



# CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT



**March 1, 2022**

## **ITEM TITLE**

Grant Application: Fifth Cycle of the Smart Growth Incentive Program Administered by the San Diego Association of Governments for the Chula Vista Trails Master Plan

**Report Number:** 22-0024

**Location:** No specific geographic location

**Department:** Development Services

**Environmental Notice:** The activity is not a “Project” as defined under Section 15378 of the California Environmental Quality Act State Guidelines; therefore, pursuant to State Guidelines Section 15060(c)(3) no environmental review is required. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the activity qualifies for an Exemption pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the California Environmental Quality Act State Guidelines.

## **Recommended Action**

Adopt a resolution authorizing an application for grant funds from the San Diego Association of Governments for a Trails Master Plan and, if selected for funding, authorizing actions necessary for implementation of the grant.

## **SUMMARY**

In the interest of obtaining grant funding toward planning a citywide recreational trail system, staff is preparing an application for the Smart Growth Incentive Program (SGIP) – Cycle 5 grant administered by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). The goal of this program is to fund planning activities that facilitate compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented development and increase housing and transportation choices. The application is for the Chula Vista Trails Master Plan (the “Trails Master Plan”).

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The Director of Development Services has reviewed the proposed activity for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and has determined that the activity is not a “Project” as defined under Section 15378 of the State CEQA Guidelines because the activity consists of obtaining grant funding toward planning a citywide recreational trail system, which does not involve any commitment to any specific

project that may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment. Therefore, pursuant to Section 15060(c)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines, the activity is not subject to CEQA. Thus, no environmental review is required. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Director of Development Services has also determined that the activity qualifies for an Exemption pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the California Environmental Quality Act State Guidelines.

Although environmental review is not required at this time, once the scope of potential individual projects has been defined, environmental review may be required for each project and the appropriate environmental determination will be made.

## **BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

None

## **DISCUSSION**

Up to \$3 million of *TransNet* funding for SGIP Planning projects is available to local jurisdictions through the SGIP Program provided by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

On November 24, 2021, SANDAG announced the SGIP – Cycle 5 Call for Projects. The SGIP provides funding for transportation-related infrastructure improvements and planning efforts that support smart growth development in Smart Growth Opportunity Areas. While the over-arching goal is to fund comprehensive public infrastructure projects and planning activities that facilitate compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented development and increase housing and transportation choices, Cycle 5 is dedicated to planning projects only. The maximum award available is \$500,000 per application.

The goal of the Trails Master Plan is to develop a city-wide comprehensive trail system that will identify existing and planned facilities within the City’s open space areas. This network of hiking trails, paths and off-road bikeways will connect Chula Vista’s neighborhoods with its numerous parks and recreation facilities as well as link to local and regional circulation systems in adjacent communities. The Trails Master Plan would also complement the Active Transportation Plan (approved in May 2020) which guides future pedestrian and bicycle improvements along the City’s roadways.

## **Background**

There currently exists a mix of planned and authorized trails as well as many unofficial trails that have been carved through city open space areas and, in some cases, within sensitive habitat that is damaging natural resources. While some existing trails are recognized by the City in various communities, the Trails Master Plan will formalize a network to add some of the currently unofficial trails and close off others to allow the repair of plant communities within these sensitive habitat areas.

Both the City’s General Plan and Parks & Recreation Master Plan acknowledge the need for a trail system within the City:

- General Plan - Policy E 11.4 states, “Prepare and implement a City-wide Trails Master Plan that defines staging and access areas, trail types, standards, and siting criteria, consistent with the

Greenbelt Master Plan and the Chula Vista MSCP Subarea Plan, including the placement of appropriate limitations on public access outside of designated trails and staging and access areas.”

- Parks & Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) - Policy 1.30 reads, “Enhance access to the parks and recreation system by continuing to grow the citywide network of open space, trails, paths, and bikeways linking park and recreation facility locations.

Action Item: Develop a comprehensive trails master plan that identifies existing & planned facilities citywide.

Action Item: Encourage the development of trails, paths, and bikeways within master-planned communities that not only link the community’s parks and recreation facilities but also provide connections to parks and recreation facilities in adjacent communities, including the OVRP.”

A comprehensive trails system supports City initiatives such as Healthy Chula Vista and the City’s Climate Action Plan goals by promoting physical activity and alternative modes of transportation and developing awareness of our urban forest and open space.

The mountain biking community expressed a strong desire to formalize the many unofficial existing trails throughout the City during public outreach meetings and correspondence as staff was seeking input on the 2018 update to the PRMP. Staff acknowledged the need for this growing recreational sport and the need for a formal trail system, creating Policy 1.30, mentioned above. PRMP Figure 4-4, Greenbelt / Open Space & Network Trails / Paths also notes the intention to develop the Master Plan (Attachment 1).

### **Pilot Project**

In July 2020, the City of Chula Vista embarked on a pilot project within Snake and Rice Canyons in the Rancho del Rey community. The pilot project formalized a loop trail and allowed the official use of mountain bikes on existing trails and recognizes some previously unofficial trail segments, while closing off others to reestablish sensitive habitat. On September 17, 2020, staff presented an update to the planned Master Plan and the Snake and Rice Canyon Loop Trail Pilot Project to the Parks & Recreation Commission, and while no formal recommendation was provided, the commissioners expressed full support of the projects. Staff has been documenting operations and maintenance costs associated with the pilot project and will be bringing forward its findings to City Council at a meeting this summer.

### **Master Plan**

If awarded SGIP funding, staff will issue a request for proposals from qualified consultants to prepare the Trails Master Plan. Staff will work with the selected consultant to develop a scope of work (including but not limited to, an existing inventory of trails, goals and objectives, framework of the trail system, proposed alignments, trailheads, staging areas and linkages, guidelines for design and construction, operations and management, program implementation, etc.) and schedule to prepare the plan.

## Estimated Cost

Description	Estimated Cost
Estimated Cost to draft a Master Plan <i>(including hiring a consultant and conducting public outreach)</i>	\$300,000-400,000
Estimated Cost to complete CEQA analysis as needed <i>(including bio reports &amp; CEQA docs; but not including potential mitigation costs)</i>	\$75,000-\$100,000
<b>Total Estimated Cost</b>	<b>\$375,000-\$500,000</b>
Maximum SGIP Contribution	\$500,000

## DECISION-MAKER CONFLICT

Staff has reviewed the decision contemplated by this action and has determined that it is not site-specific and consequently, the real property holdings of the City Council members do not create a disqualifying real property-related financial conflict of interest under the Political Reform Act (Cal. Gov't Code § 87100, *et seq.*). Staff is not independently aware and has not been informed by any City Council member, of any other fact that may constitute a basis for a decision-maker conflict of interest in this matter.

## CURRENT-YEAR FISCAL IMPACT

There is no current year fiscal impact to the General Fund or Development Services Fund as a result of this action. If the grant is awarded, the funds will allow the City to develop a Trails Master Plan. Grant awards are expected to occur in the current fiscal year with grant agreements executed and Notices to Proceed issued in May 2022.

## ONGOING FISCAL IMPACT

There is no ongoing fiscal impact to the General Fund or Development Services Fund as a result of this action. If the grant is awarded, staff will return to Council to appropriate grant funds. Upon completion and approval of the Trails Master Plan, staff will seek funding for the implementation of trail segments.

## ATTACHMENTS

1. PRMP Figure 4-4, Greenbelt/Open Space & Network Trails/Paths
2. SGIP Planning Grant Agreement Template

*Staff Contact: Mark Caro, Landscape Architect  
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