

City of Hesperia

STAFF REPORT



DATE: June 20, 2017

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Nils Bentsen, City Manager

BY: Rachel Molina, Assistant to the City Manager
Julie Ryan, Management Analyst

SUBJECT: Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program Grant Application

RECOMMENDED ACTION

It is recommended that the City Council adopt Resolution No. 2017-032 approving the submittal of a grant application for the Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program (EEM) for the Rancho Road and Interstate 15 Interchange Landscaping Project.

BACKGROUND

The Legislature and Governor of the State of California have enacted Section 164.56 of the California Streets and Highways Code, which is intended to provide grant funds to local, state and federal agencies and nonprofit entities for projects to enhance and mitigate the environmental impacts of modified or new public transportation facilities. This program authorizes the legislature to allocate up to \$7 million each fiscal year from the Highway Users Tax Account. Article XIX of the California Constitution imposes restrictions on the use of funds from the Highway Users Tax Account, but permits such funds to be used for the mitigation of the environmental effects of the construction, maintenance, and operation of public streets and highways, among other purposes. The program encourages projects that produce multiple benefits which reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase water use efficiency, and reduce risks from climate change impacts as further mitigation for the environmental effects of nearby major transportation facilities.

Grants for individual projects are generally limited to \$500,000 each. Every project must mitigate, either directly or indirectly, the environmental impacts of the modification of an existing Transportation Facility (i.e., Rancho Road) or the environmental impacts of the construction of a new Transportation Facility (Rancho Interchange). Projects which involve a significant change in the capacity or configuration or physical lay-out of the transportation facility qualify for the EEM program.

ISSUES/ANALYSIS

The program funds projects, which directly or indirectly mitigate the environmental impacts of Related Transportation Facilities (RTFs), such as public streets, highways, mass transit facilities, or their appurtenant features.

The Rancho Road Interchange was completed in 2015. The new interchange provided additional access through Hesperia and helped achieve acceptable levels of traffic operation along Interstate 15 and on the local roadway network. The partial clover interchange consists of an 8-lane overpass, on/off ramps for both north and south traffic flows, realignment of both

Caliente Road and Mariposa Road, reconstruction of portions of Ranchero Road, and traffic signalized intersection at Ranchero/Caliente and Ranchero/Mariposa.

According to the project California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document, the Interchange creates negative impacts to the visual environment, water quality resources, natural communities, plant habitat, and invasive species. By implementing the proposed EEM project, the City will be providing additional mitigation for the transportation project's impacts to the local community.

The project's mitigation measures, in accordance with CEQA, will include the following: texturized slope paving and colors; use of native plantings, rock mulches, and boulders in the landscape areas within the interchange; use of visually compatible ornamental groundcover in basins or bio-swales; incorporating maintenance BMPs, design pollution BMPs, and treatment BMPs; through limiting vegetation removal, relocation, storage, and replanting of sensitive plants, the interchange area and disturbed natural communities will be restored to existing conditions; restoring the project area with reseeded or replanting of native desert plants; preserving and transplanting Joshua Trees within the project impact area; and the landscaping and erosion control included in the project will not use species listed as noxious weeds.

This proposed Landscaping Project would help mitigate the environmental effects of the Interchange project through the building of the bio-swales and planting of drought tolerant plants and trees native to the region to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate the heat island effect, increase shade/tree canopies, and mitigate stormwater runoff by introducing water-absorbing leaf canopies and the sponge-like capacity of root mass in soils, and reintroduce environmentally-friendly soil biology and plant systems.

The Landscaping Project will have multiple benefits such as:

- Improve water quality by filtering flows through the vegetated swale and bio-filtration soil media and by reducing sediment discharge;
- Reduce runoff rates and volumes, increase infiltration rates, and increase water quality by removal of urban pollutants such as metals, oil and grease, etc.;
- Enhance the aesthetic of the Interchange and reduce freeway's visual and air quality impacts;
- Include visually appealing landscape for the local community. The landscape will consist of native trees, shrubs and bio-swales that capture rain water during rainy season and irrigated with "smart" irrigation controllers during dry season; and
- Preservation of Joshua Trees.

The grant application submittal deadline is June 21, 2017, and requires the City Council to adopt a resolution approving the submittal of the application to the California Natural Resources Agency for the FY 2016/17 EEM program grant cycle. The resolution also authorizes the City Manager, or his designee, to execute, in the name of the City of Hesperia, all necessary applications, agreements, payment requests, etc., which may be necessary for the completion of the project. All projects receiving grant funding must be completed prior to May 1, 2022. The current project schedule will allow the City to meet this deadline.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no direct fiscal impact from Council's approval of the EEM grant application. If the application for \$500,000 is approved, the funding will be used for the construction of the project.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide alternative direction to staff

ATTACHMENT

1. Resolution No. 2017-032