

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: June 27, 2016

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 16: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for Project Planning and Design of the Los Angeles River Greenway Ecosystem Restoration Area, Burbank to Boyle Heights.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for Project Planning and Design of the Los Angeles River Greenway Ecosystem Restoration Area, Burbank to Boyle Heights in the amount of \$150,000.

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 application for a Project Planning and Design grant. The proposed grant would provide planning related to a stretch of the Los Angeles River Greenway from Burbank to Boyle Heights. During planning performed for Reaches 3 and 4 of the Los Angeles River Master Plan and the Draft Integrated Feasibility Report (IFR) as part of related studies, a specific corridor was identified that contained multiple opportunities for environmental restoration, public access and parkland improvements. The IFR is a plan for restoration of aquatic riparian ecosystem native to the Los Angeles River along an approximately 11-mile stretch that would provide ecosystem benefits while maintaining existing levels of flood risk management. That corridor, as expanded to include some nearby identified potential project sites, is the subject area for this proposed grant.

The specific area to be studied extends along the Los Angeles River from the City of Burbank on the northwestern end, through the City of Glendale, and to Boyle Heights in the City of Los Angeles, on the southeastern end. Within this study area, many opportunities exist, including connecting many schools, the Taylor Yard-G2 parcel, open waterways of the River and tributaries, and confluences with the Verdugo Wash and Arroyo Seco. Lands directly adjacent to the Los Angeles River running through Griffith Park, Elysian Park, Verdugo Wash, and the Arroyo Seco provide significant regional ecological connections and mark the Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor. Extensions of the Los Angeles River Bikeway both north of Griffith Park and south of the Arroyo Seco Confluence are currently in planning, and studies are underway for an in-channel bike path. Additional planning efforts in the area include an

integrated study of water flow and potentially an update to Los Angeles County's *Los Angeles River Master Plan*. Additional information regarding the study area can be found in the attached grant application.

Objectives of the project planning and design grant are to provide landscape planning, policy, and design to protect, restore, preserve, interpret and develop the land and water resources of the Upper Los Angeles River watershed that lie within the project area. Project planning and design describes a range of staff activities that prepare a potential project to the point that capital funding can be secured for implementation. In the case of land acquisition projects, the project planning and design effort extends throughout the escrow period. For capital improvement projects, project planning and design work extends through the completion of construction.

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 projects to be developed shall contain elements to protect and restore rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water and other natural resources. The land acquisition and improvement projects that will be planned with the proposed project planning and design grant will be required to fit 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.

Project planning and design is consistent with the following Guiding Principles:

- Connect Open Space with a Network of Trails
- Establish Riverfront Greenways to Cleanse Water, Hold Floodwaters, and Extend Open Space
- Coordinate Watershed Planning Across Jurisdictions and Boundaries
- Encourage Multiple-Objective Planning and Projects
- Create, Expand and Improve Public Open Space Throughout the Region
- Improve Quality of Surface Water and Groundwater

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 land acquisitions and 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.

Consideration: The grant request from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$150,000.