

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 24, 2012

MESA LANE ACCESSWAY IMPROVEMENTS

Project No. 12-012-01
Project Manager: Rachel Couch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$200,000 to the City of Santa Barbara to reconstruct the lower portion of the public stairway to Mesa Lane Beach, in Santa Barbara.

LOCATION: East of Douglas Family Preserve, Santa Barbara, California (Exhibit 1: Figures and Photos)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$200,000 (two hundred thousand dollars) to the City of Santa Barbara to reconstruct the lower portion of a public stairway to Mesa Lane Beach in Santa Barbara, as shown on Exhibit 1 to the accompanying staff recommendation. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the City of Santa Barbara shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. A work program, including final design plans and specifications, schedule and budget for construction.
 - b. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals have been obtained.
 - c. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy funding.
- b. The City of Santa Barbara or its successor in interest shall manage and

maintain the project for a period of not less than twenty years.”

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 Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines updated in November, 2011.
2. The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410) regarding public access to the coast.
3. The proposed project will serve greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy provide up to \$200,000 to the City of Santa Barbara to reconstruct the lower portion of a public stairway (Exhibit 1), located on Mesa Lane at Edgewater Way and known as the “Mesa Lane stairs”. The Mesa Lane stairs provide direct public access to Mesa Lane Beach and provide a link between several coastal access and watershed resources in the area which the Conservancy has supported in the past including the South Coast Watershed Resource Center at Arroyo Burro County Beach Park, the Arroyo Burro Estuary and Mesa Creek Restoration Project, and the Douglas Family Preserve. The stairs are designated part of the California Coastal Trail, and as shown on the attached map, are part of a popular coastal access trail loop.

The Mesa Lane stairs were built in 1982 to replace a crude foot trail and provide beachgoers safe access down a 140-foot-high bluff to a sandy beach and surf spots that attract area residents and visitors alike (Exhibit 2). Despite repairs made in 1991, the lower section of the wooden and concrete stairway is badly deteriorated having withstood over 20 years of heavy public use and exposure to the elements. The current condition of the lower section of the stairway is hazardous for users and raises concerns that a significant storm event could eliminate access altogether. The lower landing foundation and the concrete stairs are cracked and eroding, due to the unreinforced rebar used in the construction and the impact of sea water. The existing connectors between stairs and stairway and stairs and landings, are standard galvanized brackets and bolts that have corroded in the salt air.

The proposed project will replace the foundation, lowest landing and lowest flight of stairs with a structure that is consistent with the Coastal Act, has a 50-year lifespan, and can withstand a 50-year storm event and projected sea-level rise over a 50-year period. Project objectives include providing safe public access to the beach, reducing the total footprint of the structure on the beach, minimizing ongoing maintenance costs, and improving the aesthetics of the structure. The replacement structure includes new a lower landing, stainless steel stairs, guardrails, and handrails, that will be supported at their upper end by 12” diameter, stainless steel piles in holes drilled into bedrock and grouted in place with concrete (approximately 13 feet of the piles will be visible). The lower end of the stainless steel stairs will be supported on concrete steps and two shorter stainless steel piles in holes drilled into bedrock and grouted in place with concrete (6

feet of the piles will be visible). The existing concrete stairs at the base will be replaced with new concrete stairs that will be supported on a foundation embedded about 4.5 feet into bedrock. The concrete will be a specific mix to better withstand erosion by sea water and the rebar will be covered in a special epoxy to minimize rust. The footprint at the beach will be reduced by two-thirds with the proposed project, due to removal of an existing concrete structure built to support the deteriorating wooden support pilings.

The total cost to reconstruct the accessway, including design and construction is \$755,000. The City allocated funds in FY 2010 to pay for preparation of plans and specifications, environmental review documents, permits and construction bid documents, and will seek authorization for the remaining portion of construction funding in FY 2012-2013.

The Mesa Lane stairway is owned and managed and maintained by the City of Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation Department, part of a network of 1,765 acres of coastal and inland parks and open spaces within the City. The project is currently the only capital project programmed for completion by the Parks and Recreation Department for FY 2012-2013.

Site Description: The Mesa Lane stairs are located in the Mesa residential neighborhood in the City of Santa Barbara. Surrounding habitat is naturally occurring coastal bluff vegetation. Access to the stairs is from State Route 225 to the north and west, and Shoreline Drive/Meigs Road to the east. The stairs are located in an area of regional significance for protected parks and open space, and within one mile of the 70-acre Douglas Family Preserve, the 150-acre Elings Park, Arroyo Burro County Beach Park and the City's La Mesa and Shoreline Parks. The stairs provide access to public beaches that extend west to the University of California, Santa Barbara and Ellwood Mesa and east to Summerland and Carpinteria.

Project History: The Mesa Lane stairs have provided important coastal access for more than 30 years. The City's Local Coastal Plan, adopted in 1981, included a detailed discussion of the trail and policies that supported the construction of a stairway to provide safe access between the Mesa and the beach. In 1991, repairs to the concrete steps and the foundation at the beach, extended the useful life of the lowest section for a number of years. In 2002, the City added an accessible handrail to the stairs and replaced the guardrail to make it compliant with the Building Code. At that time, the City identified the need to address the increasing deterioration of the last landing, flight, concrete foundation and steps. Due to the recent decline in the economy, capital project funding was largely eliminated for the City's Parks and Recreation Department. In Fiscal Year 2011, the Santa Barbara City Council and the Parks and Recreation Commission prioritized the Mesa Lane stairs as the remaining project to receive capital funds due to the importance of public coastal access. City funding to date has been focused on completing project design and permitting to ensure potential eligibility for construction grant funding. However, the City does not have sufficient funding to complete the project and requested funding assistance from the Conservancy in 2011.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$200,000
City of Santa Barbara	<u>\$555,000</u>
Total Project Costs	\$755,000

The expected source for the Conservancy funds for this authorization is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, “Proposition 84,” Public Resources Code section 75001 et seq. Section 75060(b) of the Public Resources Code authorizes the use of these funds for projects that promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state and that are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project serves to promote access to coastal resources by restoring a hazardous beach access stairway and is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 as explained below. Therefore, it is appropriate to use Proposition 84 funds for the proposed project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states the Legislature’s intent that the Conservancy play a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the coast. Through the proposed authorization the Conservancy would assist in maintaining safe public access to beach and nearby coastal bluff open space along a popular segment of the California Coastal Trail.

Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes that serve more than local public needs. Consistent with that section, the proposed grant would assist the City of Santa Barbara with the reconstruction of a beach access stairway that is used by local residents, UCSB students and visitors from all over.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective E** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, this project would enhance coastal recreational opportunities for residents and visitors by reconstructing a popular accessway facility and correcting potentially dangerous conditions, while protecting the City’s existing investment in the accessway by redesigning it to be sturdier and longer lasting.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on November 10, 2011, 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 has the support of Congresswoman Lois Capps, Assemblymember Das Williams, Second District County Supervisor Janet Wolf, and the Santa Barbara City Council, as well as appointed officials including the City's Parks and Recreation Commission and Planning Commission, and key stakeholders including the Santa Barbara Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of the City of Santa Barbara.
5. **Need:** Without Conservancy funds for the project, the City will not be able to initiate construction. The City anticipates that if no steps are taken to repair the failing stairs, the stairs will need to be closed in the near future to protect the public from the hazardous conditions of the facility.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Designated part of the California Coastal Trail, the Mesa Lane stairs are an integral component of regional recreation opportunities and protected open space areas in southern Santa Barbara County. One access to the stairs is from State Route 225 to the north and west. The stairs provide access to public beaches that extend to the west to the University of California at Santa Barbara and Ellwood and to the east at Summerland and Carpinteria. As a result, both residents and visitors to the Santa Barbara South Coast benefit from the project.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The City, in consultation with Coastal Commission staff, determined that a 50-year lifespan for the project would be appropriate and that the new stairs should be built to withstand sea level rise estimates at 2050 levels. The Coastal Engineering Report, prepared by Pacific Engineering Group provides the project design criteria for withstanding sea level rise, assuming an increase of 24 inches by 2060. The Coastal Engineering Report found that the new design will actually reduce impacts on the bluff from tidal action. The Geotechnical Report prepared for the project finds that as designed the project will not affect coastal erosion.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** Funding is needed this year to construct repairs and avoid closing in the stairs due to the hazardous conditions of the lowest and most damaged section.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.

10. **Readiness:** Final project design work is underway, and permits and approvals have been secured. If the Conservancy approves the proposed grant, the City expects to go to bid in June 2012 and complete construction by the end of November 2012.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** As designed, the project minimizes the use of materials since it reduces the footprint of the structure on the beach by two-thirds (150 square feet to 50 square feet). The project is designed to minimize the effects on marine and coastal resources and minimize impacts to the shoreline. Construction contract specifications and Planning Commission conditions of approval require reuse and recycling of materials and minimization of vehicle trips to the project site to the maximum extent practicable. Local contractors and materials (including cement), and processing facilities will be used whenever possible, minimizing vehicle miles travelled during construction. Materials selected for construction are intended to have a minimum 50-year life span and reduce maintenance requirements. Reduced maintenance requirements will reduce vehicle miles travelled by City Parks Division staff. Extending the lifespan of the stairs reduces the need for neighboring residents and other users to travel by vehicle to other beach access points. During project development, the City considered alternative ways to bring construction equipment and workers in and out of the site. Barging equipment to the site was considered, but ultimately rejected for a number of reasons including cost, impacts on tidal waters and greater greenhouse gas emissions. The project involves a maximum three-month construction period. Construction of the project will result in some greenhouse gas emissions during the demolition phase, expected to be one day, as well as during operation of heavy equipment to install steel support pilings, expected to take less than a week. Materials chosen for construction have a longer life than other potential materials and will require less future maintenance.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The certified Local Coastal Program (LCP) of the City of Santa Barbara recognizes the significance of providing and protecting coastal access and recreation at this location. LCP Policy 2.1 states that “[p]ublic access in the coastal bluff areas of the City shall be maximized consistent with the protection of natural resources, public safety, and private property rights. To this end, existing vertical accessways at Mesa Lane Trail... shall be maintained and improved.” Consistent with the LCP, the City proposes to restore a heavily used but damaged accessway to ensure continued public access and safety at the site. LCP Policy 8.2 requires that any construction on the bluff be limited to public beach accessways and pipelines and that such structures be engineered to minimize alteration to or impacts on the bluff and beach. As noted above, the Coastal Engineering Report found that the new design will actually reduce impacts on the bluff from tidal action. Additionally, a Geotechnical Memorandum prepared for the project concludes that the project will not have any negative geological impacts on the bluff or beach.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulation Section 15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction) because the proposed reconstructed beach

stairway will be located on the same site and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the existing structure. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.