

DATE ISSUED: May 22, 2002

REPORT NO. 02-115

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council
Docket of May 28, 2002

SUBJECT: Mission City Parkway Bridge, Appeal of Decision by Planning Commission, Site Development Permit/Environmentally Sensitive Lands/MHPA Boundary Line Adjustment No. 4985, Council District 6, Process 4

REFERENCE: Planning Commission Report of April 4, 2002

OWNER/
APPLICANT: City of San Diego, Engineering and Capital Projects

SUMMARY

Issues - 1) Should the City Council deny the appeal and affirm the Planning Commission's decision to approve a Site Development Permit to 1) construct a two-lane collector bridge over the San Diego River extending Mission City Parkway (formerly Milly Way); 2) construct associated roadway approaches; 3) extend an existing 96-inch reinforced concrete pipe (RCP); 4) extend "I" Street from Mission City Parkway to the west end of the Qualcomm Stadium parking lot; 5) realign and widen a 0.25-mile portion of the existing Camino del Rio North immediately east of its intersection with Mission City Parkway; 6) use a 15-acre site for the National Football League (NFL) Experience venue in association with Super Bowl 2003; and 7) an MHPA boundary adjustment of 8.08 acres to occur with a combination of on- and off-site habitat areas.

City Manager's Recommendations - The City Manager recommends that City Council deny the appeal and uphold the decision of the Planning Commission to approve the Mission City Parkway Bridge project by taking the following actions:

1. CERTIFY Environmental Impact Report No. 40-0559, ADOPT the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP), and adopt the Statement of Overriding Considerations; and
2. APPROVE SDP(ESL) Permit No. 4985 and MHPA Boundary Adjustment, subject to conditions (Attachment 4).

Planning Commission Recommendation - On April 4, 2002, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to approve Site Development Permit No. 4985.

Community Planning Group Recommendation - On June 6, 2001, the Mission Valley Community Council voted 13-0-2 to recommend approval of the project.

Environmental Impact - Environmental Impact Report (EIR) No. 40-0559 has been prepared for this project in accordance with State CEQA guidelines. The EIR identifies mitigation, monitoring and reporting programs, which when implemented, would reduce all potentially significant adverse direct impacts to below a level of significance. The EIR also states that even with the implementation of mitigation measures, cumulative significant impacts associated with the loss of wetlands on a regional level would remain unmitigated. Therefore, a Statement of Overriding Considerations has been prepared for consideration.

Fiscal Impact - None with this action.

Code Enforcement Impact - None with this action.

Housing Impact Statement - None with this action.

BACKGROUND

The project before the City Council is an appeal of the Planning Commission's decision to approve a Site Development Permit for the construction of a two-lane collector bridge and associated improvements in the Mission Valley Community Planning Area. The project was approved by the Planning Commission on April 4, 2002 and was appealed by the River Valley Preservation Project. This is a City of San Diego Capital Improvements Project (CIP No. 53-053) initiated by the Engineering and Capital Project Department.

The project is located north of Interstate 8, and west of Interstate 15, east of Interstate 805 (Attachment 1). The site is zoned MV-CO (Mission Valley Commercial Office), MV-CV (Mission Valley Commercial Visitor), OF-1-1 (Open Space Floodplain) and MV-M/SP (Mission Valley Specific Plan) of the Mission Valley Planned District (Attachment 6). The land use falls within the Commercial - Recreation, Public Recreation and Public Facilities designations. The bridge is designated as a two-lane collector in the Mission Valley Community Plan. As the site contains Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESL), a Site Development Permit is required in accordance with Section 143.0110 of the Land Development Code (LDC). The Site Development Permit (SDP) includes a Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) Boundary Adjustment and requires certification of the associated EIR No. LDR 40-0559, and adoption of the Statement of Overriding Considerations.

DISCUSSION

The project proposes to construct the bridge that would extend Mission City Parkway over the San Diego River. The project includes associated roadway approaches; retaining walls; extension of an existing 96-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe (RCP) adjacent to the bridge; extension of "I" Street from Mission City Parkway to the west end of the Qualcomm Stadium parking lot; realignment and widening of Camino del Rio North; using a 15-acre site for the National Football League (NFL) Experience venue in association with Super Bowl 2003; and adjusting the MHPA boundary line. Following is a discussion of each of those elements.

Bridge and Associated Facilities

The bridge would extend Mission City Parkway (previously Milly Way) on the south as a two-lane collector across the San Diego River, linking with the northern terminus of Fenton Parkway (formerly Mission City Parkway) just north of the Metropolitan Transit Development Board (MTDB) light rail tracks. To provide adequate elevational transitions, the project includes a 15-foot-high slope along the western road bank, a 16-foot-high retaining wall along the eastern road bank. The bridge's southwest approach would require a 5- to 10-foot-high retaining wall to be constructed along the northwestern side of Camino del Rio North to allow for adequate sight distances.

During the last Mission Valley Community Plan (MVCP) update in 1998, this segment of Mission City Parkway was downgraded from a four-lane primary arterial to a two-lane collector. The existing northern terminus of Mission City Parkway (north of the river) tapers to two lanes just north of the Metropolitan Transit Board light rail "trolley" tracks. South of the river, the existing Mission City Parkway is improved as a two-lane collector and continues south as a bridge over Interstate 8, connecting to Camino del Rio South. The reduction to two lanes significantly reduces the potential environmental impacts associated with the original four-lane design.

Due to the significance and sensitivity of the San Diego River, the MVCP includes a Wetlands Management Plan. Given the importance of this north-south transportation linkage, the Mission City Bridge is identified in the Wetlands Management Plan.

Included in the bridge project is the extension of an existing 96" Reinforced Concrete Pipe (RCP). The current pipe includes an open rip-rap channel. The project proposes to extend the pipe underground in an 8-foot wide by 7-foot high box culvert. The improvement would move the drainage outfall 50 feet downstream from its current location, locate the outfall five feet from the bank and place the rip-rap to minimize erosional impacts to the river. The existing rip-rap would be removed and that area restored with native plantings.

At the hearing, on April 4, 2002, the Planning Commission asked for a widening of the sidewalks on the bridge to accommodate adequate pedestrian flow. It was mentioned that one wider sidewalk would be preferred to two standard, but narrower sidewalks. This modification has been incorporated.

The Mission Valley Community Plan (MVCP) includes a Transportation Element that identifies major traffic circulation improvements needed to accommodate growth in the area. The Transportation Element includes the extension of Mission City Parkway to Friars Road as a necessary transportation connection. This bridge connection will, therefore, be consistent with, and implement the Mission Valley Community Plan.

Extension of "I" Street

The project also includes the construction of "I" Street, which would provide a new roadway between Mission City Parkway and the parking lot of Qualcomm Stadium. The roadway would

be located just south of the MTDB light rail "trolley" tracks. (Attachment 8). "I" Street would be a two-lane collector with 12-foot lanes, an 8-foot bike lane, and a 7.5-foot wide sidewalk along its north side. "I" Street would only provide access to stadium events, operating in a two-lane "in"/two-lane "out" configuration, and remain gated in between stadium events.

Realignment/Widening of Camino del Rio North

The project also includes the realignment and widening of a 0.25-mile segment of Camino del Rio North, which is currently a non-standard "S" curve located immediately east of the intersection of Mission City Parkway and Camino del Rio North (Attachment 8).

The existing roadway would be realigned to the north and be widened from two lanes to four lanes, matching the four-lane segment of Camino del Rio North to the west of Mission City Parkway. Runoff associated with the roadway would flow into the storm drain system along Interstate 8.

"NFL Experience" Site and MHPA Boundary Adjustment

Part of the project in this area includes using the land on either side of Camino del Rio North for the NFL Experience. Approximately 15 acres (12.2 acres east of the roadway and 2.8 to the west) owned by the Metropolitan Wastewater Department (MWWD) would be temporarily paved with a two to three- inch layer of asphalt approximately two weeks prior to the 2003 Super Bowl (late January). This area would be used as a venue exhibiting NFL memorabilia and interactive activities designed to educate and entertain football fans. Approximately 8 acres of the NFL Experience site lies within the City of San Diego's MHPA. Since the proposed use is not an anticipated use within the MHPA, an MHPA Boundary Line Adjustment is required. The project proposes to adjust the MHPA by removing approximately 8 acres located on the western portion of the MWWD site and replacing it with a 5.49-acre area along the northern and eastern portions of the project site as shown in Figure 4.1-1, *MHPA Minor Boundary Adjustment* of the EIR. The proposed adjustment would decrease the on-site MHPA by 2.59 acres, but increase the overall habitat value within the San Diego River corridor by replacing Baccharis scrub habitat with wetland and coastal sage scrub (CSS) habitats. In addition to the higher value habitat, the adjustment would be supplemented by a 2.59-acre off-site addition to achieve 1:1 replacement. The off-site addition would be provided by acquisition and restoration of a 3.92-acre site (Adobe Falls) and its inclusion in the MHPA. The wildlife agencies have concurred with the addition of the Adobe Falls site for the adjustment.

Environmental Impacts

The EIR for this project has identified Significant Unmitigated Impacts for Biological Resources and Hydrology/Water Quality.

The proposed bridge would result in a loss of approximately 1.28 acres of wetlands due to shading and bridge construction. The NFL Experience would contribute to the loss of approximately 7.68 acres of biological resource. Construction of the "I" Street connector would result in impacts to 0.21 acres of wetland habitat. Even though these direct and cumulative impacts would be mitigated in accordance with the MSCP and the City of San Diego Land

Development Code and Biology Guidelines, cumulative significant impacts associated with the loss of wetlands on a regional level would remain significant and unmitigated.

The project EIR has identified that implementation of the project in conjunction with other plans for development in the San Diego River watershed has the potential to exacerbate the impacts associated with drainage and watershed preservation and could further affect the water quality of the San Diego River. The EIR further identifies that, although mitigation measures have been incorporated into the project, cumulative impacts to the San Diego River watershed would still be considered cumulatively significant. To reduce to below a level of significance or avoid those project impacts identified as potentially significant, mitigation measures have been incorporated into the Mission City Parkway Bridge and Associated Facilities project. Mitigation Measures have been identified for Land Use and Planning, Biological Resources, Historical Resources, Geology and Soils, Hydrology/Water Quality, Noise, Hazards and Hazardous Materials.

APPEAL

After the hearing held on April 4, 2002, an application to appeal the Planning Commission's decision was filed by the River Valley Preservation Project and the Sierra Club. The Baykeeper and the Audubon Society were also listed as appellants. The appellants listed 13 items for the appeal, primarily indicating that the project is inconsistent with CEQA and Endangered Species Act, that the project's environmental analysis was flawed or inadequate and that other issues related to the project site. Staff has reviewed the appeal issues and believes the environmental analyses were complete and adequate, that the project is consistent with CEQA guidelines and the Endangered Species Act and believes other related issues have been adequately addressed. A detailed response to each issue is attached as a separate report (Attachment 13)

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends denial of the appeal and approval of the project. Staff's detailed analysis of the issues identified in the appeal indicates that potential project impacts were adequately analyzed under CEQA. This project is in conformance with all other development regulations of the underlying zones and is consistent with the Transportation Element of the Mission Valley Community Plan. The Mission Valley Community Council voted 13-0-2 to recommend approval of the project on June 6, 2001. The Planning Commission also received a letter from the Mission Valley Community Council supporting the project citing the need to open up traffic flows to ease traffic congestion resulting from Qualcomm Stadium events.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the appeal and deny the project.
2. Uphold the Planning Commission's decision and approve the project with modifications.

Respectfully submitted,

Tina P. Christiansen, A.I.A.
Development Services Director

Approved: P. Lamont Ewell
Assistant City Manager

CHRISTIANSEN:MED

Note: The attachments are not available in electronic format. A copy is available for review in the Office of the City Clerk.

- Attachments:
1. Location Map
 2. Community Planning Map
 3. Project Data
 4. Draft Permit and Conditions
 5. Draft Findings of Approval
 6. Project Zoning
 7. Project Area
 8. Realignment of Camino del Rio North.
 9. Proposed MHPA Boundary Adjustment
 10. Howard Chang Letter, February 1, 2002
 11. Copy of Appeal(s)
 12. Ownership Disclosure
 13. Mission City Parkway Bridge SDP Appeal Issues and Responses