

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: April 25, 2011

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 11: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the City of Los Angeles for a natural area within the boundaries of Cesar Chavez Recreation Complex in the San Fernando Valley.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the City of Los Angeles for a permanent natural area within the boundaries of Cesar Chavez Recreation Complex in the San Fernando Valley and Los Angeles River watershed.

Legislative Authority: Section 33204(c) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Cesar Chavez Recreation Complex occupies an approximately 40-acre open space area formally part of the Sheldon Arleta sanitary landfill complex operated by the City of Los Angeles. The City's Department of Recreation and Parks is transforming this site into a multifaceted recreation complex. Located just south of the merge between Interstate 5 and the Hollywood 170 Freeway, the site is part of a large assemblage of publically-owned, but mostly inaccessible open space that includes the Tujunga Spreading grounds. Any avian habitat resources created on the subject Cesar Chavez site will ultimately be complemented by restored habitat on portions of these spreading grounds.

The 6th City Council District has been seeking Conservancy grant funds for the subject area for approximately three years. For over a year, staff has been working diligently with numerous City departments on a potential natural park plan for the northeastern flank of the subject complex. The site is now mostly near-finish graded and positioned to implement a unique natural landscape. The subject portion of site was specifically graded with raised terrain to block residents' views of the active park on Sharp Avenue. The City originally proposed an approximately 10-acre natural area and hoped to receive a \$1.5 million grant. With only \$1,000,000 potentially available, the City's submitted figures partially reflect the larger park footprint.

The attached application from the City is for a \$1,000,000 grant of Los Angeles River watershed Proposition 84 funds to construct a natural park on approximately 6.0 acres of the property. A conceptual plan of the whole park and the potential Conservancy-funded 6.0-acre

Phase IIIB natural area is attached as part of the application. The whole park would be fenced. Gates at the two relevant park corners would provide access to a treated decomposed granite meandering trail system through the natural area. A key component of the City's plan is that not a single non-native plant or even hybrid native cultivar will be planted or be allowed to inadvertently grow within the area defined by a grant agreement. The proposed grant agreement would clearly define this prohibition and will empower the Conservancy or its agents and assignees to enter the property and terminate/remove all prohibited vegetation. Staff has favorably reviewed detailed plans for the paths and undulating topography. Staff has also provided input on the plant species to be used. The grant agreement would also prohibit any lighting within the main body of the natural park. Many additional details would be covered in the grant agreement to ensure the success and viability of this park subarea as native habitat in perpetuity.

The dearth of any natural area for almost a three mile radius around the recreation complex and its proximity to a much larger park and a public high school create an important permanent opportunity to bring nature into the heart of the developed San Fernando Valley. The project would also add to the ongoing multi-agency effort to create a corridor of natural lands within the Tujunga Wash tributary of the Los Angeles River from Studio City to Hansen Dam. Hansen Dam is located 2.5 miles upstream of the site.