

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: April 27, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 13: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds for project planning and design of public improvements at the Los Angeles River Taylor Yard G2 property.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority in the amount of \$200,000 for project planning and design of public improvements for the Los Angeles River Taylor Yard G2 property, Los Angeles.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2, 33204.27(a), and 75050(g)(2) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority has submitted the attached grant application for project planning and design of the Los Angeles River Taylor Yard G2 project. The Taylor Yard G2 property is a critical site for restoration of the Los Angeles River watershed, and is a key component of the Army Corps of Engineers' Los Angeles River Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study. The 42-acre site includes nearly one mile of river frontage along the scenic soft-bottom portion of the river. This large site has the potential to treat regional stormwater flows and therefore can impacted the long term water quality of the watershed and coast. Its proximity to existing open space, recreational resources, and interpretive resources, including Rio de Los Angeles State Park, riparian habitat in the river itself, numerous parks along hte opposite bank of the river, and Los Angeles River High School, means that G2 is a singularly unique opportunity to create a regional multiple-benefit park, enhance habitat connectivity, provide recreation and interpretation, improve the water quality of the Los Angeles River watershed, and promote access to the Los Angeles River.

The G2 site was used for maintenance and fueling of trains from the 1930s to 2006. Conversion of the property to public parkland and watershed restoration will require a multi-year remediation process to address pollutants on portions of the site. The subject grant will be used for project planning and design for both permanent and interim improvements on the site, including technical research for the remediation process. Objectives of the grant are to protect the Los Angeles River watershed through the restoration of native habitat and treat urban storm water, and promote public access to the watershed's land, water and wildlife resources

by creating a trail link along the Los Angeles River.

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*.

The proposed project planning and design grant constitutes watershed protection activities in the Upper Los Angeles River watershed. The geographic area covered by the grant is within the Upper Los Angeles River watershed, and the project to be developed contains elements to protect and restore rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water and other natural resources. The improvement project that will be planned with the proposed project planning and design grant fits within the definitions of eligible activities: development, preservation, protection, interpretation, and/or restoration.

The project planning and design grant is 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*, 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 and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. 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. These broad principles are designed to accommodate the varying priorities and needs of projects in the region.

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 Taylor Yard G2 project scores highly as a project in the following categories:

Urban Park Value: The G2 project is located in a densely populated and disadvantaged community. It will create a new and significantly sized park in a natural-resource-deficient urban area.

Trail Resource Value: The G2 project will build a major link in the Los Angeles River Greenway regional trail, and promote access to the Greenway through the provision of parking and visitor amenities.

Public Recreation Value: The G2 project implements a major component of multiple existing plans, including the Army Corps of Engineers' Los Angeles River Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study and the City of Los Angeles' Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan

Scenic Value: The entire length of the G2 property offers viewshed of a major public use area, the Los Angeles River.

Sustainability Value: The project proposes to provide innovative design of green infrastructure for storm water and substantial water conservation.

Interpretation Value: The G2 project will result in new public access to a watershed resource with high interpretive and educational value. It will add visitor-serving amenities, accessibility, and public safety improvements to public parkland with significant water resources, to serve a regional visitor base. The project creates a new public access point to resources of the Los Angeles River that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Natural Resources Enhancement Value: The G2 project will restore native riparian habitat over a substantial portion of the 42-acre property.

Partnership Value: The G2 project is a priority of the City of Los Angeles.

Based upon consistency with the selection criteria and Guiding Principles, the Taylor Yard G2 project is consistent with the Common Ground Plan as required by Section 79508 of the Water Code.

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, and tangible physical property with an expected useful life of 10 to 15 years. Section 16727 (a) also allows bond funds to be used for costs that are incidentally but directly related to construction or acquisition including costs for planning, engineering and other design work.

The activities that the MRCA proposes to fund with this grant constitute planning of a land improvement project to protect land and water resources, protect and restore rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water and other natural resources. Thus, the proposed activities fall within the definition of “capital assets” or are incidentally but directly related to acquisition or construction, and therefore are proper under the General Obligation Bond Law.

Consideration: The grant request from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$200,000 to fund project planning and design for interim and permanent parkland uses.