

# SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

---

**Staff Recommendation**  
**SDRC Resolution 20-03**  
May 14, 2020

## **PROPOSITION 68 GRANT**

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to provide \$250,000.00 to the City of El Cajon (El Cajon) to install streetscape landscaping and two stormwater treatment devices along the Main Street corridor within El Cajon, San Diego County, California.

**LOCATION:** Main Street runs through the heart of El Cajon, connecting the Transit Center to the downtown area. Access to the proposed improvements will be available via the surrounding roadways and sidewalks, which are within 1 mile of a severely disadvantaged community (SDAC) identified by California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) Community Fact Finder.

**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:** Staff recommends that the San Diego River Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, § 32630 et seq.):

The San Diego River Conservancy (Conservancy) hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$250,000.00 (two hundred and fifty thousand dollars) to implement projects focused on creating and enhancing park and trail facilities, providing public access, enhancing river parkways, improving water quality and protecting forests and wetlands specifically as follows:

- City of El Cajon: Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000.00) to install streetscape, native landscaping, street trees and two stormwater Low Impact Devices along the **Main Street - Green Street Corridor Gateway Improvements** (Project).

Prior to the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit to Conservancy's Executive Officer a scope of work, budget and schedule, including the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the Project.

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the San Diego River Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines for the Conservancy's Proposition 68 grant program.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act, including Section 32649.

**PROJECT SUMMARY:** El Cajon seeks funds to install native landscaping, street scaping and water quality enhancements in the Main Street corridor. This is the primary access from the Transit Center to downtown El Cajon and serves a vital link within the SDAC community connecting homes to public transportation. Proposed project improvements will transform this corridor into an attractive tree-lined thoroughfare with signage, site furnishing, stormwater treatment devices (planters) and lighting.

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

---

Under a grant from SANDAG, El Cajon received \$2,500,000 to widen sidewalks and provide Class IV bikeways and pedestrian links for the Main Street - Green Street corridor project. More specifically, El Cajon is requesting funds to install streetscape landscaping and street trees along the project corridor to create an urban-forest gateway. The landscaping in this project includes native drought-resistant plants compatible with the natural habitat and environment. The proposed project will feature streetscape landscaping, forty 15-gallon shade trees and larger signature trees specified in the El Cajon Transit District Specific Plan's (TDSP) Street Tree Program to create an urban forest.

El Cajon proposes to install two Low Impact Development (LID) stormwater treatment planters between the road and the storm drain to help treat urban runoff and protect pedestrians and cyclists from roadway flooding. The LID planters will absorb water and remove pollutants before the water passes through concrete lined channel to Forester Creek eventually reaching the San Diego River.

**SITE DESCRIPTION:** Currently, Main Street features single-story commercial and auto-oriented land uses. The flat topography has impervious surfaces with channelized drainages and minimal natural open space. The project area drains to the County Ditch Creek, which then drains to Forester Creek, a tributary of the San Diego River. Runoff from the Project site is collected through a system of curb inlets and underground storm drain piping. Most of Forester Creek is a concrete-lined open channel with a few segments enclosed in a box culvert. Existing vegetation is largely non-native which includes ornamental trees, shrubs, and ground cover provided by commercial, industrial, and residential landscaping.

**PROJECT HISTORY:** Initial planning for the proposed Main Street - Green Street Gateway project was conducted during the establishment of the TDSP. Through this process, various alternatives were designed and discussed with the community through public outreach and agency stakeholders. Additionally, the City provided regular updates to the City's Planning Commission, the El Cajon Collaborative group, the El Cajon Downtown Partnership, and other local and civic groups to keep them informed and solicit input throughout the planning process. In addition to these public events, a website was also created and maintained throughout the plan development time-frame to provide updates.

**PROJECT NEED:** When developing the El Cajon TDSP, El Cajon residents provided input for this project; including requests for more shade trees and increased pedestrian safety. The proposed project will create safer bikeways, improve outdoor natural experience for residents and visitors to connect to the transit center to the City of El Cajon's downtown area. Planting trees help reduce heat island effects, filter air, provide oxygen, provide wildlife habitat and corridors and empower residents to stay and thrive in their communities while improving resiliency to climate change. This proposed project is vital in creating a more natural setting and safe corridor that is easily accessible to pedestrians.

Currently, there are no water quality improvements present within the public right-of-way. Water delivered to the County Ditch Channel is currently untreated. The proposed project includes installation of LID planters to filter contaminants, reduce flooding by limiting the amount of water entering the roadway, and improve water quality that enters the San Diego River.

**PROJECT FINANCING:** The total TDSP project costs for Main Street - Green Street corridor improvements are \$2,750,000. El Cajon is requesting \$250,000 funding from the Conservancy.

# SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

---

Additional funds were approved in the amount of \$2,500,000 from SANDAG's Smart Growth Incentive Program to provide for public safety elements. The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation from Proposition 68 grant.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:** This project would be undertaken consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation (Public Resources Code, §§ 32630-32659.9).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):** Consistent with Program 2, Support and Encourage Recreation and Education, Program 3 Preserve and Restore Natural Resources and Program 5, Enhance Water Quality and Natural Flood Conveyance, from the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Update 2018-2023.

## **CONSISTENCY WITH PURPOSES OF THE FUNDING SOURCE**

The extent to which the project achieves one or more of the purposes of Proposition 68, Division 45 of the Public Resources Code, Chapters 1-13, Sections 80000-80173.

- Urban Recreation
- Facilities improvements and public access, to biking
- Leverage Funding
- Benefits SDAC
- Reduction of GHG/carbon sequestration
- Capture of stormwater to reduce stormwater runoff
- Reduce water pollution

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE PLANS AND PRIORITIES**

### **A. *California Water Action Plan (Update 2009)***

- i. Action 6 – Expand Water Storage Capacity and Improve Groundwater Management. The use of LID planters will accomplish this by treating stormwater runoff for groundwater recharge. The LID planters will be sized to treat approximately 2,300 cubic feet of stormwater per rain event and retain approximately 555 cubic feet of groundwater recharge.

### **B. *Water Quality Control Plan for the San Diego Basin (2016)***

- i. Improve water quality in ocean waters, inland surface waters, and ground waters in the San Diego County.

### **C. *California's Climate Adaption Strategy (2009)***

- i. L-2, Land Use and Community Development - Encourage climate adaption initiatives in local communities. Trees help reduce heat island effects, and empower residents to stay and thrive in their communities while improving resilience to climate change.

## **LOCAL PLAN**

### ***El Cajon Climate Action Plan (2019)***

- ii. Improve GHG efficiency and identify benefits of GHG reduction including: improved air quality, reduced energy use, improved public health, enhanced safety, improved water quality, reduced heat island effects and improved resiliency to climate change.

# **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

---

## **CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS**

With the addition of 40 shade trees, landscaping will mitigate heat island effects. In a study conducted by the City of San Diego, it was found that a one-degree rise in temperature resulted in a two-percent increase in peak electricity costs, and that urban neighborhoods with mature trees can be up to 11 degrees cooler in the summer than neighborhoods without trees.

The proposed project's sustainable landscaping will include native, drought tolerant species, as outlined in the El Cajon TDSP. To establish larger trees, smart irrigation control systems, such as Calsense Resource Management Systems will adjust water use based on weather conditions, plant type, soil type, sun exposure, and precipitation rates.

FEMA maps indicate the project lies within a 0.2% annual chance flood hazard. The current stormwater management system along the corridor lacks efficiency, and results in flooding during storm events. This is a safety hazard for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. The proposed urban greening and addition of LID planters will treat runoff, reduce pollution and increase the project area's perviousness by 4,000 square feet. Baseline monitoring through pre- and post-construction water quality sampling will be established to document improvements. These combined features will lessen flood potential, create a more pleasant pedestrian environment and help protect individuals.

## **MULTIPLE BENEFITS**

The proposed project is a multi-benefit project that will provide positive impacts to native habitat, reduce GHG, improve air and water quality, as well as enhance transportation facilities. The proposed active transportation improvements will increase access to employment, shopping, housing, and recreational uses within the transit center's mobility hub. Through infrastructure investments, it will be ensured that people of all abilities can access and enjoy these improvements.

One hundred percent of the proposed improvements are ADA accessible and include widened sidewalks and reconstruction of 11 non-standard curb access ramps. Through the proposed improvements, the project will provide new multi-modal access where none exist. Pre- and post-project walking and biking counts will be performed to measure the multi-modal usage. In addition, creating this type of infrastructure is expected to reduce vehicle miles travelled by allowing pedestrian, bike, and neighborhood electric vehicle for a low-cost access between destinations.

The proposed urban greening is calculated to sequester nearly 6,800 pounds of carbon each year according to the iTree Planting software from the USDA Forest Service. This will result in a decrease of GHG emissions helping the City implement its climate action plan.

Additionally, the proposed landscaping will also remove pollutants such as ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and particulate matter (PM). Using tools available from iTree, a software suite from the USDA Forest Service, benefits of trees planted can be calculated for the next 40 years:

- CO<sub>2</sub> Avoided: 35,020 lb
- CO Sequestered: 274,165 lb
- Electricity Saved: 96,180 kWh
- Rainfall Interception: 772,500 gal
- Avoided Runoff: 200,735 gal

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

---

- O<sub>3</sub> Removed: 930 lb
- NO<sub>2</sub> Avoided: 2.5 lb
- NO<sub>2</sub> Removed: 145 lb
- SO<sub>2</sub> Avoided: 9 lb
- SO<sub>2</sub> Removed: 60 lb
- VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) Avoided: 45 lb
- PM<sub>2.5</sub> (Particulate Matter) Avoided: 30 lb
- PM<sub>2.5</sub> Removed: 5 lb

Per the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the use of trees and vegetation in the urban environment benefits:

- Reduced energy use, improved air quality, lower GHG emissions, enhanced water quality, reduced pavement maintenance and improved quality of life.

### **PROJECT READINESS**

The project site is within existing City right-of-way, and through the TDSP Environmental Impact Report, CEQA was completed in March 2018. The project is in preliminary design with the project kickoff meeting in February 2020. Final design is estimated to be completed by February 2021. A general contractor will need to be procured through competitive bid, and once awarded, construction will begin shortly after. The project schedule is currently estimated to be completed by Fall 2022.

### **COMMUNITY SUPPORT, NON-PROFIT AND OR GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION**

To develop this project, extensive community and stakeholder outreach was performed. Outreach methods included over 100 intercept surveys, public hearings, two public workshops and four working group meetings composed of residents, business owners, social services representatives, Caltrans, San Diego Metropolitan Transit System, San Diego Air Pollution Control District personnel. In advance of each public workshop, flyers were distributed to the local community in three languages and during each meeting, translation services were provided.

The community's input was taken into consideration during project development. Some of the key themes derived from the outreach process includes: adding more trees and vegetation, increasing pedestrian and bicycle safety, implement traffic calming, increase bike and pedestrian facilities, add lighting and site furnishings, enhance the streetscape, and create a walkable community environment. This ensures aesthetics match the community's vision and creates a sense of place with civic pride, all of which confirms feedback and input received from the community outreach process.

### **DISADVANTAGED OR SEVERELY DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY**

The Project will benefit a Severely Disadvantage Community which is located within one mile of project site. According to State Park's Community Fact Finder.

Main Street is currently comprised of 5 vehicle travel lanes, narrow sidewalks, and no bicycle facilities. By constructing this proposed project, the City will provide safe bicycle travel. According to the California Healthy Places Index (HPI), approximately 12.5% of workers in census tract 162.02 and only 6.83% of workers in census tract 160.00 commute to work by transit, walking, or cycling; both of which are immediately adjacent to the project limits. By providing safe, low-stress

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

---

connections to transit and employment centers, the project will help to increase the active transportation mode within the City boundaries.

### **LEVERAGED FUNDING**

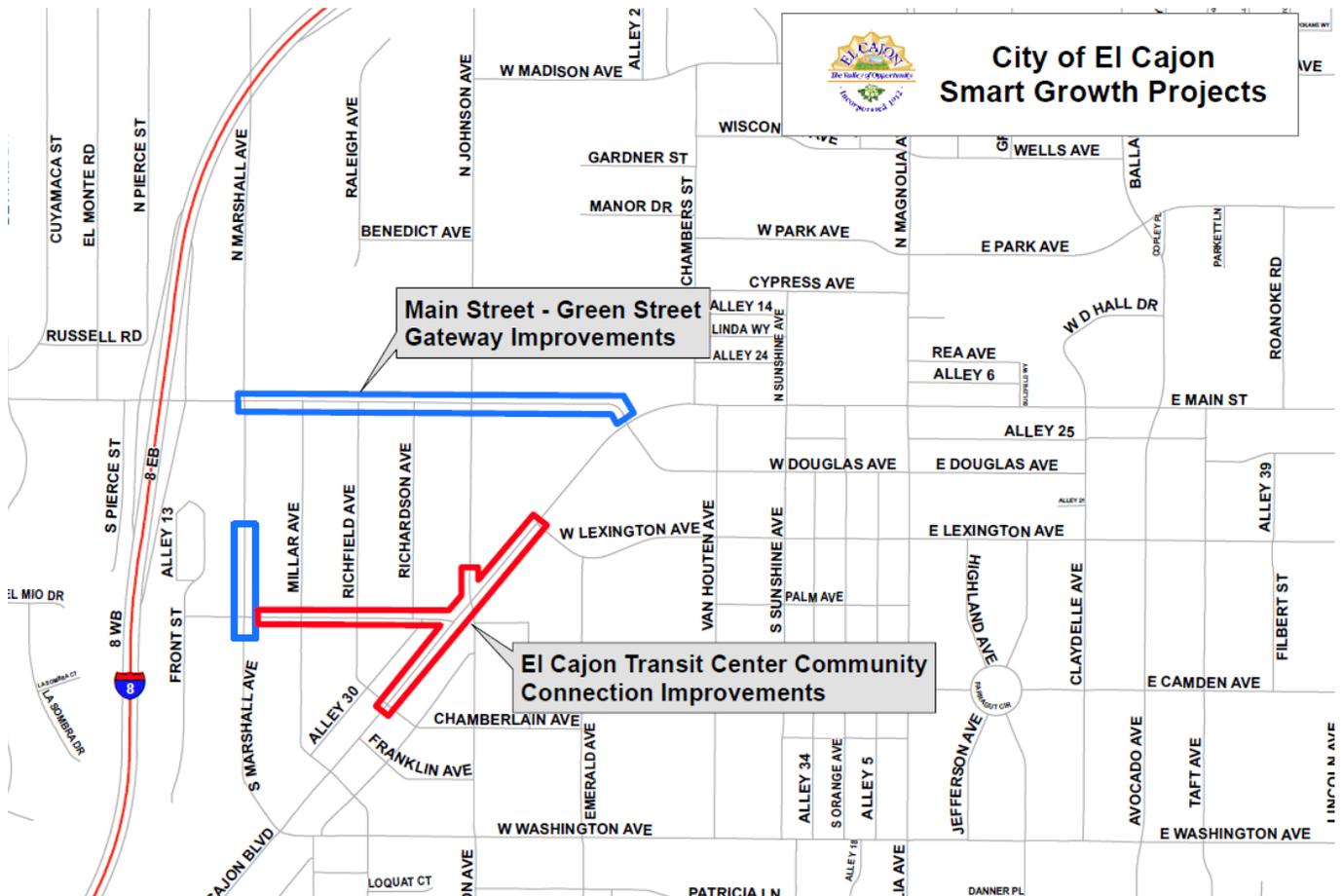
To achieve these proposed results, the project intends to leverage grant funding from SANDAG's Smart Growth Program; however, due to that program's funding limitations, the project is currently unable to provide streetscape landscaping, shade trees, and LID stormwater treatment facilities. In-kind City staff time is estimated to have a value of \$30,000 to administer the project design and management including construction implementation and inspection services.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA**

As part of the TDSP, a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared and certified by City Council in May 2018, thus clearing the proposed project to proceed to preliminary and final design. The preliminary design phase is currently underway and will include performing engineering field data collection such as topographical survey and geotechnical investigations, and the layout and design of the proposed multimodal and landscaping improvements. The layout and designs will be packaged into a construction plan set along with technical specifications, which will create the project's bidding documents used for permitting. Following the receipt of permits and the public bid and award process, the selected contractor will proceed with the construction of the proposed improvements. As the project advances, City of El Cajon Public Works approval will be the only required construction permits.

# SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

## MAP



The Project before the Board today is highlighted in blue and labelled, “Main Street – Green Street Gateway Improvements”

The red highlighted section represents another El Cajon project entitled, “El Cajon Transit Center Community Connections Improvements” which was approved by the San Diego River Conservancy’s Resolution 20-02, and funded by Proposition 68 (severely disadvantaged community).