



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: October 2, 2019

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VI(e): Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant augmentation request to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for 3810-P01-1775, Upper Los Angeles River Project Planning and Design.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant augmentation request to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for 3810-P01-1775, Upper Los Angeles River Project Planning and Design in an amount ranging between \$500,000 to \$1,500,000.

Background: In December 2017, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) granted funds to MRCA for the Upper Los Angeles River project planning and design, to carry out requirements as established by Assembly Bill 466 (AB 466), Chapter 341 of the Statutes of 2017, and subsequent legislation that modified the project. The legislation required that the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Working Group, a temporary group within the Conservancy, develop a Revitalization Plan (Plan) for the Upper Los Angeles River, the tributaries of the Pacoima Wash, Tujunga Wash, Verdugo Wash and the Arroyo Seco, as well as any additional waterway that the Working Group determines to be necessary.

The Working Group is tasked with development of the Plan, supported by staff and a team of consultants. Working Group members include representatives from Los Angeles County, the Cities of Los Angeles, Burbank and Glendale, California State Parks, and several community members (see complete list at www.upperlariver.org). MRCA was granted funds to assist the Conservancy to administer the Working Group and develop the Plan, but is not a Working Group member.

The Conservancy's Working Group has met on a monthly basis since August 2018, in full session and as committees. In addition to the parameters established by the various pieces of legislation, the Working Group has made other decisions which dramatically expanded the scope of work, and consequently the cost, of the Plan. These include the geographic extent of study - how far away from the waterways

should the analysis be conducted; the amount, complexity and scope of the community outreach effort; the number of site-specific designs and their level of detail; studying additional tributaries, such as the Sepulveda Basin drainages; and increasing the amount and complexity of hydrologic engineering conducted.

During the Working Group's committee meetings in August 2019, it was noted that there are still elements that could be more robustly envisioned, or added to the scope, to better achieve the project's goals. These include exploration of channel modifications, potential diversions, and creation of new open space for habitat and recreation. Furthermore, if the region's critical needs for housing were incorporated into analysis, it could make the final Plan more relevant and applicable. The Working Group has an agenda item on their September 26, 2019 agenda to add the following components to the Plan to make it more visionary, relevant, and comprehensive:

- Deeper Analysis of Opportunity Areas: In opportunity areas where conceptual design has already begun, the designs shall explore more options for habitat enhancement, feasibility of river restoration, channel expansion, infrastructure modifications, water infiltration and storm water capture. The concepts should also consider community needs for housing and open space, and benefits for optimal results. Illustrations shall be added if needed to communicate design ideas. The cost for this item is expected to range between \$200,000 and \$250,000.

- New Assessment of Publicly Owned Properties: The Plan shall assess publicly owned lands which are underutilized and potentially could be converted to new uses for public benefit and to achieve the Plan's goals. Revising or consolidating current uses among said lands shall also be studied to maximize land potential for both industry and public needs. The cost for this item is expected to range between \$100,000 and \$150,000.

- New Assessment of Privately Owned Properties: The Plan shall evaluate large parcels of privately-owned land which are proximate to waterways and in the immediate vicinity of opportunity areas. These lands shall be assessed for their potential for restoration or conversion to and depending on their current uses, proximity to waterways and potential for restoration propose revitalization enhancements. The cost for this item is expected to range between \$100,000 and \$150,000.

- Add Climate Change Analysis for Open Space Benefits: The Plan shall quantify and apply greenhouse gas reduction impacts to the acreage of open space created, and study habitat and biodiversity metrics for land under public land ownership. The cost for this item is expected to range between \$150,000 and \$175,000.

- **Public Engagement for Plan Implementation:** A comprehensive public information strategy shall be developed to distribute the final Plan and education to a wider audience about the Plan's goals and recommendations. This shall include additional outreach methods and development of an easily accessible document for mass distribution (Reader's Guide). Once the Plan is finalized, staff shall explore options for community advisory stewards and focus groups to advocate for individual projects, moving them forward for implementation and wide public support. This may entail extended efforts related to incorporation into other ongoing planning efforts. The cost for this item will need to be negotiated upon the selection of a public relations team.

- **Multilingual Communication:** In addition to a Spanish version of the summary document, all chapters of the Plan and all new content contained in its appendices should also be translated. Simultaneous translation shall be provided for the draft Plan listening session, and any additional meetings that are a product of ongoing engagement. The comprehensive public information strategy shall incorporate multilingual materials and targeted materials for linguistically isolated populations. The cost for this item is expected to range between \$50,000 and \$75,000.

- **Project Management:** Any added analysis, scope, meetings, and/or work products will also increase the project management needs for the project. Previously added Plan elements, meetings, extended time-lines, online services, and illustrations have already maximized the available resources. The cost for this item which anticipates approximately nine additional months of MRCA staff time is expected to range between \$250,000 and \$300,000.

To meet the mandated legislative deadline, it has been necessary for this project to proceed on an accelerated schedule as compared to a typical planning process. An effect of the accelerated schedule has been that while added scope is identified early on, the project team is not always able to negotiate scope and budget specifics right away. Augmentation needs have been separated into multiple increments in order to keep the project moving forward. All requests have been, and will continue to be, supported by the budget and scope data available at the time of the request.

Consideration: The existing grant from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is \$1,700,000. If the Working Group approves addition of all of the elements listed above, staff estimates that the full project cost could reach \$3,000,000, if all the variables were to come in at the highest cost. If all variables were at their lowest estimate, full project cost would be closer to \$2,250,000. As a comparison, a similar process for the Lower Los Angeles river was approximately \$2.4 million, and studied a much shorter length of river, did not include any tributaries, and did not extend away from the waterway into the larger the watershed.

Staff expects that the total budget augmentation request will be within a range of \$500,000 to \$1,500,000. The final amount will be determined per the Working Group's direction and negotiations with the consultant team on specifics. Potential funding sources include Propositions 1 and 68. Staff will consult with the Conservancy's grants analyst to determine the most appropriate breakdown.

Fiscal Impact: If awarded, the grant augmentation will be added to the fiscal year 19/20 budget. There is no expected impact on the general fund.