



STAFF REPORT

DATE: JULY 11, 2022

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: DAVID WAHBA, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: PLANNING APPLICATION NO. PA-220255. A PRECISE PLAN OF DESIGN (PPD-220256) FOR GEORGE F CANYON NATURE CENTER REPLACEMENT PROJECT & INITIAL STUDY WITH PROPOSED MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION (ISMND) UNDER THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA). LOCATION: SOUTHWEST CORNER OF PALOS VERDES DRIVE NORTH & PALOS VERDES DRIVE EAST (27305 PALOS VERDES DRIVE EAST; ROLLING HILLS ESTATES, CA 90274) APPLICANT: CITY OF ROLLING HILLS ESTATES.

OVERVIEW

The following is a request for the Planning Commission to consider recommending approval to the City Council, a Precise Plan of Design (PPD) application for the George F Canyon Nature Center replacement Project, and an Initial Study (IS) with a proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) (ISMND), finding that the Project will not have a significant impact on the environment with the adoption of mitigation measures, all as set forth under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

BACKGROUND

The following timeline outlines the steps taken to bring this project forward to the Planning Commission:

City Council Approves Task Order with MBI to prepare an Initial Study:	7/27/2021
Application Deemed Complete:	7/27/2021
Notice to Prepare an Initial Study:	8/9/2021
Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration Completed:	6/1/2022
Public Review Period of Initial Study Posted on City's Website:	6/7 - 6/27/2022
Public Notices Mailed and Emailed to Interested Parties:	6/7 & 6/30/2022
Public Notice Published in the PVPN:	6/16/2022

Prior to this Nature Center Project coming before the Planning Commission, the City has had several meetings to engage the nearby neighborhoods around the project (i.e., Hitching Post Dr., Harbor Sight, Spinning Wheel Ln. and Larga Vista). The Project has

also been reviewed several times (and revised) by the Parks & Activities Commission, The PVP Land Conservancy, and the City Council (including a City Council subcommittee), to gain an understanding of what type of a project would be acceptable to the community. Initial discussions for a new Nature Center replacement project, including possible grant funding opportunities, extends back to about the 2004 timeframe.

In 2018, the City solicited Request for Proposals (RFP) to obtain the services of an architect (including a landscape architect) to assist the City in designing a new nature center project that would also include a new community room, to replace the aged existing 450 sq.ft. nature center building, 1,000 sq.ft. outdoor classroom deck and 600 sq.ft. community room (demolished in 2016), all to be located in the same approximate location as the existing site improvements. The firm of Roesling Nakamura Terada Architects, Inc. was awarded the RFP and the first community meeting was held on 2/28/2019, in which the City has been engaging the community since this time.

The first conceptual drawings for this approximately 24,000 sq.ft. site in 2019 involved a proposal for two separate buildings—one for a split-level 2,800 sq.ft. nature center and a second for a one-story 1,500 sq.ft. community room, for a total building area of 4,300 sq.ft. A 1,200 sq.ft. outdoor deck was also proposed, for a grand total of about 5,500 sq.ft. of gathering space. 20 parking spaces were provided in a surface parking lot with two driveway entrances/exits—one on Hitching Post Dr. and one on PVDE, very similar to what exists today. Given the relatively small building pad of the site, the buildings were proposed to extend out partially over the canyon, with outdoor viewing decks proposed on the back of the buildings to overlook the canyon.

After meeting with the various neighborhood groups, the Parks & Activities Commission and City Council, it was determined that the two buildings and decks initially proposed for the site would be too large for the site given the number of parking spaces proposed (noting that it may not be enough for the intended uses) and the cost of the project that could be too costly to construct. To this end, the project was revised several times to ultimately propose one 1,750 sq.ft. single-story building that would combine both the use of a nature center and community room. A 1,000 sq.ft. outdoor deck, plus a 120 sq.ft. storage shed, is also proposed for outdoor classroom activities. Further, a 420 sq.ft. viewing deck, located off of the back of the building, is proposed for a grand total of 3,290 sq.ft. of facility space, which is 2,200 sq.ft. smaller than the first design for the project and 850 sq.ft. larger than the existing facilities to be demolished (noting that the community room was already demolished several years ago). Finally, the surface parking lot now provides 22 parking spaces instead of 20.

DISCUSSION

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Applicability

On 7/27/2021, the City Council approved a Task Order under Michael Baker International's (MBI) Professional Services Agreement (PSA) to prepare an Initial Study (IS) for the Nature Center Replacement Project. On June 7, 2022, a proposed Mitigated

Negative Declaration (MND) was prepared, finding that the Project, with mitigation, would not have a significant effect on the environment. A Notice of Intent (NOI) to adopt an MND and the full ISMND was posted on the City's website and circulated to all interested parties and published in the Palos Verdes Peninsula Newspaper for a period of 20 days, ending on June 27, in which to obtain public comment. Several comments were received and responses to those comments are attached by MBI and the City's traffic consultant. The full ISMND can be found by opening the following link on the City's webpage: www.ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us/home/showpublisheddocument/20580/637902765510630000.

It can be noted that the majority of the public comments received for this project relate to the potential for increased use of the facilities and whether or not there is adequate parking on site and on the adjacent street of PVDE. Additional concerns were also raised with respect to additional traffic in the nearby intersections and circulation to and from the site's redesigned parking lot.

From the ISMND, most of the items reviewed in the checklist for the Project have been determined to have "No Impact" or to be "Less than Significant". The items that are checked "Less than Significant with Mitigation", can be found under Biological Resources (Fish & Wildlife); Cultural Resources; Geology & Soils (Paleontological Resources); and, Tribal Cultural Resources (Native American Resources for the Gabrieleno Band of Mission Indians-Kizh Nation). Of these four topic areas, there are 10 Mitigation Measures as presented in the ISMND Document.

Project Description (ISMND)

The Project proposes the demolition of the existing George F Canyon Nature Center facility and construction and operation of a new Nature Center facility, which would include a single-level, 1,750 sq.ft. nature center/community room building with a 420 sq.ft. viewing deck, a 1,000 sq.ft. outdoor classroom area with a photovoltaic (PV) shade canopy, storage enclosures, boardwalk with a canyon overlook, privacy screen, fencing, and associated parking and drop-off spaces. The Project would increase the total building area of the existing nature center and associated facilities from 1,450 square feet to 3,290 square feet. The existing amphitheater would remain protected in place and would be accessed by a new boardwalk ramp from a new central court located between the new nature center and the covered outdoor classroom area. Similar to the current layout, the parking lot would be located on the north side of the Project site (providing 22 parking spaces) and would be accessed from Palos Verdes Drive East and Hitching Post Drive. Pedestrian access to the site would be along Palos Verdes Drive North, at the northern edge of the Project site. Additionally, the Project includes roadway improvements along Palos Verdes Drive East to accommodate approximately 26 additional parking spaces, provide a bicycle lane with a safety buffer, and install roadway safety designs including red curbs, "no stopping any time" signs and improvements to the existing guardrail. The roadway improvements would require minor realignment of the existing roadway edge line within the existing road right-of-way. The improvement area is estimated to occur along an approximately 1,800-foot-long by 12-foot-wide segment of Palos Verdes Drive East from Palos Verdes Drive North to Harbor Sight Drive.

The proposed project would require approval of a Precise Plan of Design (PPD) from the City of Rolling Hills Estates per Rolling Hills Estates Municipal Code Section 17.15.040(A).

Precise Plan of Design (PPD)

The City of Rolling Hills Estates Municipal Code (RHEMC) sets forth the following parameters when considering a PPPD application.

17.58.010 - Purpose. In order to accomplish as nearly as possible a uniform policy for controlled, orderly growth as required within the city's general plan, nonresidential development shall be regulated by a precise plan of design. The precise plan of design shall be utilized to afford each applicant enjoyment of his property rights as afforded him by the zoning on the subject property while at the same time imposing a uniformity of regulations and conditions to protect the use and enjoyment of surrounding properties.

17.58.030 - Determination. The planning commission shall approve, approve with conditions, or reject the precise plan of design. If the proposed plan would substantially depreciate property values in the vicinity or would unreasonably interfere with the use and enjoyment of property in the vicinity, and the protection of the public peace, health, safety and welfare, such plan shall be rejected or so conditioned to remove such objections. In approving a precise plan of design, the commission shall include in its consideration whether:

- A. All provisions of the zoning ordinance are complied with;
- B. The following are so designed and/or arranged that traffic congestion is avoided, pedestrian and vehicular safety and welfare are provided and no adverse effect on surrounding property will result:
 - 1. Buildings, structures and improvements,
 - 2. Vehicular ingress, egress and internal circulation,
 - 3. Setbacks,
 - 4. Height of buildings,
 - 5. Location of services,
 - 6. Walls and fences,
 - 7. Landscaping,
 - 8. Lighting, and
 - 9. Signing
- C. The project has been designed to meet all the development standards of the city and would be consistent with the city's general plan.

The architect, including the landscape architect, civil engineer, traffic engineer, environmental consultants, City staff, including the PVP Land Conservancy staff, all have been working diligently on this project for over three years to propose a nature center replacement project that best meets the needs of the community. In the attached plans

for the development, staff feels that the project meets the needs of the community and the requirements as summarized above for approval of a PPD application.

The Open Space Recreation District (OS-R) (Chapter 17.15) of the RHEMC sets forth the permitted uses and standards for development of properties located within the OS-R District. While replacement facilities (nature centers, which are a permitted use) do not require Planning Commission review, staff elected to have this project reviewed by the Commission, given that the existing uses are being completely demolished and reconfigured on the site. Further the environmental document (ISMND) prepared for the Project and discussed above, should be reviewed by the Commission along with the Project. Given that this is a City facility, the City Council will have the final review and approving authority on this Project with a recommendation from the Commission.

While the OS-R District does not prescribe specific setbacks or parking requirements for a proposed structure, it does limit buildings to be one-story and no more than 16' in height. Further, the development must be compatible with the site and surrounding areas and no development is permitted on slopes steeper than 35%, which would alter the site through significant grading activities. As shown in the attached proposed plans for the site (Including the proposed color and materials board attached), the site improvements have been thoughtfully designed to respect the rural character of the City, and the site itself, by developing on the relatively flat portion of the site, and the proposed parking lot with 22 parking spaces to support the proposed uses as discussed herein. The proposed rustic, yet modern building and outdoor decks, and landscaping proposed for the site are compatible with the City and will complement the City's scenic corridors of PVDN and PVDE as specified in the General Plan.

Parking

While the OS-R District does not prescribe parking requirements for proposed uses, staff consulted with the Project architect, the City's contract traffic engineer (Willdan Engineering) and MBI, who prepared the ISMND, to further study the Project's parking needs. Staff also consulted with the Land Conservancy to understand their needs for parking as the primary user of the facility. As summarized in the Traffic Engineer's memorandum attached, a conservative estimate was used, with a maximum capacity of 60 people in attendance, and 1.5 people per vehicle, which yields a parking requirement of 40 parking spaces. While the use proposes 22 parking spaces in the reconfigured parking lot, including two handicapped spaces (replacing the existing parking lot of 15 parking spaces), there are conceptual plans to add on-street parallel parking space on PVDE, located south of the Nature Center. It is anticipated that 14 on-street parking spaces could be provided on PVDE along with 8 parking spaces at the trailhead and 32 spaces in the trail parking area. This is a total of 76 parking spaces. The conceptual plans also provide for an optional 10 more spaces on PVDE near the trailhead and trail parking area, for a total maximum of 86 parking spaces.

With the newly configured parking lot, vehicular access to the site will only be permitted from Hitching post Drive and PVDE, with the driveway on PVDN being eliminated. This will maximize the available parking on site at 22 parking spaces and improve traffic ingress

and egress to and from the site. The intent of providing additional parallel parking on PVDE is also to not allow parking on Hitching Post Drive, to respect the desires of the residents as expressed during various public meetings held during the initial review process held for this Project.

The proposed uses of this facility, as further discussed below, are essentially the same as it operates today, with school busses arriving to the site for school field trips during the week. Typical daytime use is for field trips and general public use is typically on the weekends. Since the building combines the use for a nature center and a community room, the community room aspect of the use would be mostly in the evenings and on weekends when parking would have the highest demand. As summarized above, the use is expected to have a maximum demand of 40 parking spaces, with 22 spaces provided on site; however, in the event that there is a greater demand, the on-street parking proposed on PVDE and shared parking at the trailhead, provide a combined maximum total of 86 parking spaces. Lastly, since the City will be regulating the use of this facility, a shuttle service could also be required to shuttle people from a nearby parking lot, such as the Rolling Hills Covenant Church properties, located on PVDN.

Proposed Uses

The proposed use for this new Nature Center Replacement Project are essentially the same as it operates today by the PVP Land Conservancy, as further discussed below. The new and expanded building from 450 sq.ft. to 1,750 sq.ft. will provide more space for exhibits and classes to meet inside all at once, rather than in small groups. The new outdoor deck is essentially the same size as what exists today (1,000 sq.ft.) and will continue to provide an outdoor classroom setting for field trips. The new building will also have the ability to provide space for community meetings, which replaces the previously demolished 600 sq.ft. building on the site. Community room events will NOT have the ability to take place while the Nature Center is being operated. Community room events, managed by the City, would be typically held on weeknights and on weekends, as also further described below.

Programming at George F Canyon Nature Center (PVPLC)

Student Naturalist Field Trips

Description: We run field trips for approximately 600 3rd Grade Students through our Student Naturalist Program each year. These field trips take place on the trail and in the nature center and are led by PVPLC Staff who are assisted by PVPLC Docents and parent volunteers from the school groups.

Days and Times: Tues-Fri 8am-1:30pm October-June (usually 0-2 field trips per week)

Average #of Students: 65

Average # of Parent Volunteers: 15

Average # of PVPLC Volunteers: 5

Average # cars: 20

Average # of buses: 1

Wilderness Discovery Field Trips

Description: These staff and docent-led field trips are provided for local schools as a day experience in nature with a strong emphasis on stewardship.

Days and Times: Tues-Fri 8am-1:30pm October-June (0-2 field trips per week)

Average #of Students: 65

Average # of PVPLC Volunteers: 4

Average # cars: 10

Average # of buses: 1

Scout Programs

Description: PVPLC Staff and Docents lead fee-based guided Scout Badge Programs in the nature center and on the trail for a variety of ages of girl and boy scouts.

Days and Times: Variable

Approx # of Participants: 15

Approx # of Cars: 10-15

Bird Walks

Description: We partner with Wild Birds Unlimited to provide free monthly bird walks along the canyon trail.

Days and Times: 8:30am on a weekday 1x per month

Approx # of Participants: 5-15

Approx # of Cars: 10-15

Nature Walks

Description: PVPLC Staff and Docents lead free monthly nature walks along the canyon trail.

Days and Times: Saturdays and Sundays 9am-10am 1x monthly

Approx # of Participants: 15

Approx # of Cars: 10-15

Full Moon Hikes

Description: During June-September we provide monthly fee-based night hikes.

Days and Times: Friday and Saturday Evenings - Time varies starting after twilight and lasting 2 hours.

Maximum # of Participants: 20

Approx # of Cars: 15-22

Plant Sales

Description: We hold monthly plant sales to provide a source of local native plants to the community. These are drop in periods for purchase spread over half or full nature center shifts.

Days and Times: Saturdays and Sundays - drop-in between 10am-4pm one to 2 days a month

Average # of Participants: 20

Approximate # of Cars: 15

Family Nature Club

Description: We provide free monthly family events at the nature center and on the trail which encourage families with young children to get out in nature together.

Days and Times: Monthly on Saturdays or Sundays between 9am-11:30am

Average # of Participants: 25

Approximate # of Cars: 15-18

City Community Room Use

The proposed new building, when not being used by the PVPLC, will have the ability to host small community events. Note that the floor area of the building for community events is limited to about 600 sq.ft. and that the details of the exhibit space for the nature center use is still being developed such that this meeting space could be even smaller when the plans are finalized. The building also houses two restrooms, storage areas and office space, such that the maximum occupancy of this space has been estimated at 60 people, which could be less depending on the final design of the space. The building does not provide a kitchen, but it has been discussed that it should provide a small counter area, sink and refrigerator primarily for staff use. The outdoor decks proposed on the site totaling 1,420 sq.ft., would also provide outdoor meeting space, with favorable weather conditions, for community events.

City staff will coordinate and supervise the community use of this site, which would primarily be used for Homeowners Association meetings, student clubs, small recreational events, community expos, etc. The City is not planning on renting this space for weddings and private events as has been suggested in the past, noting that the facilities do not provide for a kitchen or catering area use. Lastly, hours of use would be limited largely to daytime use, with evening events ending by 10 pm. Smoking is prohibited, as well as amplified music or any type of loud noises.

Next Steps

Once the Planning Commission reviews and recommends approval of this Nature Center Replacement Project to the City Council for their final review and approval of the Project, including the ISMND, the architect and landscape architect will finalize their construction documents, which are about 70% complete. Once finalized, the project will be reviewed by Building & Safety (Plan Checked) and all permits will be issued. Bid documents will be prepared and the project will be competitively bid. The City is in the process of obtaining grants to build the project, which is estimated to cost about two million dollars. Park Land Dedication Fees can also be used for construction of the Project. It is anticipated that the Project will be bid next year and construction could begin in the summer or fall of 2023.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the ISMND prepared for the Project and the Precise Plan of Design application and recommend City Council approval of both as presented herein.

Attachments:

- A. [ISMND Document](#)
- B. Response to ISMND Comments
- C. Project Plans
- D. Traffic Engineer's Parking Analysis Memo
- E. Color & Materials Board