for use in irrigation) were completed at the site in 2004. New features that will be completed in 2006 include: 1) a redesigned parking area, which will capture and treat stormwater; 2) the environmental learning center, which will consist of outdoor displays and an indoor learning space oriented to park visitors and students; 3) the new nursery, which will provide trees for local parks and habitat restoration projects; and 4)

URBAN WATERSHED GARDEN

the urban watershed garden, which will use native landscaping and water features to educate students and visitors about their role in restoring environmental health to the region based on examples of local watersheds and new water management technologies.

TreePeople has already secured significant funding for different elements of the expansion of the Center for Community Forestry and has requested that the Conservancy fund the development and construction of the new outdoor exhibit (see Exhibit 2), the Urban Watershed Garden. The exhibit will be divided into two separate areas that will mirror each other. One side of the exhibit will present the existing urban watershed and demonstrate how water flows through a city now, with impermeable paving, traditional concrete storm drains and catch basins and a concrete river channel. The other side will present a new model for an urban watershed that includes permeable paving, gravel drains and bio-swales, trees, and a more natural river channel. A pond at the bottom of the two river channels will represent the ocean. Students will be able to compare water quality in the two systems and assess the impact of their personal actions as urban dwellers on water quality in “the ocean.”

The project site is located within the geographic jurisdiction of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) but outside the Conservancy coastal zone jurisdiction. Although outside of the coastal zone, the project, nonetheless, will serve to educate visitors about the nature of urban watersheds and their interface with the coastal and marine environment, consistent with the Conservancy’s statutory purposes. California Government Code Section 6502 authorizes public agencies to exercise jointly by agreement any power common to the agreeing agencies regardless of whether one or more of the agencies lacks geographic jurisdiction. The proposed joint powers agreement would enable the Conservancy to join the SMMC in providing grant funding for the nature center within the Los Angeles River coastal watershed.

TreePeople is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is focused on watershed management, urban forestry, and integrated regional planning. TreePeople provides K-12 education programs and forestry programs. Their programs also address serious urban issues such as water and energy conservation, flood prevention and stormwater pollution.

Site Description: The Center for Community Forestry is located in the Santa Monica Mountains at the City of Los Angeles’ 45-acre Coldwater Canyon Park (Exhibit 1). The park is located at the top of Coldwater Canyon with panoramic views of the San Fernando Valley. TreePeople has a long-term lease (until 2029) with the city and has been located in the park since 1977. Over 70,000 people a year visit Coldwater Canyon Park for TreePeople’s educational programs and “Eco-tours.”

Coldwater Canyon Park is owned by the City of Los Angeles and is part of a network of parks known as the Cross Mountain Park. This 1,000-acre park also includes Wilacre State Park, Fryman Canyon State Park and Franklin Canyon Park.

Project History: TreePeople has been planning for the expansion of the Center for Community Forestry for several years. In 2004, the new conference center was completed. Designs for the parking grove, environmental learning center, nursery, and

URBAN WATERSHED GARDEN

watershed garden were completed in 2005. The new projects have already secured funding from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the S. Mark Taper Foundation, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the City of Los Angeles and individual donors.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy	1,000,000
Individual donors	500,000
S. Mark Taper Foundation	250,000
U.S.D.O.T. (TSCP grant)	234,000
City of Los Angeles (Prop. K)	<u>80,000</u>
Total Funds Secured	\$2,064,000
State Coastal Conservancy	<u>300,000</u>
Total Funds Secured w/SCC grant	\$2,364,000
Total Project Cost	\$2,620,816

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding is a 2004 appropriation to the Conservancy pursuant to the “Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002” (Proposition 50). Section 79571 of the Water Code directs that 10% of Proposition 50 funds allocated to the Conservancy for coastal watershed protection be used “for the acquisition and development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources.” Subsection (b) identifies eligible projects as “(n)ature centers that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands identified for protection...that provide viewing, outdoor experiences, and conservation education programs to the public and students...(w)ith priority to projects that are operated by or in cooperation with nonprofit organizations and are designed to serve children from urban areas that lack access to natural areas of outdoor programs.” TreePeople is a nonprofit organization whose Center for Community Forestry is located in a watershed that has been identified for protection and it provides education programs for the public and students from the surrounding Los Angeles area.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31220, *et seq.*) relating to the protection of coastal and marine resources. This project is consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31220, which allows the Conservancy to provide grants for the construction or expansion of nature centers or research facilities that emphasize conservation education or research activities focusing on the marine portion of the coastal zone or the land and ocean interface. TreePeople is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is developing the Center

URBAN WATERSHED GARDEN

for Community Forestry as a regional center to educate visitors about the nature of urban watersheds and their interface with the coastal and marine environment. The educational curriculum of the center will focus on waste reduction, water quality, and the impact of existing development on the coast/ocean. Finally, as required by subsection (c) of Section 31220, as a condition of grant funding, TreePeople will be required to develop a monitoring and evaluation component for its educational project.

In addition, the project is consistent with Section 31119. Under that section, the Conservancy may undertake educational projects for pupils in kindergarten to grade 12 relating to the preservation, protection, enhancement, and maintenance of coastal resources, and may award grants to nonprofit organizations for these purposes. The proposed grant to TreePeople would help fund the development of the urban watershed education project at the Center for Community Forestry. Other funders are providing grants for the environmental education curriculum.

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

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A**, this project will help preserve and restore coastal watersheds in the Los Angeles area by promoting public outreach and community involvement through public education about watershed management

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D**, this project will increase coastal recreational opportunities for residents and visitors by the support of a regional environmental education center. The project will result in increased opportunities for environmental education.

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:** Letters of support are included in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The project site is located in the Santa Monica Mountains in the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Zone.
5. **Need:** The grantee has already secured the majority of the funds needed for development of the environmental education center at Coldwater Canyon Park from

URBAN WATERSHED GARDEN

other sources. TreePeople has approached the Conservancy to complete the funding needed for the various components of the new center.

- 6. Greater-than-local interest:** The center is a regional facility that will host 10,000 students per year and 60,000 visitors per year.

Additional Criteria

- 7. Urgency:** TreePeople hopes to complete the various components of the center by the end of October 2006. The majority of the needed funds have already been secured. The grant that TreePeople is requesting from the Conservancy will complete the funding needed for the project to move to construction.
- 9. Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities with a new structure of substantially the same purpose and capacity on the same site is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act, pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15302. The current project which the Conservancy would fund under this authorization is the second stage of a larger project. In 2003-04, TreePeople removed old community meeting and environmental education structures. The proposed project is Phase II of the larger project and will replace those structures with new educational facilities, with a similar capacity. Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.