

# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: April 28, 2014

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

Subject: **Agenda Item No. 14: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust, a non-profit organization, for project planning and design of Blueberry Hill, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution recommending the authorization of a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust, a non-profit organization, for project planning and design of Blueberry Hill, City of Los Angeles, Upper Los Angeles River watershed in the amount of \$100,000.

Legislative Authority: Public Resources Code Section 33204.2(a) provides that the Conservancy may award grants to non-profit organizations.

## I. BACKGROUND

The Boyle Heights Green Corridors project is a collaborative effort to bring recreational improvements and native ecology to the densely populated Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. A series of public improvement projects is contemplated, ranging from street greening and stormwater management to parks and recreational amenities. The Green Corridors project will increase safe pedestrian connectivity from the surrounding neighborhoods, schools and parks to the Los Angeles River. First envisioned by students and teachers from Hollenbeck Middle School, conceptual planning of the Boyle Heights Green Corridors occurred in 2006-2008 by a team including representatives from Los Angeles County, City of Los Angeles, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, and NUVIS Landscape Architecture and Planning.

The Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust (LANLT) has submitted a grant proposal to implement one of the Green Corridors components, the Blueberry Hill project. The project is located on right-of-way for East Sixth Street, between Orme Avenue and Camulos Street where Sixth Street is terminated. An existing staircase allows pedestrians to cross over Blueberry Hill between the two segments of the street. The proposed project will transform the neglected and barren land associated with the Blueberry Hill stairs into a park and usable space.

LANLT plans to actively engage the disadvantaged community of Boyle Heights using their

experience implementing multiple-benefit parks that meet the diverse needs of the community while protecting natural resources. The grant proposal will include project planning and design to prepare the project for construction. The park improvements will include stormwater mitigation and water quality protection measures, slope stabilization and new low-water use plantings, and installation of outdoor fitness equipment to support healthy choices for low-income families. LANLT plans to conduct multiple community meetings, finalize a design and construction documents, prepare a construction cost estimate, perform project management and a preliminary permit review for the improvements. Once this work is complete, the project will be highly competitive for construction funding.

Established in 2002, LANLT is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to grow healthier, safer and stronger communities by creating small, accessible urban parks and gardens that help remedy the critical lack of green and recreational spaces in greater Los Angeles' underserved neighborhoods, and to ensure participation and collaboration among low-income residents throughout the process of envisioning, building and managing the parks and gardens they create. LANLT works exclusively in underserved, park-poor areas of Los Angeles. They are dedicated to remedying the severe lack of open space and accompanying negative health effects that exist in these primarily African-American, Latino and immigrant communities.

## **II. Analysis–Proposition 84 and the Common Ground Plan**

Section 75050 of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84), allocates funds to various entities “for the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources.”

Section 75050 (g)(2) of the Act specifically allocates funding to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy “for implementation of watershed protection activities throughout the watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River pursuant to Section 79508 of the Water Code.” The section of the Water Code referenced therein states that watershed protection activities in the Los Angeles River shall be consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*.

### **A. The Project Planning and Design of Blueberry Hill Constitute Watershed Protection Activities Within the Watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River, as Required by Section 75050(g)(2)**

The Project Planning and Design of Blueberry Hill lies within the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed, and the property and its facilities are resources for public recreational use. As outlined in the application, the proposed project is consistent with Proposition 84's policy to

promote the access to and enjoyment of land and water resources. LANLT is requesting a grant to rehabilitate, restore, protect and improve the site of Blueberry Hill.<sup>1</sup>

All elements of the project fit within the definitions of eligible activities (development, preservation, protection, and restoration) because the funds will be spent on design that will improve the site, enhance its active recreation uses, and restore the native habitat.

**B. The Project Planning and Design of Blueberry Hill are Consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan* as Required by Section 79508 of the Water Code**

The *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*,<sup>2</sup> also known as and hereinafter referred to as the "Common Ground" plan, was jointly developed by the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, or Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC). The purpose of the plan is to "articulate a vision for the future of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watersheds" and "provide a framework for future watershed and open space planning." The plan outlines a holistic approach to watershed protection and development, organized by a set of Guiding Principles.<sup>3</sup> These broad principles, referenced further below, are designed to accommodate the varying priorities and needs of projects in the region.

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<sup>1</sup>Chapter 1, Section 75005 of Proposition 84 defines the following terms:

(f) "Development" includes, but is not limited to, the physical improvement of real property including the construction of facilities or structures.

(l) "Preservation" means rehabilitation, stabilization, restoration, development and reconstruction, or any combination of those activities.

(m) "Protection" means those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property or natural resources or those actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources and includes acquisition, development, restoration, preservation and interpretation.

(n) "Restoration" means the improvement of physical structures or facilities. Restoration projects shall include the planning, monitoring and reporting necessary to ensure successful implementation of the project objectives.

<sup>2</sup>A copy of the Common Ground Plan can be accessed online at [http://www.rmc.ca.gov/plans/common\\_ground.html](http://www.rmc.ca.gov/plans/common_ground.html)

<sup>3</sup>The Guiding Principles are outlined in Page 2 of the Executive Summary, or discussed with greater depth on Page 47 of the Plan.

To help guide decision making in watershed planning and project selection, the Common Ground plan includes a set of Project Evaluation Criteria (Appendix F), developed to help the agencies determine “regionally significant” park, trail, and restoration projects. The Evaluation Criteria identify a diverse set of values that a site might have, such as Open Space, Recreational Resources, Wildlife Resources, Access, *et cetera*. Within those values, a project receives a rating on a 1-4 scale based on the degree to which the project meets specified criteria.

The proposed project scores highly in several of the Project Evaluation Criteria:

- 1. Urban Resource Value (4 points):** The site provides a significant contribution to a proposed greenway, the Boyle Heights Green Corridors. Blueberry Hill is located within the heavily populated, park-poor and disadvantaged community of Boyle Heights in the City of Los Angeles. The site can be accessed from multiple points and is along a popular walking route to two neighborhood schools, making it easy for a great number of people to get recreational benefit from it.
- 2. Access Value (4 points):** The entire site itself is public right-of-way, and it is within walking distance from ample public transportation, including the Gold Line, and bus routes 251, 252, 605, 620, 751, 18, 30 and 330.
- 3. Partnership Value (4 points):** The site is of significance to one or more partner government agencies, including the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority. The County’s Proposition A program previously granted funds for the Boyle Heights Green Corridors project.
- 4. Trail Resource Value (4 points):** The site provides a frequently-used connection within an urban community.
- 5. Scenic Resource Value (3 points):** The site contains an important, but less than critical, viewshed of a major park/public use area. The site will be an overlook of the surrounding area, including a view of the downtown Los Angeles skyline and natural resources such as the San Gabriel Mountains, Elephant Hill, Ascot Park and other Northeast Open Spaces.
- 6. Other Recreational Resource Value (3 points):** The site provides area for a smaller-scale recreational facility, including a picnic area, outdoor fitness equipment and walking path.

Based upon its high scores in the selection criteria, as well as its consistency with the Guiding Principles, the Blueberry Hill Project Planning and Design project is consistent with the

Common Ground Plan as required by Section 79508 of the Water Code.

### **III. Analysis - General Obligation Bond Law**

The General Obligation Bond Law provides that bond funds may be used for the construction and acquisition of "capital assets." Capital assets include major maintenance, reconstruction, demolition for purposes of reconstruction of facilities, and retrofitting work that is ordinarily done no more often than once every 5 to 15 years or expenditures that continue or enhance the useful life of the capital asset (Government code Section 16727 (a)). Capital assets also includes equipment with an expected useful life of two years or more. Section 16727 (a) also allows bond funds to be used for costs that are incidentally but directly related to construction including costs for planning, engineering and other design work.

This project is for the development, preservation, protection and restoration of a capital asset, that is, a land and water resource in the Los Angeles River watershed. As such, it is a proper expenditure of bond funds. In addition, the activities that this grant will fund will enhance the useful life of the facilities and on that basis as well qualify as capital assets for purposes of the General Obligation Bond Law.