



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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DATE: January 25, 2023

03

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

ESTABLISH AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR THE MOUNT WOODSON GATEWAY COUNTY PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT AND CEQA NEGATIVE DECLARATION (DISTRICT: 2)

OVERVIEW

The trail network surrounding Mount Woodson located off State Route 67 (SR 67) in the unincorporated community of Ramona, is a popular hiking destination visited by thousands of recreational users annually. The trail network encompasses portions of the City of San Diego, City of Poway and unincorporated area. The most popular route to the Mount Woodson Summit and Potato Chip Rock, a frequently photographed location, is currently accessed by trail users parking on the shoulders of SR 67 and on nearby neighborhood streets, then illegally crossing the highway where no safe crossing exists, which poses a threat to public safety. To provide adequate and safe parking for trail users looking to access the Mount Woodson regional trail system, the County of San Diego (County) worked with other governmental partners such as the City of Poway, the City of San Diego, CalFire, and trail user groups to find an off-street parking solution. The County sought to build a parking lot on a nearby County-owned preserve. Because the County-owned property was landlocked with no direct access to SR 67, on April 19, 2019, the County acquired approximately 84 acres of land adjacent to SR 67. The properties were combined to form the Mount Woodson Gateway County Preserve. In addition to providing safe and legal access to the existing Mount Woodson regional trail system and a staging area for public parking, the purchase of the property expanded the existing preserve dedicated to supporting the North County Plan of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) which was developed to protect San Diego's native habitats and wildlife.

Approximately nine acres of the 84-acre County property is reserved for the Mount Woodson Gateway County Preserve Improvements Project (Project) for construction of a parking lot which will allow visitors to safely park and access the existing County-owned land and regional trail system. The County Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) attended a series of Ramona Community Planning Group meetings and subcommittee meetings to collaborate with the public and project stakeholders including CAL FIRE and Caltrans in shaping the goals and design of the project. DPR staff has also met with the adjacent neighborhood (Mt. Woodson Estates Homeowners Association) on two occasions. The proposed project includes 209 public parking

SUBJECT: ESTABLISH AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A SINGLE CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR THE MOUNT WOODSON GATEWAY COUNTY PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT AND CEQA NEGATIVE DECLARATION (DISTRICT: 2)

spaces with 11 accessible Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) parking spaces, directional signage, solar powered entry gate to the parking area, solar powered bollard lighting, trash and recycling receptacles, and space for portable restrooms.

Today's request will authorize the Director of the Department of Purchasing and Contracting to advertise and award a construction contract for the Project estimated at \$1,500,000 including contingency. Construction contingency covers unexpected costs that can arise throughout a construction project. The total cost of the County funded Project of \$3,500,000 is included in the Fiscal Year 2022-23 Operational Plan in the Capital Outlay Fund based on General Fund fund balance. If approved, project construction will begin in early 2023 with completion anticipated in winter 2023-24.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Find, on the basis of the whole record, that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment. Consider the Negative Declaration (Attachment B) together with comments received during public review (Attachment C), and adopt it, finding that it reflects the independent judgment and analysis of the Board of Supervisors.
2. Adopt the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (Attachment D) prepared pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21081.6 and California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines section 15074(d), and authorize the Director, Department of Parks and Recreation to implement the identified mitigation measures.
3. Adopt the "Statement of Location and Custodian of Record of Proceedings" (Attachment E).
4. Authorize the Department of Purchasing and Contracting to advertise and award a single construction contract and to take any action authorized by Section 401 et seq., of the Administrative Code, with respect to contracting for the Mount Woodson Staging Area Improvement Project.
5. Designate the Director, Department of Parks and Recreation, as the County of San Diego Officer responsible for administering the construction contract for the construction of the Mount Woodson Staging Area Improvement Project in accordance with Section 430.4 of the County Code of Administrative Ordinance and Board Policy F-41, Public Works Construction Projects.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Access to the Mount Woodson regional trail system from the east is via a City of San Diego-owned and maintained utility road. There is no designated parking for trail users to access the eastern route. For that reason, trail users park their vehicles on both shoulders of State Route 67 (SR 67)

SUBJECT: ESTABLISH AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A SINGLE CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR THE MOUNT WOODSON GATEWAY COUNTY PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT AND CEQA NEGATIVE DECLARATION (DISTRICT: 2)

and on nearby neighborhood streets, then walk along or illegally cross SR 67 and traverse private or state-owned land to access the regional trail system. The proposed project would allow for safe public parking and access to the trails and avoid potentially dangerous pedestrian activity along SR 67. In addition, the project will include Americans with Disabilities Act accessible parking spaces and paths, and portable restrooms, which will provide amenities for visitors of all abilities and allow access to the regional trail system.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposed Mount Woodson Gateway County Preserve Improvements Project (Project) contributes to many of the County of San Diego's Sustainability Goals: engage the community; provide just and equitable access; transition to a green, carbon-free economy; protect health and wellbeing; and protect ecosystems, habitats, and biodiversity. Throughout the planning and design process of the project, stakeholders have been engaged through public meetings to provide their input. The project will allow for safe access for persons with all abilities to enjoy the open space area, which is currently hindered due to the lack of accessible parking and safe pedestrian access. Providing a parking lot will allow for safe access to outdoor recreational space which promotes exercise and positive physical and mental health. The built features of the park will include solar powered bollard lighting and solar powered entry gate. DPR will include the feasibility of one solar powered Electric Vehicle (EV) charging station in the bidding and construction documents as an additive alternate. Additive alternates will be included with the construction contract if the bids received for the base contract and additive alternates are below the total amount of funding available for construction. These sustainable features will help reduce the park's reliance on electricity. In addition, the Project supports the protection of approximately 75 acres of the 84-acre property recently acquired by the County for the North County Plan of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), which will serve as a respite for wildlife as urban densification increases and comply with the development of natural and organic land management.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 Operational Plan for the Capital Outlay Fund and will result in costs of \$3,500,000 for the County funded Capital Project 1021983 Mount Woodson Acquisition and Parking Lot Project. Construction costs are estimated at \$1,500,000 including contingency. The remaining project funding of \$2,000,000 is used for project related expenses including acquisition, project design, inspections, permitting, monitoring, construction management and project administration. The funding source is General Fund fund balance. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

Upon completion of this project, ongoing operations are estimated at \$110,800 annually, which will include maintenance supplies and services. The facility is projected to open in FY 2023-24, and these costs will be included in future Operational Plans pending availability of funding. The funding source will be day use parking revenue (\$60-70,000) and existing Department of Parks and Recreation General Purpose Revenue (\$40,800).

SUBJECT: ESTABLISH AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A SINGLE CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR THE MOUNT WOODSON GATEWAY COUNTY PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT AND CEQA NEGATIVE DECLARATION (DISTRICT: 2)

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The Mount Woodson regional trail system is a popular hiking destination managed by the City of Poway and the City of San Diego, located west of State Route 67 (SR 67) in Ramona. The area managed by the City of Poway is known as the Mount Woodson Wilderness Area and the area managed by the City of San Diego is known as the Mount Woodson Open Space area. In recent years there has been an increase in popularity of Mount Woodson as a hiking destination for those looking to access Potato Chip Rock, a frequently photographed site, which is located at the Mount Woodson Summit. The Mount Woodson regional trail system can be accessed either from the west through the City of Poway's land or from the east through the City of San Diego's land. Access to the trail system from the east is via a City of San Diego-owned and maintained utility road and trail easement. The County manages the existing trail and trail easements located on Mount Woodson Gateway County Preserve that connect to the regional trail system as managed by City of San Diego and City of Poway. Trail users often choose to access the trailhead from the east because access to the Mount Woodson Summit is shorter and more direct than from the west. There is currently no designated parking for trail users to access the eastern route to the Mount Woodson regional trail system. Currently trail users park their vehicles on both shoulders of SR 67 and on nearby neighborhood streets, then walk along or illegally cross SR 67 and traverse private or State-owned land to access the city-maintained utility road and trail easement. This results in unsafe pedestrian access to the regional trail system and a hazardous situation for vehicles on SR 67.

The California Department of Transportation has stated that they would only add "no parking" signs along the north side of SR-67 in the area of Mount Woodson if another safe parking area was established. In order to provide improved parking and safety for trail users accessing Mount Woodson regional trail network from the east, the County of San Diego (County) worked with representatives from the City of San Diego, City of Poway, and Cal Fire to find a public off-street parking solution that allows trail users to safely access the existing trail system. The County assessed the feasibility of constructing a parking lot on a portion of the County-owned preserve adjacent to SR 67. This County-owned property was landlocked and not directly accessible from SR 67. To provide access, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) evaluated the feasibility of constructing an access road on privately-owned properties adjacent to the County-owned property and sent willing seller letters to neighboring property owners to request an easement or legal access. One of the neighboring property owners, Taylor Family Trust, agreed to sell an adjacent 84-acre property, which could provide legal access from SR 67 to the County's 18-acre study area. With Board approval, on April 19, 2019, the County acquired the 84-acre property.

The County performed a conditions assessment of the property which evaluated its viability for future uses, including trail access, potential parking areas, and open space. Part of this evaluation

SUBJECT: ESTABLISH AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A SINGLE CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR THE MOUNT WOODSON GATEWAY COUNTY PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT AND CEQA NEGATIVE DECLARATION (DISTRICT: 2)

involved an asbestos and lead evaluation on the five existing structures located on the property. Three of the structures contained asbestos and all five buildings were found to contain lead-based paints. In addition to removing the hazardous materials, extensive improvements would be required to make the structures suitable for public use. The structures were evaluated for their physical condition, and it was determined they were not suitable or safe for future public use. With Board approval, the structures were demolished in 2020 in compliance with the County's construction and demolition ordinance, including compliance with regulations associated with asbestos and lead-based paint abatement and disposal of universal waste.

Because the entire 84-acre property is not required for legal access to the existing County property, the remaining portion of the property will be conserved as open space. Approximately 75 acres of the 84-acre property is comprised of habitat suitable for the draft North County Plan of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), a regional conservation planning program that balances long-term protection for sensitive plant and animal species with allowances for development, agriculture, and public recreation. The acreage features very high to moderate quality chamise chaparral, oak woodland, and coastal sage scrub habitats. Approximately 40 of the 75 acres are currently included in the draft Priority Conservation Area (PCA) of the MSCP North County Plan and the remaining 35 acres could be added to the PCA.

Public Outreach

Since the inception of the project in 2018, public outreach for the project was conducted through presentations and discussions with the public at Ramona Community Planning Group (CPG) meetings, subcommittee meetings and meetings with project stakeholders. Extensive communication with CalFire and the Ramona Community Planning Group prior to acquisition of the Taylor property assisted the County in determining a feasible solution for providing safe access for the public to the Mount Woodson regional trail system. CalFire has a station adjacent to the County property, has used this property to access this area and for a landing space for their helicopter, and interacts with trail users on a regular basis. During monthly Ramona CPG meetings, DPR provided updates on acquisition, collaborated with the community on project goals and shaped the design for the project. DPR developed a concept plan for the proposed project in collaboration with the Ramona community during these meetings. The final layout for the facility adheres closely to the original concept plan, with minimal changes to accommodate for existing site conditions and future facility operations. DPR also engaged additional Project stakeholders such as the City of Poway and City of San Diego, along with the Homeowner's Association that represents the residential area adjacent to the project site and continues to provide updates to these groups.

DPR provides regular Project updates to the public at Ramona Community Planning Group meetings and subcommittee meetings. DPR will continue to engage the public in these forums through construction of the Project.

Project Design and Features

DPR developed a concept plan for the proposed project in collaboration with the Ramona community. The final layout for the facility adheres closely to the original concept plan, with

SUBJECT: ESTABLISH AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A SINGLE CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR THE MOUNT WOODSON GATEWAY COUNTY PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT AND CEQA NEGATIVE DECLARATION (DISTRICT: 2)

minimal changes to accommodate for existing site conditions. The proposed facility will be accessed from a 130-linear foot-long existing County driveway directly off SR 67. The existing driveway will be improved to allow for two-way traffic, emergency vehicle access and a hammerhead turn-around prior to a solar-powered entry gate. Beyond the gate, a prefabricated bridge will provide access across a small creek to avoid impact to the existing waterway. The proposed parking area will include approximately 209 parking spaces, 11 of which will be Americans with Disabilities Act accessible parking spaces. Space for up to eight portable restrooms will be provided, and a cargo container will be installed for DPR storage purposes. Decomposed granite trails will lead from the new parking areas to the existing trails. Security measures for the Project include solar-powered bollard lighting; solar-powered entry gate open during hours of operation (typically sunrise to sunset); chain link fencing; and post and chain gates. Additional amenities include directional signage, information and interpretative kiosks, a park monument sign, trash and recycling receptacles, and a trash enclosure. Directional signage will inform users of designated parking areas to avoid impact to existing trees and vegetation and maintain clear vehicular circulation throughout the facility. Additional “No Parking” signs will be installed along SR-67 to support use of the parking lot. The project will also include the feasibility of one solar powered Electric Vehicle (EV) charging station in the bidding and construction documents as an additive alternative. Additive alternatives will be included with the construction contract if the bids received for the base contract and additive alternatives are less than the total amount of funding available for construction.

The Mount Woodson Gateway County Preserve and Staging Area will serve the San Diego region. When finished the staging area will be managed by DPR as part of the nearby Dos Picos Park work team. DPR staff will provide daily supervision and maintenance of the staging area. To help offset the costs to operate and maintain the staging area, DPR will charge the standard \$3 per vehicle day use parking fee to enter this regional park. Yearly parking passes for San Diego County residents (\$25) and seniors 62+ (free of charge) will also be available.

Today’s request will authorize the Director of the Department of Purchasing and Contracting to advertise and award a construction contract for the Mount Woodson Staging Area Improvements Project estimated at \$1,500,000 including contingency, and to take any action authorized by Section 401 et seq. of the Administrative Code. If approved, the project construction will begin in early 2023 with construction completion anticipated in Winter 2023-24.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

A Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the Mt Woodson Gateway County Preserve Parking Lot project was developed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The MND considered potential impacts from construction and ongoing management of the proposed new park project. The Department of Parks and Recreation circulated the draft MND and Initial Study (IS) for public review from October 22, 2022 – September 22, 2022 (Attachment B). Based on the IS, it was determined that the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment.

SUBJECT: ESTABLISH AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A SINGLE CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR THE MOUNT WOODSON GATEWAY COUNTY PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT AND CEQA NEGATIVE DECLARATION (DISTRICT: 2)

Twenty-four public comment letters/emails were received during the public comment period, which related to public safety concerns regarding noise, public services and traffic addressed within the draft MND. Staff reviewed the comments, prepared responses and determined that no additional study or further analysis is required in response to the comments. Improved project specifications were added to the MND to reflect public comments for the following topics: traffic, parking, lighting, security, and signage. These letters/emails are included in the MND along with County of San Diego staff responses to the comments (Attachment C).

The MND identified potential project-related impacts to biological resources. Through implementation of mitigation measures, avoidance measures and project design features, the proposed project will not cause any significant environmental impacts. A Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (Attachment D) will be adopted to ensure compliance with avoidance and minimization measures in accordance with Section 21081.6 of the Public Resources Code.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The proposed actions support the Sustainability and Community Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan by promoting an environment where residents can safely enjoy parks, open spaces, and outdoor experiences.

Respectfully submitted,



SARAH E. AGHASSI
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A – Vicinity Map

Attachment B – California Environmental Quality Act, Mitigated Negative Declaration

Attachment C – Comment Letters and Responses on the Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration

Attachment D – Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

Attachment E – Statement of Location and Custodian of Record of Proceedings