



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: November 4, 2020

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item IX: Consideration of resolution authorizing entering into an agreement with Groundwork USA to provide community engagement technical assistance for the Taylor Yard Paseo del Río project, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing entering into an agreement with Groundwork USA to provide community engagement technical assistance for the Taylor Yard Paseo del Río project, City of Los Angeles.

Background: The Taylor Yard G2 Parcel is a critical area for public access and restoration of the Los Angeles River watershed, and was acquired by the City of Los Angeles (the City) in March 2017. The 42-acre site includes nearly one-mile of river frontage along the soft-bottom portion of the River. In April 2019 the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) acquired a permanent multipurpose easement over 12.5 acres of the G2 Parcel. The MRCA is coordinating with the City and the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), who owns the adjacent 18-acre G1 Parcel (Bowtie) abutting MRCA's easement. The three landowners have signed a Letter of Intent to form the "100-Acre Partnership at Taylor Yard" (Partnership) to work together to collaboratively plan the largest continuous open space along the River. The Partnership received funding from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) in June 2020 to plan and implement an early activation river edge access project, currently called Paseo del Río (Paseo), that would provide over one mile of contiguous riverfront public access along both the G2 and Bowtie Parcels at Taylor Yard. The Paseo will be the first project implemented by the Partnership and community engagement and outreach will be vital to facilitating public trust and support for this and many future phases of improvements throughout the 100-acre area.

Taylor Yard was historically operated as a freight railroad facility in northeast Los Angeles and has left a legacy of pollutant contaminants that have been found in

subsurface soils. Most of the larger brownfield Taylor Yard area has seen remedial cleanup occur with oversight by the Department of Toxic Substance Controls (DTSC) (e.g. Rio de los Angeles State Park and Sotomayor Arts and Sciences Magnet), with the G2 and Bowtie Parcels as the final remaining area to undergo cleanup. The local communities surrounding Taylor Yard are very engaged and justifiably concerned that any improvements be done safely and to benefit the residents that live there today. For a meaningful community driven process to occur, community engagement efforts for Paseo must seek to discuss the history of the site and to provide many options to best facilitate multi-generational, cultural and linguistic participation, especially critical during Covid-19 restrictions.

The MRCA and State Parks are currently preparing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Community Engagement (CE) Team to be released soon that includes, but is not limited to an overall *Lead Outreach Team*, *Public Information Team*, and *Community Organizing Team*. Within the scope of the Paseo project, the CE Team's engagement should foster discussion and seek to provide guidance to the Partnership Paseo planning team in the areas of design of the Paseo del Río greenway, brownfield restoration and environmental planning, equity strategies, programming of the future open space, and other culturally relevant practices. A strong CE Team will have a diverse technical background with subject matter experts supporting the team, and should be prepared to work in-depth with the community around brownfield aspects.

In searching to augment the project with technical advisors ahead of the CE Team formation, the Partnership has been in discussion over the last year with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funded non-governmental organization (NGO) Groundwork USA (GWUSA) that is nationally recognized for their work on projects that "transform the natural and built environment of low-resource communities and are a national enterprise with local roots, working at the intersection of the environment, equity, and civic engagement. Working hand-in-hand with local residents through inclusive, community-driven processes, GWUSA projects plan and implement high-impact brownfield transformation and land-reuse projects in long-overlooked neighborhoods, transforming environmental liabilities into community assets". The Partnership seeks to add GWUSA's expertise to benefit the full Partnership planning team and the future CE Team. The MRCA recently received a proposal from GWUSA to provide community engagement technical and brownfield assistance to the Partnership at no cost. GWUSA's expenses and staff time are completely covered through grants they receive from the EPA, and a non-binding agreement executed by the MRCA will engage them to serve in an advisory capacity to the Project.

The GWUSA staff assisting with the Project will not be in the forefront developing content or leading meetings, as that will be the role of the selected CE Team that

should have local ties to the community. However, the GWUSA staff will be important to strategically advising the engagement effort, principally with regards to successful brownfield redevelopment. GWUSA and their partners have significant experience working in low-income, non-English speaking, and communities of color. Their experience will bring to the CE Team a range of successful and culturally relevant practices such as: coalition building, hiring-for-benefit of young and old community members as project ambassadors, meetings completely held in Spanish with English translation, development of understanding who is not at the table and should be better included in the engagement process, and during Covid-19 restrictions the development of well-designed surveys, mailings, and campaigns to draw attention to their projects.

The scope of work for GWUSA includes providing technical assistance and feedback regarding the development of community engagement and outreach framework and plans; assist to develop concrete environmental justice and equitable development goals, milestones, and evaluation methods to weave into planning and developmental processes; serve in an advisory capacity during essential internal and community engagement team meetings; and provide equitable development and environmental justice-oriented feedback on key public-facing documents such as RFPs, engagement plans, and communications.

Please note: due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, community engagement practices must evolve to ensure that safety is paramount. This comes with many challenges to the Project to ensure that the CE Team is able to engage with a robust population of the community and stakeholders, most notably for those whom have partial or significant limitations within virtual participation. Given that holding public meetings during the Covid-19 is currently restricted, it is important to the Partnership to identify alternate convening and input methods to allow the community to participate throughout the planning process for the Project. As this Project duration is anticipated to reach beyond two years, it is foreseeable that many or all Covid-19 restrictions could be no longer necessary before the Project is completed.

Consideration: The proposed action would authorize entering into a no cost agreement with Groundwork USA.

Fiscal Impact: The agreement will be at no cost and will help to augment the capabilities of the community engagement scope for the Project. The community engagement task costs for the Paseo del Rio project were included in the fiscal year 2020/21 budget and are still planned to be expended on a new team following the planned RFP process.