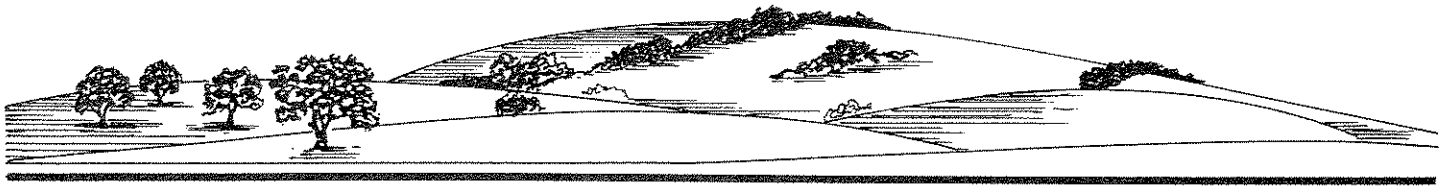

LOS ANGELES COUNTY REGIONAL PARK AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

November 18, 2008

The Honorable Board of Directors
Los Angeles County
Regional Park and Open Space District
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Directors:

APPROVE CHANGES IN THE PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS FOR GRANTS AWARDED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION AND THE MOUNTAINS RECREATION AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY (FIRST DISTRICT - 3 VOTE MATTER)

SUBJECT

These actions will approve changes in the project descriptions for grants awarded to the Department of Parks and Recreation for the Whittier Narrows Trails Access Staging Area Project and to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the Vista Hermosa Park Project.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT YOUR BOARD:

1. Find the proposed actions exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act, for the reasons cited herein.

2. Approve changes in the project description for the Department of Parks and Recreation's Whittier Narrows Trails Access Staging Area Project.

3. Approve changes in the project description for the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority's Vista Hermosa Park Project.

PURPOSE/JUSTIFICATION OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Approval of the recommended actions will allow the Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to change the project scope for their previously approved projects.

Whittier Narrows Trails Access Staging Area Project

On February 19, 2008, your Board awarded $150,000 in Competitive Excess Funds to the Department for the Whittier Narrows Trails Access Staging Area Project. The original project description included the construction of a new staging area for access on the west side of the San Gabriel River for hikers, equestrians, and bicyclists. The project was also to include a parking area, turnaround area, trail safety modifications, landscaping, fencing and signage. The development of a new commercial storage facility adjacent to the original project site has adversely affected visibility into and out of the project area. The Department therefore requests approval to change the project's location to a site affording more acceptable vehicular/trailer access and equestrian ingress/egress safety.

The requested revised project description is "The construction of a new equestrian arena at Horsemen's Park on the east side of the San Gabriel River and the enhancement of the existing access point for hikers, equestrians, and bicyclists. The project will also include a parking area, turnaround area, trail safety modifications, landscaping, fencing, and signage." Also, the project name would be changed to the Whittier Narrows Equestrian Arena Project.

Vista Hermosa Park Project

On December 6, 2005, your Board awarded $450,000 in Specified Excess Funds to the MRCA for the Vista Hermosa Park Project. The original project scope included the development of a park in which landforms will emphasize watershed processes through a living pond which will support fishing and a stream course that captures all on-site water, marshlands, wetlands and adjoining riparian ecosystems and meadows. MRCA requests the change in project scope due to methane gas mitigation issues at the project site. MRCA is leasing the land where the park is being developed from the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The Division of State Architect (DSA), the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and LAUSD reviewed the park plans and were concerned that a soft liner in the pond could possibly allow pockets of methane gas to form underneath, and that the soil used would not allow gases to escape. MRCA would be required to line the pond, stream course and other water elements with an impervious surface such as concrete. Such lining of the water elements would eliminate the ecological functions as originally intended.

The new project description requested is "The development of a park in which landforms will emphasize watershed processes through the capture of on-site water, the creation of riparian ecosystems and meadows, and interpretive elements that emphasize the natural systems and processes of the Los Angeles River watershed." Under the proposed project description the park would include two smaller areas to collect natural rainfall and would approximate the pond and stream course elements of the original project scope. In addition, the proposed project modification would eliminate the possibility of methane gas pockets forming and becoming trapped underneath the living pond by removing the currently-approved living pond element from the project altogether.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The proposed recommendations further the Board approved County Strategic Plan Goal No. 1 (Service Excellence), Goal No. 4 (Fiscal Responsibility), Goal No. 5 (Children and Families' Well-being), and Goal No. 6 (Community Services), by approving the change in the project scope for projects to enhance recreational opportunities in the Pico-Union community of Los Angeles and at the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area in the First Supervisorial District.

FISCAL IMPACT/FINANCING

Sufficient appropriation for the grants in the amount of $600,000 is budgeted in the First Supervisorial District portion of the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District Excess Funds Project Fund, HD6.

FACTS AND PROVISIONS/LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The 1996 Proposition provides a method for determining each fiscal year the amount of funds available in the following fiscal year to fund capital improvement projects in addition to the amounts specifically identified for projects in the Safe Neighborhood Parks Propositions of 1992 and 1996. The grants are being funded from the Excess Funds available to the First Supervisorial District from Excess Funds for specified and competitive projects.

Your Board approved a Procedural Guide on June 17, 1997, to govern the administration of Regional Park and Open Space District grants for Specified and Per Parcel projects. This Procedural Guide governs the administration of these grants.

CONTRACTING PROCESS

Grant Project Agreements were entered into and are administered under authority delegated to the Director of Parks and Recreation and pursuant to the Procedural Guide approved by the Board in 1997. The Project Agreements were approved as to form by County Counsel.

IMPACT ON CURRENT SERVICES (OR PROJECTS)

The projects will enhance recreational opportunities in the Cities of Los Angeles and South El Monte in the First Supervisorial District.

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION

All public agency projects funded by the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District are required to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a condition of the grant. The lead agency is responsible for preparing the appropriate environmental documentation for the project. The County of Los Angeles is the lead agency for the Whittier Narrows Trails Access Staging Area Project. The MRCA is the lead agency for the Vista Hermosa Park Project.

The proposed administrative actions are not subject to CEQA in that the actions do not meet the definition of a project according to Sections 15378 (b)(4)(5) of the State CEQA Guidelines because the actions are administrative activities for government grants which by their terms do not involve any commitments at this time to any specific projects which may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment.

CONCLUSION

Please instruct the Executive Officer-Clerk of the Board to return one conformed copy of this action to the Chief Executive Office, Capital Projects Division, and to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Respectfully submitted,

Russ Guiney
Director, Parks and Recreation

RG:IV:LB:REGIONALPARKOPENSPACEDISTRICT(1ST DISTRICT SCOPE CHANGE BL)

c: Chief Executive Officer
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors (22)
County Counsel