



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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DATE: October 23, 2024

02

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

AMEND GRANT AGREEMENT WITH THE SAN DIEGO REGIONAL POLICY & INNOVATION CENTER TO ALLOCATE \$2 MILLION IN AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT FUNDS TO CLIMATE-RESILIENT GREEN STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS AND NO CEQA RELATED EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

On June 8, 2021 (03), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Auditor and Controller to establish a trust fund for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) program funds and appropriated \$13 Million in ARPA funds for stormwater, sewer, and drinking water infrastructure. On October 5, 2021 (13), the Board allocated \$13 Million in ARPA funds, which included \$8.5 Million for various water projects within the Land Use and Environment Group (LUEG) and a \$4.5 Million grant for the San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center (SDRPIC) to support three projects focused on innovative water technologies, water affordability, and climate-resilient green infrastructure.

The \$4.5 Million in ARPA funds for SDRPIC included \$2.25 Million for climate-resilient green infrastructure demonstration projects combined with broadband. These projects will identify where there is a need for improvements in both stormwater infrastructure and broadband connectivity, along with the potential for improving disaster resilience. SDRPIC conducted outreach with multiple stakeholders and developed a project site selection methodology based on flood risk, ground surface permeability, median household income, the federal Justice40 Initiative, and County of San Diego (County) identified Environmental Justice Communities. This methodology was used to identify high priority census tracts, from which potential sites were identified for implementation of green infrastructure demonstration projects that will capture and treat stormwater. A 9.5-acre site owned by the San Diego Youth Foundation and operated by San Diego Youth Services (SDYS) in Spring Valley was selected based on the site's location within a high priority census tract, available land for multiple green stormwater infrastructure projects and other potential benefits, and the willingness of the property owner to implement projects, and include educational elements for the larger community. This site serves as a trusted community hub and provides various childcare and mental health services for youth, as well as space for a variety of community events in a historically underserved area of the county.

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Separately, the \$8.5 Million in ARPA funds that were allocated to LUEG included \$2 Million for community-focused stormwater improvement partnerships with the Department of Public Works (DPW) for stormwater, water, and wastewater improvements on private property. DPW staff worked with a consultant team to explore potential opportunities for this funding within County-identified Environmental Justice communities. A multi-faceted prioritization approach was used to assess environmental benefits, design considerations, coordination with other projects, and community benefits at the parcel level. Similar to SDRPIC's analysis, DPW's prioritization approach also ranked the Spring Valley SDYS site as a top candidate. After multiple meetings and discussions with the property owner, SDRPIC, and DPW's consultant team, several conceptual projects have been identified throughout the site that will improve stormwater quality, enhance existing and planned uses for the site, provide educational and potential workforce development opportunities, and showcase sustainable best practices to the community.

Following a comprehensive review of the separate analyses, staff recommend that DPW's ARPA funding for the community-focused stormwater improvement partnerships project be combined with the SDRPIC climate-resilient green infrastructure demonstration project to streamline permitting and construction activities and maximize the positive impact that this funding will have on the community of Spring Valley and beyond. Spring Valley is identified as an Environmental Justice Community in the County's General Plan and has historically been underserved. Additionally, this is a low-income area and was recently impacted by extreme weather and flooding. Implementation of the conceptual projects that have been identified will improve stormwater quality, enhance existing and planned uses for the site, provide educational and potential workforce development opportunities, and showcase sustainable best practices to the community.

Today's action would amend the current grant agreement with SDRPIC to add the \$2 Million in ARPA funds that were previously allocated to DPW for community-focused stormwater improvement partnerships to implement stormwater projects at the SDYS site.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Find that the proposed actions are not subject to review under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(3) because the action is not a project as defined in Section 15378 of CEQA Guidelines.
2. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer, or designee, to amend the grant agreement with the San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center (SDRPIC) in an amount up to \$2 Million using funds from the Department of Public Works General Fund, Services & Supplies to fund SDRPIC's planning and implementation of climate-resilient green infrastructure demonstration projects, and to prepare and authorize any other required documents in furtherance of this program.

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EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County of San Diego strives to preserve, enhance, and promote quality of life and environmental resources through the implementation of programs and projects that improve regional community health and environmental quality. The infrastructure enhancements realized through the San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center's (SDRPIC's) climate-resilient green stormwater infrastructure projects will benefit the well-being of the surrounding communities while improving water quality and providing additional benefits to a community that has historically been underserved and was recently impacted by extreme weather and flooding. Additionally, these projects will provide educational and potential workforce development opportunities. SDRPIC will demonstrate an equity and multi-benefit approach to stormwater challenges by addressing climate change resilience and community equity through robust community outreach and stakeholder engagement throughout the planning and implementation phases of these projects.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's action to approve an amendment to the grant agreement with the San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center supports the County's sustainability goals to protect the environment and the health and well-being of residents and has health, well-being, and environmental sustainability benefits. Investments in stormwater infrastructure support the health of the community and the environment by improving the water quality of runoff that reaches the region's rivers, beaches, and bays during rainfall.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan for Department of Public Works, General Fund. If approved, this request will result in current year cost and revenue of \$2 Million, for a total of \$6.5 Million in the amended grant agreement with San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center. The funding source is American Rescue Plan Act. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's actions benefit local businesses and the community at large by improving surface water quality and mitigating sources of water quality contamination. This contributes to quality of life for the community and a healthy environment.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

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BACKGROUND

On June 8, 2021 (03), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Auditor and Controller to establish a trust fund for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) program funds and appropriated \$13 Million in ARPA funds for stormwater, sewer, and drinking water infrastructure. On October 5, 2021 (13), the Board allocated that \$13 Million in ARPA funds, which included \$8.5 Million for various water projects within the Land Use and Environment Group (LUEG) and a \$4.5 Million grant for the San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center (SDRPIC) to support three projects focused on innovative water technologies, water affordability, and regional climate resilience.

SDRPIC is a nonprofit organization that focuses on cross-sector, multi-jurisdictional solutions for climate resilience, critical infrastructure, community wealth disparities, and housing affordability in the San Diego region. Their stated mission is, “to unlock the region’s potential by cultivating and building partnerships.” SDRPIC is affiliated with San Diego Foundation and also partners with the Brookings Institution to conduct research and policy analysis.

SDRPIC’s ARPA-funded projects include \$2.25 Million for climate-resilient green infrastructure demonstration projects combined with broadband. These projects will identify where there is a need for improvements in both stormwater infrastructure and broadband connectivity, along with the potential for improving disaster resilience. As part of this project, SDRPIC conducted outreach and compiled feedback from multiple stakeholders and experts, including various landscape architects and civil engineering professionals. After receiving input and consensus on potential methods, SDRPIC finalized a site selection methodology based on flood risk, ground surface permeability, median household income, the federal Justice40 Initiative, and County of San Diego (County) identified Environmental Justice Communities (Exhibit A). This methodology was used to identify high-priority census tracts, from which potential sites were identified for implementation of green stormwater infrastructure demonstration projects. A total of thirty sites were evaluated, and SDRPIC conducted field visits to the top six sites.

A 9.5-acre site owned by the San Diego Youth Foundation and operated by San Diego Youth Services (SDYS) in Spring Valley was selected based on the site’s location within a high priority census tract, available land for multiple green stormwater infrastructure projects and other potential benefits in underserved areas, and the willingness of the property owner to implement projects and include educational elements for the larger community. SDYS is a nonprofit that provides multiple services to vulnerable youth throughout the region, such as LGBTQ+ services, homeless housing and support, workforce development, child sex trafficking awareness and recovery, suicide prevention and intervention, domestic violence prevention, anti-bullying awareness and support, mental health, and support services for foster and adoptive families. The County of San Diego and SDYS have collaborated for over 30 years to provide contracted services to youth and families across San Diego. The SDYS site in Spring Valley serves as a trusted community hub and provides various childcare and mental health services, as well as space for a variety of community events. For example, as one of the community partners with the Sustainable Environment and Engaged Development Strategies group, SDYS hosts networking

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and community outreach events at the site focused on creating a sustainable and just Spring Valley. Additionally, the site recently hosted an Independent Living Skills Youth Job Fair, and the California Rare Fruit Growers San Diego Chapter holds annual plant sale events there. The community also has access to the sports fields on site, and recreation-league sports are hosted there, as well.

ARPA-funded projects within LUEG include \$2 Million allocated to the Department of Public Works (DPW) for community-focused stormwater improvement partnerships for stormwater, water, and wastewater improvements on private property, for other projects to be identified. DPW staff worked with a consultant team to explore potential opportunities for this funding within County-identified Environmental Justice communities. A multi-faceted prioritization approach was used to assess environmental benefits, design considerations, coordination with other projects, and community benefits at the parcel level (Exhibit B). DPW's prioritization approach also ranked the SDYS Spring Valley site as a top candidate.

After multiple meetings and discussions with SDYS, SDRPIC, and DPW's consultant team, several conceptual projects have been identified throughout the site that will improve stormwater quality, enhance existing and planned uses for the site, provide educational and potential workforce development opportunities, and showcase sustainable best practices to the community. Identified project concepts include the installation of gutters, rain barrels, rain gardens, biofiltration features, permeable pavement, a subsurface cistern that can capture stormwater and be used for irrigation on site, and drainage infrastructure and other improvements. These projects will enhance the variety of activities and uses onsite and will provide downstream benefits for the broader community.

Staff recommend that ARPA funding for the community-focused stormwater improvement partnerships project be combined with SDRPIC's climate-resilient green infrastructure demonstration project to streamline permitting and construction activities at the SDYS Spring Valley site and maximize the positive impact that this funding will have on a community that has historically been underserved and was recently impacted by extreme weather and flooding. DPW staff will continue to coordinate and communicate with SDYS and SDRPIC for ARPA tracking and reporting purposes and will ensure project concepts are selected for design and implementation before the ARPA deadline of December 31, 2026.

Today's action would amend the current grant agreement with SDRPIC to add the \$2 Million in ARPA funds that were allocated to DPW for community-focused stormwater improvement partnerships, increasing the grant agreement total from \$4.5 Million to \$6.5 Million for SDRPIC's three ARPA-funded projects.

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ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(3) exempts certain activities from CEQA review if they are not considered "projects" under CEQA Guidelines Section 15378. This includes government funding or fiscal activities that do not involve a commitment to a specific project, as they do not trigger CEQA review requirements. Today's action seeks Board approval to amend an existing grant agreement with the San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center. Currently, potential projects identified by SDRPIC are at the concept phase. Today's action does not constitute approval of a specific project or set of projects, nor guarantee which projects will be constructed. As such, the proposed action is a funding or fiscal activity exempt from CEQA review by Section 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines. Projects will be subject to further CEQA review prior to construction.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's action supports the Sustainability, Equity, Community, and Justice Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan by investing in climate-resilient, multi-benefit stormwater infrastructure in underserved communities. Investments in stormwater infrastructure directly support the health of the community and the environment by improving water quality in runoff that reaches the region's rivers, beaches, and bays when it rains. These investments can also improve quality of life, boost the tourism economy, and support compliance with regulatory mandates, thereby reducing the risk of penalties for non-compliance.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dahvia Lynch', is positioned above the printed name.

DAHVIA LYNCH

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

- A. SDRPIC Site Selection Methodology
- B. DPW Site Selection Methodology