DATE: **January 19, 2019**

TO: **WCA Governing Board**

FROM: **Johnathan Perisho, Project Manager**

THROUGH: **Mark Stanley, Executive Officer**

SUBJECT: **Item 15: Consideration of resolution to approve acceptance of a grant award from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for the Community Participatory Design and Implementation Project.**

RECOMMENDATION: That the WCA accept a grant in the amount of $65,000 from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for Community Participatory Design and Implementation Project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The Watershed Conservation Authority—through a partnership with both the Conservation Corps of Long Beach and Landscape Architecture Graduate Students from Cal Poly Pomona—is engaging two underserved communities in the vicinity of the Lower Los Angeles River in participatory planning, design, and implementation of two water-related, public realm community-built projects to be constructed by September 30, 2017.

This project will serve to demonstrate model methodology for sustainable community engagement through the utilization of Project Opportunity Development (POD) teams which pair Conservation Corps youth with University students in a collaborative grassroots planning and implementation process. POD teams will:

1. Engage under-represented communities in the planning process.
2. Create the building blocks for future community engagement and long-term local stewardship as well as support for green, multi-benefit projects to meet environmental and socio-economic challenges.
3. Increase community awareness and understanding of green infrastructure benefits for quality of life and water resource security that can be accomplished through a distributed systems approach at the neighborhood scale.
4. Identify and demonstrate how small changes to our landscapes can play a role in improving local resiliency to water scarcity and environmental challenges.
5. Utilize community expertise and local knowledge to identify social and environmental challenges unique to their neighborhoods to map project opportunities and identify constraints and barriers to resolve.
6. Ensure academic-based, community-engagement-identified projects and concepts are incorporated into both local and regional planning efforts: the Gateway Cities & Rivers Urban Greening Master Plan; and AB530/Los Angeles County Lower LA River Master Plan.
7. Identification of potential project proponents and partners to fund and implement community identified projects.
8. Construct community-identified, community-supported, and community-built projects.
9. Explore feasibility to institutionalize POD team sustainable community engagement by incorporating methodology into Conservation Corps and University curricula.

The missions and experience of the parties involved are key in organizing this model for success:

- Cal Poly Pomona has faculty, resources, and skilled graduate students with demonstrated potential to inform and activate local community members. Local community members are experts in understanding what their communities need to be more thriving, sustainable, and to better contribute to both environmental and social wellbeing.

- The Long Beach Conservation Corps has staff experienced in installations, that are also often responsible for maintaining projects that have been installed, and members are often from communities that are underserved.

Participation of youth corps ensures ongoing access to community participants and access to neighborhoods which may not always be reached through traditional planning efforts. Connecting with people and building relationships is typically the most difficult step in the outreach process, and the social networks and existing relationships that people already from neighborhoods possess—in addition to the perspective of those that are and will be doing work to realize and maintain projects—is a powerful resource to more effectively and meaningfully engage communities.

Result will grow a widespread network of engaged community members and future project proponents and informed stewards.

BACKGROUND: In the 2015-2016 academic year the Cal Poly Pomona capstone Graduate Studio of Landscape Architecture (606 Studio) conducted an interactive, inclusive outreach program that included participatory design-build project installations and identification of community-driven greening projects in the Cities of Bell, Cudahy, and South Gate (Exhibit A). This Community Participatory Design and Implementation Project will expand on that work in partnership with the Conservation Corps of Long Beach (CCLB).

Planning efforts traditionally concern large-scale master plans with limited outreach and timelines so long into the future that there is little to no tangible result for communities to experience. This disconnect between engagement and results can have a dampening effect on community participation and stewardship. In contrast, this project will result in community-built projects at the end of the participatory planning process. This pilot project will concentrate on two South East Los Angeles (SELA) neighborhoods. SELA communities are on average park poor, have limited access to open space and trails, are highly dense, and are populated by residents who are predominantly Latino and low-income communities that are often not appropriately heard, served, nor meaningfully engaged in planning processes.

This project is directed to genuinely listen, empower, and engage local communities to identify needs, design solutions and implement small-scale projects driven by local community members themselves. Site-scaled projects and disbursed green infrastructure improvements can make a big difference to the people they serve and they have the potential to be implemented quickly. These types of small community-driven projects—when distributed over a large area—can have profound impacts on water capture, supply, and quality as well as environment, community, and quality of life that transforms forgotten spaces into livable streets, public spaces, and water capture systems that work with nature, provide habitat and cool neighborhoods.

The approach is to build from the ground up and build capacity—starting with local youth through CCLB members. CCLB members have been selected as engagement partners who call SELA neighborhoods

"home". Two of their neighborhoods are the project focus areas, as the teams will take advantage of their local knowledge, experience, and insights to identify and engage community members in the process to identify project opportunities.

Rather than focusing on a more traditional vision plan, the purpose of this project is deep interaction with local communities and stakeholders in re-envisioning the future of the river corridor through their neighborhood lens, how parks and open spaces relate to the river corridor, identifying priority new park areas and open space resources, and improving accessibility of local communities to open spaces and environmental amenities. Each neighborhood will identify public space improvements and/or strategies to re-purpose, create shared purpose, or multifunctional landscapes to address park poverty, improve water conservation and quality, link the river to local communities, and provide additional multifunctional infrastructure benefits. A set of 3 to 6 projects of varying size will be identified and explored for each community that can be integrated into a single community green infrastructure improvement initiative.

The project team (CCLB and Cal Poly Pomona students and faculty) will use community interviews, canvassing, kitchen table meetings, group meetings, advisory committees, charrettes, and community-build work days to engage members of the CCLB member neighborhoods in identifying and addressing opportunities for physical infrastructure that provide environmental and ecosystem benefits and identify opportunities and solutions to positively impact on: climate change, urban heat island, air quality, safe access to parks and schools, stormwater runoff (water quality, quantity and temperature, including pollutant mitigation) and ecological systems. These efforts will be the result of project location, connections to other projects and surrounding areas, design characteristics, material selection, and design for ease of maintenance. This integrative approach will increase the resilience of resulting projects and their surrounding landscapes.

WCA staff will work with Cal Poly Pomona students and faculty to provide project development insights and recommendations to ensure community projects can be made ready for funding and implementation. WCA will also coordinate with Cal Poly Pomona to build capacity by engaging organizations and agencies that can advance and realize implementation of community projects developed and identified.

FISCAL INFORMATION: The total grant award requested is $65,000. Together with an additional $15,000 from Conservation Corps of Long Beach in-kind contributions the total project budget is $80,000.

The Participatory Design and Implementation Project will be funded through surplus grant funds from Proposition 50, the Water Quality, Supply and Safe Drinking Water Projects Act of 2002.

Exhibit A

FINAL

Community Constructed

Participatory Design-Build in Lower Los Angeles River Communities

606 Studio

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Department of Landscape Architecture • College of Environmental Design

Communities in the study region adjacent to the river have limited parks and open spaces due to higher land use density and unequal distribution of recreation spaces. The study region is also greatly impacted by polluted runoff during rain events, compared to other communities north and east of downtown Los Angeles.

In the study region, 30% of the population is non-English speaking which is a challenge for communication. The region is also characterized by low educational attainment. It has a high rate of poverty with 59.6% of the population living below the poverty line. Similarly, unemployment in this region is higher than other parts of the county.

While the whole region would benefit from intensive participatory design processes, to perform impactful work, the 606 Studio had to choose a small number of neighborhoods. To select these neighborhoods from the many underserved communities in the area, the students developed a list of carefully selected criteria. The 606 Studio split into three project teams to investigate the study area and identify potential neighborhoods through a five stage process.

STAGE 1 Preliminary investigation of large unused vacant lots (by the 606 Studio)

STAGE 2 Investigation of neighborhoods with unused open available land (by the 606 Studio)

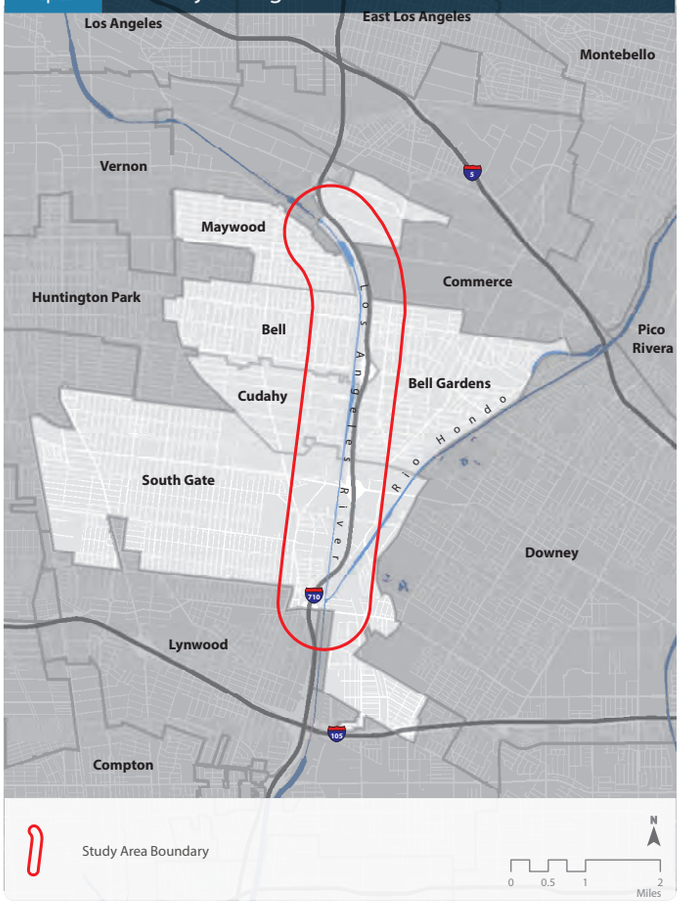
STAGE 3 Investigation of neighborhoods with unused open available land and specific neighborhood characteristics (by the 606 Studio)

STAGE 4 Identification and evaluation of 12 potential neighborhoods (by each project team)

STAGE 5 Development of final selection criteria and selection of final neighborhoods (by each project team)

The 606 Studio selected three final project neighborhoods, one for each project team—Bell del Río (Bell), La Santana (Cudahy) and Thunderbird Villa (South Gate).

Map ES1 The Project Region Data Source: ESRI



Methods

Throughout the project, teams employed a variety of methods that allowed them to gather information from many sources, and engage with communities in a participatory process that highlighted the local knowledge, expertise, and needs of local residents. The following methods were employed and adapted by all the teams during various phases of the project:

- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- Data mining
- Interviews
- Field observations
- Canvassing
- Steering committee meetings
- Community Meetings
- Site selection walks
- Design workshops
- Work days

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

La Santana Neighborhood

This project neighborhood is situated in Cudahy, California, a small but densely populated city located in central Los Angeles County south of downtown. Urban form in the neighborhood is characterized by long rows of apartments extending roughly 400 feet from Santa Ana Street and Elizabeth Street, creating sub-communities inside the larger neighborhood. The Los Angeles River is accessible via two ramps located along River Road, one of which sits behind Cudahy Park, and the second of which sits slightly to the north of the neighborhood across River Road from Cudahy River Park.

Ethnically the neighborhood is 96% Hispanic, with the remaining population being split almost evenly between white and African-American residents (OEHHA, 2014; American Community Survey, 2014). Economically the neighborhood is working class, and roughly 63% of residents live below twice the federal poverty level (American Community Survey, 2014; OEHHA, 2014).

Inventory results reveal a portrait of a neighborhood marred by the fear of crime and hurt by political corruption. Yet it is also a neighborhood with the optimism to elect one of the youngest city councils in the county and to organize efforts to improve the neighborhood and finds value in the bare concrete street corner between a carniceria and laundromat.

Site Selection

The project team, steering committee members, and community members conducted site selection walks of the neighborhood. During the walks, the project team used open discussion and a mapping activity to foster a dialogue about the proximity of potential sites to areas that the committee felt were unsafe or undesirable. The preferred site, a paved area outside the neighborhood meat market at the intersection of Santa Ana Street and Wilcox Avenue, was chosen because of its relationship to the neighborhood, and because it is a place residents use often.

Program

Many elements of site programming happened simultaneously with site selection. A list of 13 different program items identified during steering committee and community meetings were prioritized by number of votes. The results of the final program were evaluated using open discussion.

Students and the project steering committee evaluate potential project sites around the neighborhood.

Steering committee members rank program elements using dotmocracy.

Design

The project was designed at a series of steering committee and community meetings. A mapping exercise consisted of a collaborative site analysis, where elements such as noise, sun, wind, and accessibility were visually placed on a prepared site plan. The project team discussed a number of design principles such as spatial proximity, prospect and refuge, and size relationships, using terminology that was clear to non-designers. Ready-made pieces were used by participants to represent their design ideas. Community members worked together in groups and openly discussed their ideas, arranging pieces on the base map collaboratively. After the series of meetings, the project team developed a final site plan, design details, and draft construction documents.

Eventually, as a result of city requirements, the project team also agreed to remove existing asphalt in an area between the parking wheel stops and the carniceria entrance. The use of infiltration trenches met the city's conditions, accommodated foot traffic, and increased stormwater permeability.

Build

The students and community prepped the site and painted the concrete vibrant colors chosen by the community. As site construction progressed, many curious shoppers and people passing by grew excited about the project and volunteered to help. Together, the project team and community constructed tree planter benches, a seating wall, succulent planters, a large tree planter bench, a shade structure planter bench, and planted trees and perennials.

To create the infiltration trenches in the parking lot as required by the city, the project team rented a walk-behind concrete saw and cut out four long strips of asphalt in the area behind the parking wheel stops. The team then filled the trenches with gravel and painted the asphalt between them in order to create a visual signal for pedestrians that the ground plane had changed. The project team and community also constructed small planters in the same style of the Plaza Milagro space and planted them with ground cover plants.

Long-Term Project

During the site selection and programming phases of the participatory design process, the community chose a site across from Park Avenue Elementary School for the long-term community design project. Although the project team did not have sufficient time or resources to design the site with the community because of the increased scope of construction required by the City of Cudahy, they set plans in motion and identified a project partner to implement this larger project within a few years.

Community members arrange ready-made design elements on a base map at the first design workshop.

The project team and community build a shade structure with an integrated planter and bench.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conclusion

The goal of this project was to test the efficacy of participatory design-build process in disadvantaged, river-adjacent communities. The results speak for themselves. Over the course of nine months, through participatory design, the 606 team was able to build a small urban plaza in the empty space next to a butcher shop, create a community gathering space in a trailer park, and paint four street murals. Community members were deeply engaged throughout the process—recruiting new members, creating designs, selecting sites, swinging hammers, and advocating on behalf of the projects when faced with challenges. Taken as a whole, the success of these projects leaves little doubt as to the readiness of these communities to engage in participatory design.

Figure 5.12 Bell Riverside Mini-Park Design Concept

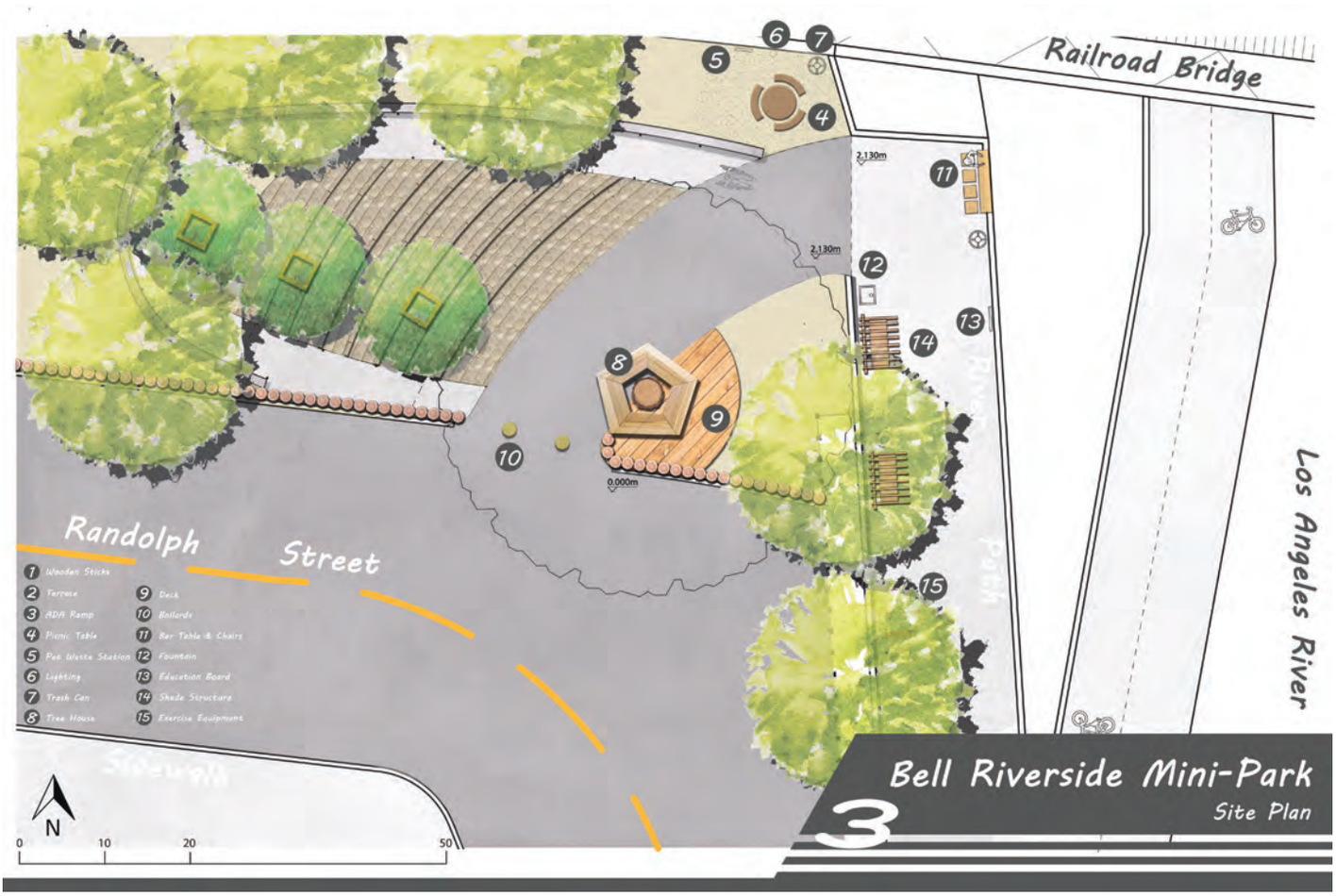


Figure 7.13 Bird's Eye View of LADWP Power Line Trail

Figure 7.14 Vegetation Along the LADWP Power Line Trail

Figure 7.15 Walking Path in the North Lot

Design Objectives:

- To provide multi-purpose trails for residents of Thunderbird Villa and the community of South Gate for recreation and exercise.
- To provide multiple viewpoints along the LA River and power line corridor.
- To provide direct access to the LA River for residents of Thunderbird Villa.

Constraints:

- Obtaining secondary use of LADWP right-of-way is a long process which involves many steps.
- Some Thunderbird Villa residents are resistant to using the space for fear of crime, homeless people, and wild animals such as coyotes.

Opportunities:

- Views from the space are very dynamic and interesting looking towards the trestle bridge, LA River, and power lines above.
- It is a huge open space with immediate connections to the LA River.
- Thunderbird homes back up directly onto the space.

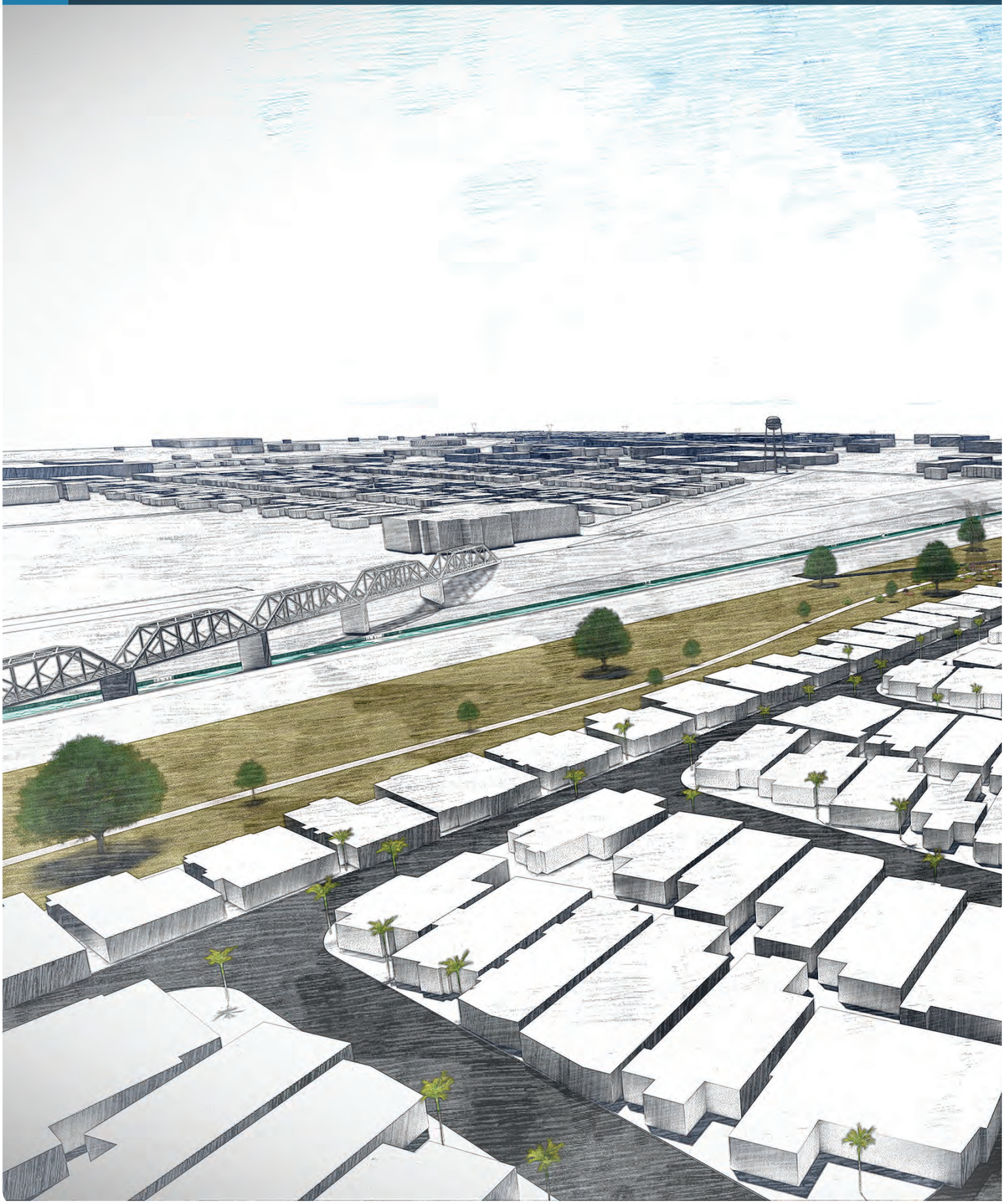
The proposed space will provide multipurpose trails along the power line corridor along with small trees and drought tolerant shrubs. There will be exercise equipment along the trails, and views that will connect trail-users to the LA River.

North Lot

The North Lot is currently owned by the City of South Gate and is being used as a construction disposal site for branches and debris.

The view from the trestle bridge crossing the LA River will include the improved right-of-way with its new tree canopy and trails.

Figure 7.19 Bird's Eye View of the Long-Term Project



January 19, 2017 - Item 15

RESOLUTION 2017-05

RESOLUTION OF THE WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY TO APPROVE ACCEPTANCE OF A GRANT AWARD FROM THE RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY FOR THE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATORY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

WHEREAS, the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) has been established as a joint powers agency between the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District; and

WHEREAS, the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) has further been established to focus on projects which will provide open space, habitat restoration, and watershed improvement projects in both the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers watershed; and

WHEREAS, this action approves acceptance of a grant award from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for the Community Participatory Design and Implementation Project; and

WHEREAS, the proposed action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); NOW

Therefore be it resolved that the WCA hereby:

1. **FINDS** that this action is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the WCA.
2. **FINDS** that the actions contemplated by this resolution are exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
3. **ADOPTS** the staff report dated January 19, 2017.
4. **APPROVES** acceptance of a grant award from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy in the amount of $65,000 for the Community Participatory Design and Implementation Project.

~ End of Resolution ~

//

Motion: _____ Second: _____

Ayes: _____ Nays: _____ Abstentions: _____

Resolution 2017-05

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the
WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
On January 19, 2017

_____
Governing Board Chair

ATTEST:_____
David Edsall
Deputy Attorney General