

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 30, 2023

**CAMINO DE LA COSTA STAIRWAY REPAIR
FEASIBILITY STUDY**

Project No. 23-067-01
Project Manager: Prentiss Williams

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$325,000 to the City of San Diego to conduct a feasibility study for the repair of the beach access stairway and potential improvements to the scenic overlook and parking area located adjacent to 5990 West Camino De La Costa in the La Jolla neighborhood in the City of San Diego.

LOCATION: La Jolla, City of San Diego, San Diego County (Exhibit 1)

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Neighborhood Map](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Photos of Stairway](#)
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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 three hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$325,000) to the City of San Diego (“the grantee”) to conduct a feasibility study for the repair of the beach access stairway and potential improvements to the scenic overlook and parking area located adjacent to 5990 West Camino De La Costa in the La Jolla neighborhood in the City of San Diego (see Exhibit 2).

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.
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3. In addition, to the extent appropriate, the City of San Diego shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Coastal Access Project Standards'.

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 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$325,000 grant to the City of San Diego ("City") to conduct a feasibility study for the repair of a beach access stairway and potential improvements to the scenic overlook and parking area located adjacent to 5990 West Camino De La Costa in the La Jolla neighborhood in the City of San Diego (see Exhibits 1 and 2).

The stairway is currently in a state of deterioration and repairs are needed to allow for its continued safe use for beach access. The concrete sidewalls are cracked, eroded, or missing and unable to support handrails (see Exhibit 3). Replacement of the concrete sidewalls and associated handrails and patching of lower steps are needed to restore the stairway to safe and full function. Public safety is dependent on refurbishment or reconstruction. The stairs are used by lifeguards and emergency responders and are the only emergency access within approximately 1,200 feet of the beach.

The proposed feasibility study would determine the best means and methods to repair the sidewalls, handrails, and lower steps of the stairway. "Repair" may include restoration, replacement, reconstruction or partial reconstruction, and/or refurbishment. The project would also determine the feasibility of making improvements to the scenic overlook and parking area located at the head of the stairs to provide improved access for people with physical disabilities.

Repair of the stairway would maintain public access from the coastal bluff to the beach and improve public safety through restoration of concrete sidewalls, associated handrails, and landings to restore the stairway to full functionality. If the feasibility study indicates that the scenic overlook and parking area at the top of the stairs can be made more accessible to users with physical disabilities, then such improvements will be added to the final project design. The feasibility study would also evaluate approaches to best mitigate and minimize impacts to natural resources while providing public access.

The Camino Del La Costa stairway was built in 1983 and provides the only access to a very popular beach. The stairway is heavily used by the public and repair of the stairway to improve public safety and accessibility is widely supported by the local community. The State Legislature added \$2,000,000 to the Conservancy's Fiscal Year 2022/2023 budget for projects to address

this accessway and this proposed feasibility study constitutes the first phase of that undertaking.

Subsequent phases will include design, permitting, and construction. The design team will hold community meetings during the design phase to inform the public about the planned accessway improvements. Generally, there is significant community support for the repair of the stairway. Repair of the stairway is also consistent with the La Jolla Community Plan and Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan.

In August 2023, the Conservancy sent a letter to all tribal groups in San Diego County and invited them to discuss the project. The Conservancy did not receive any requests to initiate any form of consultation. The City will consult with local tribes during the future design phase.

Site Description: The stairway is located at the foot of West Camino De La Costa in La Jolla on land owned by the City of San Diego. The site includes an approximately 1,000-square foot overlook area, a small parking area, and the stairway leading to the beach. The area at the top of the stairs is developed with a small parking area with space for two vehicles, and a scenic overlook. Additional street parking is available along Camino De La Costa. Surrounding land use is mostly single-family residential.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The grant will be managed by the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department, which currently manages over \$100 million in state and federal grants for capital projects. One such project is the Sunset Cliffs Natural Park. This project, partly funded with grants from the Coastal Conservancy, completed improvements to the Hillside Park section of the Sunset Cliffs Natural Park, which is considered one of the unique coastal environments in San Diego County. The park includes a trail system, observation points, pedestrian bridge, and interpretive signs along with extensive native vegetation. The City actively manages this 68-acre park as well as nine city beaches and 37 beach access points. The City has been managing the Camino De La Costa stairway for 40 years and will continue to do so after the repairs are completed.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The proposed project is a feasibility study to determine the best means and methods to repair a beach access stairway that provides the only access to a very popular city beach. The feasibility study will also evaluate potential improvements to the overlook and parking area to improve accessibility for people with physical disabilities. San Diego beaches are visited by over 28

million people each year, and the Camino De La Costa stairway provides the only access to one of these beaches. The stairway also provides beach access for lifeguards and other emergency responders. The stairway is very deteriorated, and repairs are needed if the stairway is to continue to provide this access.

The proposed project will facilitate the future repair of the stairway and potential improvements to the overlook and parking area, consistent with the La Jolla Community Plan and Local Coastal Plan Land Use Plan and Coastal Act policies regarding coastal access. Consistent with Public Resources Code Section 30001.5(c), the proposed project would help to "maximize public access to and along the coast and maximize public recreational opportunities in the coastal zone" by determining the best means and methods to preserve safe public access to an otherwise inaccessible pocket beach.

The project budget was determined by the San Diego Department of Public Works and is consistent with costs for similar projects. Repair of the stairway is a priority for the State Legislature as evidenced by the fact that the Legislature added funding specifically for this purpose to the Conservancy's Fiscal Year 2022/2023 budget.

3. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

The goal of the proposed project is to determine the best means and methods to extend the life of an important beach access stairway. The purpose of conducting a feasibility study is to select the best alternatives for completing the repairs of the stairway. The impacts of sea level rise on the longevity of the stairway will be one of the factors taken into account when selecting repair methodologies. The total Conservancy funding available for the completion of the stairway repairs is \$2,000,000. Of this amount, the proposed feasibility study would use \$325,000, leaving \$1,675,000 available for the subsequent phases of design, permitting, and construction. The City will be contributing another \$282,000 to the design phase. Following completion of the stairway reconstruction, the City will manage and maintain the stairway to maximize its useful life.

4. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

Preserving the continued safe public use of the iconic Camino De La Costa stairway is consistent with the La Jolla Community Plan and Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan. The design team will hold community meetings during the design phase to inform the public about the planned accessway improvements. The stairway is very popular with the local community and there is significant community support for its repair to insure its continued use.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$325,000
Project Total	\$325,000

The source of the Conservancy funding is a Fiscal Year 2022/2023 appropriation of \$2,000,000 from the General Fund to the Conservancy specifically for the "Camino de la Costa Viewpoint Coastal and Beach access projects" (The Budget Act of 2022, SB 154, as amended by AB 178,

Chapter 45 and AB 179, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022). The amount being requested in this authorization is for the first phase of the repair project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Section 31400.1 of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes grants to public agencies for the development, operation, or management of public accessways to and along the coast. The proposed feasibility study will inform the repair of the Camino De La Costa stairway, which will lead to continued safe public access to a very popular beach. Consistent with Section 31400.1, the stairway serves greater than local needs. San Diego beaches are visited by over 28 million people a year and the Camino De La Costa stairway provides the only access to one of these beaches. Consistent with Section 31400.3 of Chapter 9, the proposed project will aid the City in the establishment of a system of public coastal accessways.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):

Consistent with **Goal 2.3, Expand Accessibility**, the proposed project will seek to expand coastal access opportunities for people with disabilities by exploring alternatives for making the parking area and scenic overlook at the top of the stairway more accessible for those with physical disabilities. If such alternatives are found to be feasible, they will be incorporated into project design.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5, Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will be the first phase in the enhancement of a coastal accessway.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 15262 because the project is a feasibility study for possible future action which has not yet been approved, adopted, or funded and will not have a legally binding effect on later activities. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.