

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
October 17, 2019

**SANTIAGO PARK PHASE I CONSTRUCTION**

Project No. 19-019-01  
Project Manager: Greg Gauthier

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to the City of Santa Ana for construction of the Santiago Park Phase I improvements in the City of Santa Ana in Orange County.

**LOCATION:** Santiago Park, City of Santa Ana, Orange County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Santa Ana River Conservancy Program

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Area Images](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31170 et seq. of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one million dollars (\$1,000,000) to the City of Santa Ana ("the grantee") to construct Phase I of the Santiago Park improvements in the City of Santa Ana in Orange 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.
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5. Prior to commencing the project, the grantee shall enter into and record an agreement pursuant to Public Resources Code 31116(c) sufficient to protect the public interest in the improvements.

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 authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of the recreational and educational experience on program lands in a manner consistent with the protection of land and natural resources and economic resources in the Santa Ana River area and its tributaries.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.”

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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$1,000,000 to the City of Santa Ana (City) to construct Phase I of the Santiago Park improvements. The City has completed design and engineering and is ready to proceed immediately with construction of the project upon approval of funding.

The purpose of the project is to restore a key section of Santiago Park. Phase I Santiago Park improvements are located at East Memory Lane and Lawson Way in the City of Santa Ana. A portion of Valencia Street and an undeveloped and deteriorated parcel of land bifurcate Santiago Park.

The proposed project area presently has a few mature trees that are in decline due to disease or lack of irrigation. The ground is barren dirt with a deteriorated gas storage house, an old fire ring, faulty security lighting, and a dilapidated barbeque area. An approximately three hundred-foot portion of Valencia Street divides the park and is blocked off and no longer used for through traffic.

The adjacent areas of Santiago Park are heavily used by the public and visitors to the Discovery Cube Orange County, a science museum for children immediately across the street from the park. Youth from Santa Ana’s disadvantaged communities visiting the Discovery Cube utilize the park for lunch picnics and recreation as part of their field trip experiences.

The proposed project includes the following elements: planting of native riparian landscaping and installation of a drip irrigation system; renovation of the old gashouse (so named as it was previously used to store fuel for park equipment and maintenance) for use as a refreshment concession for park patrons during events in the park; installation of a natural rustic amphitheater; installation of new play equipment with rustic features adjacent to the existing

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group picnic area; biking and hiking trail improvements; and installation of park security lighting. The project also includes the removal of Valencia Street to re-connect the two sides of the park and improve the pedestrian circulation and ADA access into the park. Removal of the asphalt will allow connection of the hiking and biking trails that run through Santiago Park and improved landscaping.

Completion of the proposed project will reintegrate portions of Santiago Park, improve the recreational opportunities for community members and visitors, and restore native riparian habitat for wildlife.

**Site Description:** Santiago Park is a 35-acre park adjacent to Santiago Creek in the City of Santa Ana, Orange County. Santiago Creek is a tributary to the Santa Ana River. The park, located one mile from the Santa Ana River Parkway, includes a regional bike trail that connects adjacent cities to the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway. The park also includes the Santiago Creek Wildlife and Watershed Center, a log cabin, a playground equipment area, two lawn bowling greens, the Lawn Bowling Center, an archery range, tennis courts, a ballfield, picnic areas, parking, and restroom facilities. A portion of the park between the Lawn Bowling Greens and the Log Cabin Play Equipment Area is undeveloped. It is this area that will be restored and renovated through the proposed project.

Santiago Park is heavily used by residents and visitors that enjoy the passive and active recreational elements in the park. The Santiago Park Nature Reserve which is located within Santiago Park, viewing areas, walking paths and riparian areas along Santiago Creek provide a feature for the public to enjoy bird watching and other wildlife that live in the park. The park includes large oak trees, eucalyptus trees, sycamore trees, poplar trees, and pine trees.

**Grantee Qualifications:** The City of Santa Ana Parks, Recreation and Community Services Agency has received and managed more than 50 million dollars in grant funding to construct new parks and renovate existing parks and recreation facilities. The agency works closely with the City's Public Works Department to ensure that projects are completed in a timely manner and on budget. The City's senior management analyst, administrative services manager, and senior accounting staff monitor project progress and expenditures, and manage project cash flow. Further, the City's competitive contractor selection and bid process ensures that they hire qualified contractors and require performance bonds to ensure that projects are completed on schedule and per plan specifications.

**Project History:** The proposed project area in Santiago Park has been underutilized for years due to the barren and degraded landscaping and dilapidated structures, many of which were built during the Work Projects Administration of the last half of the 1930s and early 1940s. Park areas immediately adjacent to the project area are heavily used and community members approached the City to encourage making improvements to the park a priority so that people can enjoy the park and native habitats in their entirety.

Several community meetings were held to obtain input on how to improve this undeveloped portion of the park. As a result of public input, a conceptual plan was developed with a continuation of the native riparian landscape, installation of a natural rustic amphitheater for educational or event usage, preservation of the old gashouse, removal of Valencia Street to

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connect adjacent park features, improvement of pedestrian circulation and ADA access to the park, installation of additional play equipment and connection to an existing group picnic area.

During the conceptual planning process, the Orange County Water District approached the City with plans to release water down Santiago Creek to provide water percolation into the groundwater aquifer. This further encouraged community members and the City to prioritize restoration of this portion of Santiago Park with the inclusion of expanded riparian native habitat.

Conceptual plans and design and engineering specifications are now completed, and the City is ready to proceed with construction contingent upon securing funding.

### PROJECT FINANCING

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>
<b>City of Santa Ana</b>	<b>\$1,030,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$2,030,000</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is a \$5 million FY 2018/2019 appropriation from the General Fund specifically for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program. The Budget Act of 2018, Senate Bill No. 840, Chapter 29, Section 3760-101-0001 (e) states that \$5 million shall be available for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program.

The planning and environmental review phase of the proposed project was fully funded by the City of Santa Ana.

### CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31170 et seq. regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for recreational opportunities and trails within the Santa Ana River region.

The Santa Ana River region includes lands on either side of the Santa Ana River or its tributaries (Section 31172(c)). The proposed project is located adjacent to Santiago Creek, which is a tributary of the Santa Ana River.

Section 31173 states that the Conservancy may undertake projects and award grants to public agencies to help achieve the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program, including recreational opportunities and trails, and wildlife habitat and species restoration, enhancement, and protection (Section 31173(a)).

It further states that the Conservancy may undertake projects for public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of recreational and educational experience on program lands in a manner consistent with the protection of land and natural resources and economic resources in the area (Section 31173(b)).

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Section 31174(b) requires the Conservancy to prepare the Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan (Plan), which was approved by the Conservancy in May 2018. The Plan is required to identify and prioritize low-impact recreational and open-space needs, including additional or upgraded facilities and parks that may be necessary or desirable within the Santa Ana River watershed. This project is identified as a priority project in the Plan that will assist in upgrading facilities and parks that are necessary or desirable within the Santa Ana River watershed. Further, the project is consistent with the Plan, as discussed below in the Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines section.

Section 31174(c) requires the Conservancy to "give priority to river-related projects that create expanded opportunities for recreation, greening, aesthetic improvement, and wildlife habitat along the corridor of the river and in parts of the river channel that can be improved without infringing on water quality, water supply, and necessary flood control".

The proposed project will help achieve the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program by awarding a grant to the City of Santa Ana to provide recreational opportunities, trails and wildlife habitat restoration in Santiago Park by rehabilitating old facilities, improving trails, and adding new recreational facilities such as an amphitheater and playground. The project is a priority because it is river-related, and further will expand opportunities for recreation within the park and provide greening, aesthetic improvements, and wildlife habitat along Santiago Creek without infringing on water quality, supply and necessary flood control.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 9, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will construct public access facilities along Santiago Creek, a tributary to the Santa Ana River and linked to the Santa Ana River Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will enhance natural habitats and open space in the Santa Ana River watershed by installing native riparian vegetation along Santiago Creek.

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will benefit disadvantaged communities by providing recreational and educational opportunities for disadvantaged youth visiting the Discovery Cube Orange County and utilizing Santiago Creek Park as part of the field trip experience.

### **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 October 2, 2014, in the following respects:

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### 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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** The project supports and is consistent with the "Santa Ana River Parkway & Open Space Plan" (Coastal Conservancy, May 2018): The proposed project supports Goals 1 and 2 of the Habitat and Wildlife Goals of the Plan regarding protection, restoration and enhancement of high-quality habitat areas for multiple benefits. The project further supports Goals 2 through 7, and Goal 10, of the Education, Recreation and Access Goals of the Plan regarding connections between the river corridor and surrounding communities, river-related outdoor activities, opportunities to experience and learn about the natural environment and the river's resources, open space access, and protection of open space for future education, recreation and access opportunities. Finally, the project is listed as a priority project within the Plan.
4. **Support of the public:** See the "Project History" section above.
5. **Location:** The proposed project is in the City of Santa Ana, in Orange County, within Santiago Park. Santiago Creek runs through and along Santiago Park and is a tributary to the Santa Ana River. Lands within one-half mile of the Santa Ana River and its tributaries lie within program lands of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program.
6. **Need:** The proposed project has completed design, engineering, and environmental review. Funding is needed for the construction phase and will not happen without Conservancy funding.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway is a local, regional and state resource. The proposed project in Santiago Park is connected to the trail and parkway via a bike trail and will serve as an amenity and attraction for trail and parkway visitors.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project is located inland, beyond projected sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100 as determined by the Ocean Protection Council's Sea-Level Rise Guidance.

### Additional Criteria

9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
10. **Readiness:** Design and engineering for the proposed project is completed and the City of Santa Ana is ready to proceed immediately with the construction phase.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Consistency with Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan" section above."
12. **Cooperation:** See "Project History" section above.

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13. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Restoration of riparian corridor vegetation along this section of Santiago Creek will potentially help mitigate urban heat index increases in the vicinity due to climate change.

### **CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

All components of the proposed project are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Article 19. First, Section 15301, Class 1, exempts operation, repair, maintenance, and minor alteration of existing public facilities involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use, including alterations to existing sidewalks, bicycle lanes or trails; and the restoration or rehabilitation of deteriorated or damaged structures, facilities or mechanical equipment to meet current standards of public health and safety.

The proposed project will improve an existing hiking and biking trail, without expanding its use, and rehabilitate an existing deteriorated facility previously used for storage of fuel for park maintenance operations. While the facility use will change from fuel storage to refreshments, this change in use will not expand use of the facility.

Second, the installation of the rustic amphitheater and play equipment are exempt pursuant to Section 15303, Class 3, which exempts new construction or conversion of small structures.

Third, section 15304, Class 4, exempts minor alterations in the condition of land and vegetation which do not involve the removal of healthy, mature trees.

The project involves landscaping that will include water efficient vegetation. The project also includes minor alterations to biking and hiking trails, and the removal of Valencia Street, all of which will involve grading with a slope of less than 10 percent. While the project will remove diseased or dead trees, there will be no removal of healthy, mature trees.

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