



MEMORANDUM

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR & MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: CAROLYNN PETRU, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER 
DATE: JUNE 1, 2010
SUBJECT: NATURE EDUCATION CENTER GRANT APPLICATION
REVIEWED BY: CAROLYN LEHR, CITY MANAGER 

Project Manager: Sara Singer, Senior Administrative Analyst

RECOMMENDATION

ADOPT A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RANCHO PALOS VERDES APPROVING THE APPLICATION FOR NATURE EDUCATION FACILITY PROGRAM FUNDS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE SAFE DRINKING WATER, WATER QUALITY AND SUPPLY, FLOOD CONTROL, RIVER AND COASTAL PROTECTION BOND ACT OF 2006.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

The California State Parks and Recreation Department is accepting grant applications for a new program titled, "Nature Education Facilities Grant Program." The program is a one-time "call for projects" with \$93 million made available as a result of Proposition 84, which the voters passed in 2006. The deadline for application is July 1, 2010. The City may request up to \$7 million in grant funding, no local match is required, and the project does not need to be completed until 2016. The grant program is to fund "brick and mortar" facilities which, "Educate visitors, inspire environmental stewardship, increase the public's understanding and knowledge of California resources and meet one or more of the following objectives:

- Combine the study of natural science with preservation, demonstration and education programs that serve diverse populations;
- Provide collections and programs related to the relationship of Native American cultures to the environment; and/or
- Conduct marine wildlife conservation research."

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Over the past month, staff has been meeting with the City's grant consultant, Blais & Associates, to learn more about the grant program and discuss potential projects that would be competitive for this funding opportunity. Because this is a grant program that provides significant capital funding with no local match requirement and because there are definite needs within RPV that fall under the umbrella of the objectives above, staff is seeking the Council's strong support for the proposed application for a Nature Education Center at Abalone Cove Shoreline Park.

Based on the grant scoring criteria, a new facility at the Abalone Cove site would be highly competitive. Staff proposes submitting a grant application with the following scope of work:

- Construct a new 8,000 to 10,000 square foot building which would house a Nature Education Center. Staff is proposing to construct a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) building to promote the design of environmentally responsible and healthy places to live and work. The facility would also include space for an ancillary Park Ranger/Sheriff's substation.
- Develop programming and interactive exhibits at the new facility that would educate the public on tide pools, marine life, trails, conservation, protection of the habitat of RPV and on sustainable living. This includes incorporating the exhibits which are currently located at the Discovery Room into the new exhibit space. The Discovery Room at Ladera Linda would be repurposed.
- Renovate the existing guard shack to match a new Nature Education Center. The renovated building would maintain the outdoor restroom facilities and provide additional storage for the park.
- Pave the parking lot with a porous concrete material and install educational signage at the bluff edge and the tide pool sites below.
- Improve the trail system, landscaping and outdoor picnic areas at the Abalone Cove site as presented in the Coast Vision Plan.

In 2010, the City Council adopted the following Tactical Goal:

Improve the City's recreational and educational facilities by expanding opportunities for active recreational uses and improving access to all parks.

If this grant were to be awarded to the City, access to Abalone Cove Shoreline Park would be significantly improved and the educational experience at the park would be enhanced through the proposed improvements. In keeping with staff's commitment to seek all reasonable grant opportunities available for projects consistent with the City's goals, with Council's concurrence, staff plans to continue work with the City's grant consultant to develop a grant application for the Abalone Cove Park site.

Site Information

Abalone Cove Shoreline Park is zoned Open Space Recreation (OR) and the adjacent

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cliffs are zoned Open Space Hazard (OH). The park is located within Subregion 5 of the City's Coastal Specific Plan and a portion of the property is also within the City's Landslide Moratorium Area. However, the proposed placement of the Nature Education Center would respect the Coastal Setback Zone and would be outside the moratorium area boundary.

The site currently consists of two beaches: Abalone Cove and Sacred Cove, both of which feature tide pools, magnificent viewing areas, hiking trails and picnic areas. The park is accessed off of Palos Verdes Drive South and visitors are required to pay a \$5 fee for parking in the unimproved dirt/gravel parking lot. There is great opportunity for a complete nature education experience at this park site. Many marine creatures including sea urchins, sea stars, sea hares, sea anemones, various fish, and sea lettuce are commonly spotted in the tide pools. Visitors to the park can also explore the extraordinary geology, peninsula history and learn about the Native Americans who once resided in the area through scheduled docent-led tours. The site is also adjacent to the Lower Filiorum property, which when eventually developed for single family homes, would be required to dedicate an open space/wildlife corridor to the City connecting Abalone Cove to the balance of the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve.

The site is also part of a State Ecological Reserve, so the marine life and habitat are strictly protected. However, the City frequently experiences problems with poachers and visitors disturbing the protected marine life and habitat areas. For example, in the 12 months prior to the establishment of the Park Ranger Program, the Sheriff's deputies issued approximately 10 to 12 citations for unlicensed fishing and poaching. During this same time, the Sheriff dealt with a group of individuals illegally hunting rabbits with bows and arrows at the park. Since the addition of the Park Ranger Program in late 2009, the City has issued two citations for poaching in Abalone Cove, and Code Enforcement Officers have recently issued a notice to neighbors for creating an unauthorized trail in the preserve area down to the beach. The neighbor's development activity in the nature preserve has severely damaged the protected habitat.

Currently, the only way to be "educated" about the site is to schedule a docent-led tour. With the proposed improvements, however, visitors would be able to have an interactive learning experience via a guided tour or a self guided tour through indoor exhibits and outdoor educational signage. The proposed facility would also provide a public safety presence to help protect the natural environment at the site. The City recognizes some of the abuse and damage from visitors due to a lack of education about the marine ecosystem and adequate public safety presence to deter poaching and destructive activities. The proposed improvements would protect the nature preserve and help to protect the site through enhanced educational programming, instituting supportive restrictions, and providing administrative offices for the Park Rangers/drop-in offices for the L.A. County Sheriff deputies. The site would not be advertised as a beach park, but rather a Nature Preserve dedicated to safeguarding the fragile marine life and natural habitat area in the park through education and exploration. Overall, the proposed improvements would diversify the region's recreational amenities.

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Coast Vision Plan

The City Council adopted the Coast Vision Plan in 2008, which provides the City with guidance for implementing future improvements to key areas along the coast. The key areas examined in the Plan include the following sites: Upper Point Vicente, Lower Point Vicente, Abalone Cove, Gateway Park and Del Cerro Park. The Vision Plan states:

The Rancho Palos Verdes Coast is a place unique and precious in southern California, unlike other coastal areas geographically, geologically, and in terms of protected resources, public lands, as well as mix of destinations. In an area with resources such as this, teaching and learning opportunities in which to engage residents, volunteers, school children and visitors abound. If capitalized on and expressed consistently, a continuous educational experience adds another dimension to this place, and supports and encourages future generations of stewards.

Staff assessed all key sites which were studied in the Coast Vision Plan to determine which site would best fit the grant criteria for this program. Staff also examined the Ladera Linda site which was included in the Plan, but is the current location of the City's Discovery Room, which provides minimal educational materials and is adjacent to the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve.

Upper and Lower Point Vicente Parks and Del Cerro Park

These three sites are not well-suited to accommodate a new Nature Center for a variety of reasons. Upper Point Vicente is the current City Hall site, which was identified by the Coast Vision Plan for Civic and Cultural uses (i.e. New Civic Center). There is no direct marine access and it is in close proximity to the Palos Verdes Interpretive Center, which already serves as an educational facility. Also, there is no direct access to the bulk of the Preserve from this location. As mentioned above, Lower Point Vicente already is home to the Point Vicente Interpretive Center (PVIC), which serves as an educational facility focusing on the history of Rancho Palos Verdes and is a prime whale watching site. This grant can only be used for new construction; therefore, additions or renovations to PVIC would not be eligible for grant funding under this program. Further, there is no direct access to the coastline and to the bulk of the Preserve from this location. Del Cerro Park has been designated as a donor recognition site for educating the public about the origins of the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, and includes an area to view the Preserve from above. However, there is no direct access to the coastline and additional facilities would not be easily accommodated given the limited access and parking available.

Ladera Linda

Ladera Linda is currently used for active recreation and as a community center. Active uses on the site include paddle tennis courts, basketball courts, three playgrounds and a large grass field. The site is also adjacent to the Ladera Linda soccer fields, which are

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owned by the School District and managed by AYSO. While several of the old elementary school buildings that occupy the site are leased to a local Montessori School for classroom space, the remainder is used for storage, a multi-purpose room for the City and the Discovery Room which offers minimal educational opportunities. This site is best suited for institutional and active recreation uses. The buildings have not been renovated or significantly improved since construction in the 1960's. There are many improvements required to bring this facility to current building and safety standards. While there is access to the Preserve at this site, there is no marine access, on-site parking is very limited and the site is located some distance from the main arterial roadway.

Gateway Park

The Coast Vision Plan identifies the Gateway Park as being the ideal location for a Nature Education Center as it is planned to serve as a major public access portal to the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve. The Plan identified the following goals for the Gateway Park site:

- Create a "Gateway Park" that acts as a staging area for users and visitors from Palos Verdes Drive into the Preserve beyond. Incorporate Rancho Palos Verdes natural areas "system" information into the Park, in trail head and picnic facilities.
- Establish a managed area, outside the Preserve, with a focus on specific active recreational pursuits, including horseback riding and other activities as approved by the City Council through the PUMP process.
- Develop an outdoor education/nature appreciation center suitable for school and community groups.
- Implement an integrated approach to access and parking for all users.

However, because Gateway Park is located entirely within the City's Landslide Moratorium Area, no permanent structures can be accommodated on the site, which is why the Plan calls for an outdoor education/nature center rather than a permanent building. Further, the undeveloped upper "bench" area overlooking the southern end of the site where the facility is proposed to be located is accessible by a dirt road and a trail connection. Access to the upper "bench" area has a very steep grade, so it would be a challenge to provide ADA compliant access. In practical terms, while the site can still function as a gateway into the heart of the Preserve, the opportunities to provide a multi-functional educational facility is extremely limited and would not achieve the goals of the State grant.

Abalone Cove

The Coast Vision Plan identifies the following goals for the Abalone Cove site:

- Add new park amenities – picnic tables, shade features, benches, trash receptacles, and an ADA accessible bluff top trail and trail signage.
- Implement an invasive species removal and low profile shade tree planting program within the park

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Because the Coast Vision Plan identifies Gateway Park as the preferred location for a nature education center, very little was identified in the way of permanent educational facilities and improvements at Abalone Cove. However, in many ways this site is better suited to providing this type of improvement than Gateway Park, including the existing access and parking off of Palos Verdes Drive South, existing restrooms for visitors, and proximity not only to the Preserve, but also access to the State Ecological Reserve and the associated tide pools to enhance the learning experience. In addition to these advantages, the Park Rangers would have a presence at the site to improve protection of multiple unique habitats. Additional staffing needs at the site would be minimal because the City currently budgets for this park site to be staffed by part-time employees from the Recreation and Parks Department.

Future CIP Projects and Grant Opportunities

The City's Capital Improvement Plan currently includes improvements for both Abalone Cove and Gateway Park in FY11-12 and FY12-13. The funding for the improvements would be provided by potential grant funding which would require a 20 percent match from the City. Public Works submitted an application for Metro's 2009 Call For Projects. Unfortunately, the application was denied; however, staff anticipates resubmitting the application for the 2010 Call For Projects, utilizing the services of Blais & Associates to improve our chances for success. The Gateway Park Improvement Project qualifies for the Pedestrian Improvements and the Transportation Enhancement Modal categories for the Call For Projects application.

The proposed CIP project for Gateway Park will be modified to accommodate the restrictions created by the land movement at this site. The Gateway site would be complementary to the Abalone Cove site to further enhance the learning experience about the Preserve, Land Movement, and the Geology of the Peninsula.

To further diversify recreational opportunities for the public, other proposed projects include:

- Additional public trail improvements throughout the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve.
- Civic and cultural improvements at Upper Point Vicente Park
- Annenberg Foundation educational facility at Lower Point Vicente Park
- Park improvements at Grandview Park
- Park improvements at Lower Hesse Park

Potential Public/Private Partnerships

The City would approach other public and/or private agencies to partner with the educational programming for the site. The proposed improvements include classroom space for lectures and research. Currently, school groups from throughout the great Los Angeles area visit the site to learn about the habitat, geology and marine life; therefore, these improvements would further enhance this experience and provide a space for

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learning, research and discussion. Staff has discussed potential partnerships with other agencies including: Palos Verdes Land Conservancy, SEA Lab/LACC, Bureau of Land Management, Cabrillo Marine Museum, the Coastal Commission, Los Serenos Docents, California State University Long Beach (Marine Biology Department), Aquarium of the Pacific (Long Beach).

FISCAL IMPACT

Staff anticipates the fiscal impact of this project to be comparable to the costs associated with operating and maintaining the Palos Verdes Interpretive Center (PVIC). Some revenue could be expected from proposed services at the new facility including concessions, gift shop and small-scale rentals. Operation and maintenance costs are estimated to be \$91,000 annually. Part-time staff is currently budgeted at the site, but additional part-time staff and additional full-time staff supervision would be required depending on the programmed activities at the site. The fiscal impact of the facility would be further refined upon development of a design plan and programming.

Staff also expects a potential savings in maintenance and operational costs at PVIC as a result of the public-private partnership with the Annenberg Foundation if the proposed improvements are approved by the City Council. A cost-benefit analysis will be presented to the City Council at a future meeting regarding these proposed improvements. Any savings could be redirected to this new facility.

For development of the grant application, staff estimates spending up to \$8,000 on professional services including grant writing services and architectural services.

Attachments:

Resolution No. 2010-XX

RESOLUTION NO. 2010- XX

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RANCHO PALOS VERDES APPROVING THE APPLICATION FOR NATURE EDUCATION FACILITY PROGRAM FUNDS THROUGH THE SAFE DRINKING WATER, WATER QUALITY AND SUPPLY, FLOOD CONTROL, RIVER AND COASTAL PROTECTION BOND ACT OF 2006

WHEREAS, the State Department of Parks and Recreation has been delegated the responsibility by the Legislature of the State of California for the administration of the Nature Education Facilities Program, setting up necessary procedures governing the Application; and,

WHEREAS, said procedures established by the State Department of Parks and Recreation require the applicant to certify by resolution the approval of applications before submission of said applications to the State; and,

WHEREAS, if awarded the grant, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes will enter into a contract with the State of California to complete the Abalone Cove Nature Education Center.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RANCHO PALOS VERDES DOES HEREBY APPROVE THE FILING OF AN APPLICATION FOR THE ABALONE COVE NATURE EDUCATION CENTER, AND FINDS AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1: That the CITY has or will have available, prior to commencement of any work on the project included in this application, the sufficient funds to complete the project should this grant be awarded.

Section 2: That the CITY has or will have sufficient funds to operate and maintain the project.

Section 3: That the CITY has reviewed, understands, and agrees to the General Provisions contained in the contract shown in the Grant Administration Guide.

Section 4: That this project is consistent with the City's General Plan.

Section 5: Delegates the authority to the City Manager to conduct all negotiations, sign and submit all documents, including, but not limited to applications, agreements, amendments, and payment requests, which may be necessary for the completion of the project; and

Section 6: Agrees to comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws, ordinances, rules, regulations and guidelines.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED this 1st day of June 2010.

Mayor

ATTEST:

City Clerk

STATE OF CALIFORNIA)
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES)ss
CITY OF RANCHO PALOS VERDES)

I, Carla Morreale, City Clerk of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes, hereby certify that the above Resolution No. 2010-XX was duly and regularly passed and adopted by the said City Council at a regular meeting held on June 1, 2010.

City Clerk