



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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**DATE:** June 4, 2025

**01**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### **SUBJECT**

**AUTHORIZATION TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR LOS PEÑASQUITOS CANYON PRESERVE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM IN MIRA MESA AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICT: 3)**

### **OVERVIEW**

The County of San Diego's (County) Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve (Preserve) is a multi-use recreational area that offers a variety of amenities, including about 12 miles of trails and a historic adobe ranch house featuring a museum, community garden, and a small collection of farm animals. It is located in the City of San Diego (City) on 277 acres of County-owned land bordering the communities of Rancho Peñasquitos to the north and Mira Mesa to the south. The Preserve encompasses about 3,700 acres of land west of Interstate 15 and is managed jointly by the County and the City. Of the Preserve's 3,700 acres, the County manages 277 acres, with the remainder managed by the City. This park is one of the most popular destinations in the region for outdoor recreation, serving over 92,000 park visitors per year.

The need for an outdoor classroom at the Preserve was identified by the County's Department of Parks and Recreation staff, who host over 20 outdoor education programs at the site each year, with an average of 25 students per trip. This park is a popular destination for schools in the central San Diego area, as well as homeschool groups who regularly meet at the park. However, there are no existing facilities to host a gathering for presentations, and this outdoor classroom would meet that need and enhance park visits for students and educators. The proposed outdoor classroom project will be constructed within the 277 acres of County-owned land. The community-driven process for adding this outdoor classroom to this site began in Spring 2022 and included two virtual public meetings, online and in-person survey opportunities, and close coordination with local community groups. The community-prioritized amenities that will be featured at the new outdoor classroom include an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible parking space and path, seating for approximately 50 people, and a shade structure. From 2022 to 2025, staff conducted outreach, worked with a consultant to design and produce construction documents, and initiated permitting. A bridge over Los Peñasquitos Creek was initially included in the project scope, and the feasibility of the bridge was evaluated for cost, design, and environmental impact during this time. In November 2024, staff concluded that the cost for the bridge would exceed the budget and removed it from the project scope to allow the outdoor classroom construction to proceed. Funding for this project was established by the County Board of Supervisors on May 18, 2021 (19) as part

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of the Capital Improvement Needs Assessment (CINA) Projects in District 3 under Alignment with Community Priorities, Equity, Inclusion, and Youth Development.

Today's requested actions will authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to advertise and award a construction contract for the Capital Project 1024825, Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Outdoor Classroom, for procurement and installation of the outdoor classroom. The estimated construction cost for the project is \$1,332,000 (funding set aside in Fiscal Year 2020-21 through CINA and Fiscal Year 2023-24 through a quarterly budget adjustment) including contingency. If approved, construction is expected to begin in Fall 2025 and be completed in Spring 2026.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**  
**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Find that today's action for the Los Peñasquitos Preserve Outdoor Classroom is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15303, 15304, and 15311 of the State CEQA Guidelines.
2. Authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to advertise and award a construction contract and take any other action authorized by Section 401 et seq. of the Administrative Code and Public Contract Code sections 22160-22169, with respect to contracting for the construction of the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Outdoor Classroom.
3. Designate the Director, Department of Parks and Recreation, as the County Officer responsible for administering the contract, in accordance with Section 430.4 of the County Code of Administrative Ordinances and Board Policy F-41, Public Works Construction Projects.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The Department of Parks and Recreation's proposed construction of the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve (Preserve) Outdoor Classroom is anticipated to have a positive impact on nearly 100,000 visitors from across the region, including over 20 different school groups, each year. The improvements will provide opportunities to educate the community about local history and ecology, as well as increase accessibility to highly used Preserve amenities such as the goat and chicken pens.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The proposed project will contribute to multiple County of San Diego Sustainability Goals, including Goal No. 1: engage the community; Goal No. 2: provide just and equitable access; Goal No. 3: protect health and well-being; and Goal No. 6 to educate about the protection of ecosystems, habitats, and biodiversity. Throughout the planning and design process of the project, stakeholders have been engaged through public meetings to provide their input. The project will allow for safe

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access to enjoy the outdoor classroom and surrounding site attractions. The sustainable features will help attract visitors to educate the community about the beauty and history of Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 Operational Plan in the Capital Outlay Fund for Capital Project 1024825, Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Outdoor Classroom. If approved, this request will result in costs and revenue of \$1,915,000 in FY 2024-25. The funding source is General Fund Fund Balance. Construction costs for the Outdoor Classroom are estimated at \$1,332,000, including contingency. The remaining \$583,000 will be used for project-related expenses, including design, environmental review, construction management, and project administration. Upon completion of the project, there will be no additional costs for operations and maintenance, as annual operation and maintenance will be provided by existing staff in the Department of Parks and Recreation. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

### **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

### **ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

### **BACKGROUND**

The County of San Diego's (County) Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve (Preserve) is located on County-owned land bordering the City of San Diego (City) communities of Rancho Peñasquitos to the north and Mira Mesa to the south. The Preserve encompasses approximately 3,700 acres of land west of Interstate 15, as shown in the Vicinity Map (Attachment A), and is managed jointly by the County and the City. Of the Preserve's 3,700 acres, the County manages 277 acres.

The Preserve is a multi-use recreational area that offers a variety of amenities, including about 12 miles of trails and a historic adobe ranch house featuring a museum, community garden, and a small collection of farm animals. The ranch house is included on the National Register of Historic Places and is a highly sought-after educational destination for many schools in the area. The ecosystem of the Preserve includes Peñasquitos Creek, riparian plants and trees, and native chaparral, and is frequently visited by hikers, cyclists, and equestrians.

The County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) provides parks and recreational services that enhance the quality of life for San Diego county residents and visitors. The County's park system promotes a stronger, safer, healthier, and thriving region through thousands of recreational opportunities system-wide, including events and activities, recreation programs, parks, and sports facilities. The proposed outdoor classroom project would enhance the Preserve by promoting these goals as well as providing educational opportunities in an outdoor setting.

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In 2021, the need for an outdoor classroom was identified by DPR staff who host outdoor education programs at the site. This park is a popular destination for schools in the central San Diego area, however, there are no existing facilities to host a gathering for presentations. This outdoor classroom would meet that need and enhance the experience for students and educators. The Preserve's outdoor classroom is anticipated to have a positive impact on nearly 100,000 visitors from across the region, including over 20 different school groups each year.

To develop the design for the outdoor classroom, a variety of stakeholders were engaged throughout the public outreach process by way of public workshops and events with individual stakeholders. Two public workshops were held virtually on April 22, 2022, and December 7, 2022. The workshops included presentations and information about the project, solicited input and recommendations from stakeholders for the development of a concept plan, and a panel of DPR staff and design consultants to answer questions. In addition to local community members, stakeholders who participated in these meetings included representatives from the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Citizens Advisory Committee, City of San Diego, Indie Sol Collective Home School, and San Diego City College.

The project is located within the Preserve, adjacent to the historical Los Peñasquitos Ranch House and Amphitheater. The site also includes trails throughout the Preserve, a community garden, and farm animals to interact with. However, there is no ADA-accessible parking or an accessible path to the Amphitheater. The proposed improvements will install a designated accessible parking space and accessible path for users of all abilities.

After passing through the classroom's gateway, users can enjoy two spaces. The first will consist of a three-tiered wood bench seating area for presentations by Park Rangers or special events. Steel cable railings will also be installed for safety. The second, lower area will include concrete steps and a concrete ADA access ramp that will lead down to a paved outdoor project area, where classroom tables will be placed for outdoor activities and lessons.

Today's requested action will authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to advertise and award a construction contract for the procurement and installation of the outdoor classroom at the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. The estimated construction cost for the project is \$1,332,000, including contingency. If approved, construction is expected to begin in Fall 2025 and be completed in Spring 2026.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT**

The Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Outdoor Classroom Project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15303, 15304, and 15311 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Section 15303 is applicable because the project is the development of a small structure within an urbanized area. Additionally, the project is the development of a structure that complements the existing uses at Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve (Preserve). Section 15304 is applicable because the project will require grading in areas of less than 10% slope in previously

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disturbed areas. Section 15311 is applicable because the project complements the other uses at the Preserve.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action to advertise and award a construction contract for the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Outdoor Classroom supports the Sustainability and Community Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan by fostering an environment where residents engage in recreational interests by enjoying parks, open spaces, outdoor experiences, and civic activities that enrich their quality of life and contribute to building a region that is thriving.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dahvia Lynch', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

DAHVIA LYNCH

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Attachment A – Vicinity Map