

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: April 27, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 14: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 40 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for capital improvements at Ed Davis Park in Towsley Canyon, Santa Clarita Woodlands, unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 40 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for capital improvements at Ed Davis Park in Towsley Canyon, Santa Clarita Woodlands, in the amount of \$300,000, unincorporated Los Angeles County.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2 and 33204.27 of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has submitted the attached grant application for capital improvements to Ed Davis Park in Towsley Canyon. Ed Davis Park in Towsley Canyon is a major recreational amenity used by thousands of visitors to the Santa Clarita Woodlands. Trails used for walking, hiking, and mountain biking lead visitors through an astonishing variety of habitat types. Notable park features include year-round Towsley Creek, scenic trail viewpoints, oak woodland, and the spectacular water-worn rock formations in Towsley Gorge. The park also features Towsley Lodge, a Spanish-style ranch house that sits atop a community lawn surrounded by cottonwoods and sycamores. The park is a popular destination for nearby residents as well as visitors from the greater Los Angeles County region to Santa Clarita Woodlands Park. The facility is currently used to host special events as well as informal picnicking and as a starting point for hikers. Improvements to this area will increase its functionality and enjoyment of visitors to the site.

MRCA has submitted a grant application for capital improvements to improve an area of the park to enhance utility and visitor experience. To expand the available space for community gathering and providing public programs, an area behind the pool has been identified as underutilized. The grant will be used to plan, design, and implement improvements to create a ranch-style gathering area that can be used for public programs and special events. This area of the park offers the best opportunity to provide new accessible amenities for a wide range of visitor abilities. A shade structure, improved paths of travel, security fencing, and visual screening will be constructed to create an enjoyable usable space.

Analysis–Proposition 40

The “California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002” (Proposition 40) allocated \$40 million to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for the acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection of land and water resources in accordance with the Conservancy Act. The California Attorney General has previously advised the Conservancy that Proposition 40 bond proceeds may be used for preservation which, as defined in the bond act, includes interpretation, protection, rehabilitation, restoration, stabilization, development or reconstruction. Proposition 40 also defines “development” to include “improvement, rehabilitation, restoration, enhancement, preservation, protection, and interpretation.” In the General Provisions of the Proposition, the Legislature declares that “to maintain a high quality of life for California’s growing population requires a continuing investment in parks, recreation facilities, and in the protection of the state’s natural and historical resources.” Proposition 40 bond proceeds may also be used to pay costs that are incidentally but directly related to the acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration or protection of a capital asset.

As outlined in the application, the proposed project is consistent with Proposition 40. The activities to be planned are all development, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection of land and water resources, and the improvements to property will enable use for interpretation and as a recreation facility. The capital improvements to be planned will enhance the useful life of park facilities, provide public access to parkland, and/or are major maintenance projects that ordinarily not be done more often than every five to fifteen years. This project will enable the MRCA to provide a continuing investment in parks and recreation facilities within the Santa Clarita Woodlands, available to visitors from and the surrounding region.

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 MRCA proposes to fund with this grant constitute planning of improvement projects 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.

Analysis–Consistency with Plans

The proposed grant is consistent with all applicable plans, including the *Santa Monica Mountains Strategic Plan* and *Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor Master Plan*. These two plans, adopted in 1997 and 1990 respectively, identify the Conservancy’s goals and priorities in preserving important resources and providing public recreation. The requested grant meets the following goal objectives of these two plans:

- Increase public access and educational/interpretive capabilities;
- Increase resource stewardship capabilities;
- Provide opportunities for multi-use trail recreation in a naturalistic setting;
- Maintain scenic resources, and contribute to recreational resources which enhance residents’ quality of life;
- Complete ROV trails and trail amenities recommended by the Plan;
- Expand efforts to integrate nature into the urban environment; and
- Develop long term capital improvement and maintenance plans.

The new gathering area at Towsley Canyon Park will be used to provide public programs available to community from underserved and disadvantaged areas of the greater Los Angeles region. The new facilities will be a new resource for educational and interpretive programs that teach resource stewardship, and these new amenities will augment the other recreational resources of the park.

Consideration: The application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$300,000 of Proposition 40 funds.