

DATE ISSUED: June 3, 2005 Report No. PC-05-185

ATTENTION: Planning Commission, Agenda of June 9, 2005

SUBJECT: WEST POINT LOMA MARSH RESTORATION, PTS No. 64678,
Process 4

OWNER/ City of San Diego (Attachment 8)

APPLICANT: Friends of the Famosa Slough

SUMMARY

Issue: Should the Planning Commission approve, conditionally approve or deny Site Development Permit No. 193684 to restore and enhance 2.22 acres of wetlands and 1.03 acres of uplands, and create a 0.12-acre public access trail on a 3.36-acre site, in the Peninsula Community Planning Area.

Staff Recommendation:

1. **APPROVE** Site Development Permit No. 193684.
2. **EXEMPT** from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 1533 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Community Planning Group Recommendation: On April 21, 2005 the Peninsula Community Planning Board voted 11-0-0 in favor of the project with no conditions.

Environmental Review: The project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15333 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Fiscal Impact Statement: All costs associated with this project are paid by the applicant.

Code Enforcement Impact: None with this action.

Housing Impact Statement: None with this action.

BACKGROUND

The project is for the restoration and enhancement of degraded uplands and wetlands in the West Point Loma Marsh portion of the Famosa Slough (Attachment 1). The West Point Loma Marsh area is a field of non-native grassland with fragmented salt marsh fringing the lower elevations (Attachment 1). The soils are mostly fill materials over marsh muds. The area is part of the Famosa Slough and is connected to tidal influence through the San Diego River Channel. The wetland and upland habitats enhancements are designed to improve the biological values at this site.

In 1993, the Famosa Slough Enhancement Plan was developed to restore and enhance the Slough. The objectives of the plan are restoration and preservation of the Slough as natural habitat, provide sanctuary for wildlife and to educate the public with regard to the appreciation of plants and animals that comprise a wetland. The Friends of the Famosa Slough and the City of San Diego worked together on the objectives by removing exotic species, making hydraulic modifications, restoring habitat and creating water quality improvement ponds. The proposed project is intended to further implement the goals and objectives of the Famosa Slough Enhancement Plan. To implement the project, Friends of the Famosa Slough has received grants from the State Water Quality Control Board under Proposition 13 and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bays and Estuaries Program.

DISCUSSION

Project Description:

The project would create 2.22 acres of southern coastal salt marsh, 1.03 acres of native uplands dominated by coastal dune scrub vegetation, and 0.12 of an acre of public access trail. Wetland and upland enhancement would be created by removing existing fill dirt, non-native grasslands and fragmented southern coastal salt marsh and lowering the site to salt marsh grades (Attachment 5, Sheet C-5). Open water channels would be cut into the newly created marsh, creating islands for birds and improving water circulation. Native uplands would be planted on berms created from excavated fill materials. The upland area berms would serve to buffer the wetlands from encroachment and would be planted with native upland vegetation. A trail and interpretive signing would also be components of the upland berm area. The intent of the design is to construct a system that maximizes biological and compatible, passive recreation benefits, while minimizing impacts.

Some effects to the marsh are expected as a result of lowering certain parts of the site to tidal salt marsh elevations. To minimize these effects, the project would employ preventative construction

techniques and provide an on-site management by a project biologist to monitor the construction. Sensitive plant species would be salvaged for re-use where ever possible. The proposal is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 1533 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

The Friends of the Famosa Slough have volunteered to perform long-term site maintenance as an in-kind service supporting the funded grants. Irrigation is not part of the proposed project, but the Friends of the Famosa Slough will hand water newly planted vegetation as needed for the first year following restoration. This approach has been used on similar restoration within the Famosa Slough, including the implementation of Stormwater Treatment Basins at the southern end of the Slough.

The project requires a Process 4, Site Development Permit as the proposal encroaches into Environmentally Sensitive Lands and has impacts to wetlands. The project is in the Coastal Overlay Zone within an area under the Coastal Commission's jurisdiction and would require a Coastal Development Permit from them.

Staff has reviewed the project proposal and found it to be consistent with all applicable sections of the Land Development Code. The Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) staff has determined that the project is being proposed in an acceptable manner and is consistent with the MSCP Subarea Plan, Section 1.5.2. In addition, Engineering staff has reviewed the project's hydrologic impact analysis and determined it also to be acceptable. The project is located within the floodway of a Special Flood Hazard Area and staff has found that the project will not alter the floodway or floodplain boundaries and will not require a Conditional Letter of Map Revision from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. As a permit condition, the applicant will be required to obtain a Right of Entry Permit from the City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department prior to commencing work within the marsh area.

Community Plan Analysis:

The site designated as a special study area in the Peninsula Community Plan. The proposed project conforms to the following recommendations for the Conservation and Environmental Quality element in the Peninsula Community Plan: "The Famosa Slough should be recognized as a sensitive habitat area and, as such, it should be protected, preserved and enhanced through designation as open space and dedications as a park, in addition to establishing appropriate development guidelines. In conjunction with this, the Famosa Creek Channel should be improved to increase tidal flushing of the slough. A restoration program in conjunction with possible assistance from the state Coastal Conservancy should be developed for both of these areas."

Environmental Analysis:

The proposal is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 1533 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Conclusion:

Staff recommends approval of the project. Analysis of the proposal has found that the project is in conformance with all development regulations of the underlying zone, the California Environmental Quality Act and is consistent with the Peninsula Community Plan.

ALTERNATIVE

1. Approve Site Development Permit 193684, with modifications.
2. Deny Site Development Permit 193684, if the findings required to approve the project cannot be affirmed.

Respectfully submitted,

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HALBERT/MED

Attachments:

1. Aerial Map
2. Community Plan Land Use Map
3. Project Location Map
4. Project Data Sheet
5. Project Plans, including Elevations and Site Plans
6. Draft Permit with Conditions
7. Draft Resolution with Findings
8. Ownership Disclosure Statement
9. Project Chronology