



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Los Angeles River Center & Gardens
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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

DATE: February 6, 2019

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing: (a) accepting assignment of funds from Community Conservation Solutions; (b) entering into a grant agreement with the State Coastal Conservancy; (c) accepting terms and conditions of the subject grant agreement, and (d) designating an authorized representative to negotiate and sign the agreement for the Natural Park at Ramona Gardens, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing: (a) accepting assignment of funds from Community Conservation Solutions; (b) entering into a grant agreement with the State Coastal Conservancy; (c) accepting terms and conditions of the subject grant agreement, and (d) designating an authorized representative to negotiate and sign the agreement for the Natural Park at Ramona Gardens, City of Los Angeles.

Background: In 2017, the non-profit organization Community Conservation Solutions (CCS) initiated pre-improvement planning to develop a natural park at the Ramona Gardens public housing development in the Boyle Heights neighborhood. The Natural Park at Ramona Gardens (Project) concept was originally proposed during the Green Solutions Plan prepared by CCS with input provided by Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) staff. In 2017 and 2018, CCS conducted community engagement to develop a concept for park development through project meetings, field trips, and workshops. The initial concept design and community engagement effort was supported by a team of consultants, including SWA for landscape architecture, and VS2 for engineering. Legacy LA, a non-profit organization focused on youth development in Boyle Heights, is a project partner providing community outreach and engagement.

Ramona Gardens, built in the 1940s, is located in an extremely disadvantaged community (within the top 5%) and the proposed Project meets many of the MRCA's

objectives to provide high quality natural open space in an urban environment. The Natural Park at Ramona Gardens is a unique opportunity to provide a natural park in Boyle Heights, with multiple benefits for public health, water resources, recreation and greening. The site is an underutilized, narrow strip of land that lies between the housing buildings and a fifteen-lane transit corridor. The concept design envisions creating a green buffer that will reduce air and noise pollution, an arroyo to filter a portion of nearby storm drain flows, a variety of native plants, play and fitness areas, and a multipurpose plaza. The proposed park development would improve conditions for Ramona Gardens' 1,800 residents, including 700 children, who suffer disproportionately from chronic health problems.

The final Concept Plan and Community Engagement Report was used by CCS to apply for grants to fund the next stage of project development, Schematic Design and feasibility studies. In December 2018, the State Coastal Conservancy awarded \$439,680 from their Climate Ready program to CCS for technical studies. The California Air Resources Board has granted approximately \$350,000 to Legacy LA to continue community outreach and develop studies of public health impacts and air pollution reduction measures for the project. At this time, CCS does not have adequate staff to manage a planning effort of this magnitude, and approached MRCA about taking over this stage of the project.

The Conservancy and CCS have not yet executed an agreement. CCS has already contacted the Conservancy about assigning the funds to MRCA and they have agreed to proceed with transferring the grant award, pending authorization from the Governing Board. Once a grant is in place, staff would begin discussions with the project consultants to kick off the Schematic Design phase. Added to the project team would be Feldman Consulting to provide coordination with Legacy LA, the Housing Authority, various public officials, multiple regulatory agencies, LAPD, and other stakeholders.

The current funding is only for technical studies to continue pre-improvement planning. Accepting the subject grant funds does not obligate MRCA to construct or maintain any improvements, nor to proceed with the project should the concept become infeasible. A maintenance entity has not been identified. All discussions with the Housing Authority and the City of Los Angeles at this point have been preliminary. It may be possible to incorporate workforce development training into a maintenance plan.

Consideration: The grant award from the State Coastal Conservancy is \$439,680.

Fiscal Impact: The subject grant would need to be added to the fiscal year 18/19 budget. There is no impact on the general fund. If funding from the State Coastal Conservancy is not granted to MRCA, the project will be delayed until sufficient funding is secured.