



Department of Public Works
Parks and Natural Resources Division

DATE: DECEMBER 2, 2008
TO: RECREATION and PARKS COMMISSION
FROM: KATHLEEN WOODS, P&NR Administrator
SUBJECT: REVIEW AND COMMENT ON THE RENOVATION OF THE BIRD
SANCTUARY IN THE LOWER ARROYO SECO

RECOMMENDATION:

Review and comment on the proposed renovation of the Bird Sanctuary in the Lower Arroyo Seco Natural Park.

BACKGROUND:

The Bird Sanctuary Renovation project is in the central portion of the Lower Arroyo Seco Natural Park. The project is located south of main entrance to the Lower Arroyo, is immediately west and off of Arroyo Boulevard, and north of California Boulevard. (see the attached Project Location map). The Lower Arroyo Seco was adopted by the City Council in September 2003. The Bird Sanctuary Renovation Project will primarily repair and enhance this passive resting place on a promontory point on the eastern edge of the Lower Arroyo Seco. The site can best be described as consisting of an upper and lower terrace that are accessed by a symmetrical set of steps that flank the northerly and southerly edges of the circular seating area. The upper terrace currently provides a circular seating area on a concrete and stone structure that is in disrepair, a non-functional circular fountain that is also in disrepair, and a greater level park area filled with oak trees and a non-functioning drinking fountain to greet the few, but occasional visitor. The lower terrace is narrow and primarily provides an overlook; old arroyo stone garden walls have broken and crumbled down the slope. One's view at this lower terrace overlook focuses on a broken storm drain that runs down the slope to the lower canyon floor and has caused severe erosion on the bank of this west facing slope. The attached site plan and accompanying elevational views outline the recommended design elements for the site. Of the many projects in the Lower Arroyo Master Plan, the Bird Sanctuary Renovation Project is fully funded, part of the City's adopted FY 2009 Capital Improvement Program (CIP), and ready to be implemented. Funding is provided by 1992 Proposition A Los Angeles County Park Bond funds, funds from the City's storm drain replacement fund and funding from an Environmental Enhancement Mitigation Grant.

The project is actually two projects in one. The first part of the work will be the storm drain replacement work on the slope.; this work will be designed and managed by the Department of

Public Works Engineering Division; the second part of the project is being designed and managed by the Parks & Natural Resources Division of the Department of Public Works and will include all of the other site design recommendations included in this staff report.

This project will be presented to the Design Commission for review and comment later this month and for compliance with the Arroyo Seco Design Guidelines. The Arroyo Seco Design Guidelines were adopted by the City Council in February 2003. These guidelines state that:

All projects shall be subject to the requirements for design review pursuant to the Pasadena Municipal Code. Park improvements shall be subject to the City's Capital Improvements Projects (CIP) review process. As such, the Parks and Natural Resources Division Administrator shall find that the major improvement and/or CIP is in substantial conformance with the Arroyo Seco Design Guidelines and will initiate reviews by the City's Design Commission and Recreation and Parks Commission.

The following sections of the Arroyo Seco Design Guidelines particularly apply to the recommendations for the Bird Sanctuary Renovation project. Chapter 4 of the Design Guidelines, entitled Cultural Resources, and specifically Section 4.2.2 Unique Setting, states:

The Lower Arroyo Seco (from Holly Street Bridge south to the South Pasadena boundary) is designated as a Landmark (Chapter 2.75 of the PMC). As such, all improvement plans in this area shall comply with Chapter 2.75 of the PMC.

Chapter 3 of the Design Guidelines, entitled Architecture, and specifically Chapter 3.2 Public Use Structures, states:

3.2.4 Open Structures and Bridges

1. Wood and timber construction is preferred for overhead trellises.
2. Open structures shall use wood beams in combination with wood, concrete, brick, arroyo stone piers, unpainted weathering steel or other natural materials, i.e., copper and wrought iron.

The Bird Sanctuary Renovation Project is in complete conformance with the Lower Arroyo Seco Master Plan and the Arroyo Seco Design Guidelines. The project was mentioned in the Master Categorical Exemption that was filed with the Los Angeles County Clerk in July 2001 for "Arroyo Seco On-going Operations and Maintenance Projects", but not with sufficient description of the project components, so staff is preparing a categorical exemption for this project that will be filed with the Los Angeles County Clerk, in compliance with CEQA a prior to the implementation of the work.

PROJECT HISTORY:

This project will preserve the existing bird sanctuary built in 1935 as a lovely promontory resting spot in the Lower Arroyo Seco. In 1935, the Bird Sanctuary was constructed in honor of Emma Dickinson, who had donated a portion of her large estate to the City. After many years of living out of the country, Ms. Dickinson moved to Pasadena later in life, living near the Arroyo. When she died, she left \$45,000 to the City. Because of her great love of birds, her friends suggested the city honor her gift by creating a bird sanctuary. Park superintendent at the time, Gilbert Skutt, selected this site overlooking the Lower Arroyo Seco Park.

The design of the bird sanctuary is one of a circle within a circle. A low circular tiled bird bath forms the center of the gathering spot and a flagstone patio surrounds it. A semi-circular concrete bench with backrest is provided and anchored by square pillars.

A set of stairs flank the north and southerly central gathering area and descend to a lower overlook at the very edge of the Lower Arroyo canyon. A wall mask sits on the tall retaining wall that provides the support for the upper terrace; this mask appears to serve as part of a water feature that brought water to the lower terrace. The lower terrace has been an attractive nuisance to the park and the surrounding neighborhood for many years. It is a hidden hide-a-way that is not visible from Arroyo Boulevard. Unfortunately, these conditions have brought vandals and many undesirable activities to this part of the Arroyo Seco.

The general design recommendation for the Bird Sanctuary is to take the lower terrace out of use and make the upper terrace more useable for the recreational users of the Lower Arroyo natural park as well as the surrounding neighborhood.

PROJECT ELEMENTS:

The project includes:

- Restoration of the central tiled fountain; fountain will be functional and solar controlled to turn off after dark
- Repair of central seating area in upper terrace
- New semi-circular wooden trellis structure over seating area
- Removal of grouted flagstone pavement to be replaced with an all-weather surface finished in decomposed granite; flagstone pavers will be recycled and used for other paths on the project site
- Recommendation to abandon use of lower terrace for human use due to never ending vandal problems and instead densely plant with native plants to assist in deterring useage
- Recommendation to retain all wall and stair features in lower terrace in a "ruin-like" state; augment these areas by adding native plantings in selected pockets to enhance "ruin-like" appearance
- Delineation of two overlooks, outside of each side of the central seating area that brings users to two of the most prominent viewing spots in the Lower Arroyo Seco; a decomposed granite standing area lined with Arroyo stone boulders define these overlooks
- Replace and relocate existing drinking fountain with appropriate ADA fountain, including basin for dog use
- Retain fallen oak tree; enhance by adding some new native planting pockets around tree's perimeter so that tree appears more naturally placed
- Low level lighting in the planters outside of the seating area for enhanced security
- Delineation of pathway to bring recreational users deeper into site and away from street; this will be an all-weather path with a decomposed granite surface, able to accommodate use by bicycles that will quickly enter and exit the site via the provided curb cuts
- Curb cuts at two locations on Arroyo boulevard to allow cyclists to access the area as a rest stop and also for small maintenance vehicles to access the site
- Interpretive signage
- Enhanced native plantings at select locations
- Retain all existing trees on site
- Repair of broken storm drain on steep slope below the bird sanctuary, where an existing storm drain is exposed and major erosion has occurred

The recommendation in the LAMP to create a new trail connection from the Bird Sanctuary down the slope to the Memorial Grove has been reconsidered by staff because of the extensive amount of grading that would be involved and is therefore not a part of this proposal.

All project elements will conform to the Arroyo Seco Design Guidelines and are expected to be installed and the project completed by fall 2009.

Respectfully submitted:

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Parks and Natural Resources, Department of Public Works

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Attachments:
Project Location Map
Site Plan
Sections