

## STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** August 3, 2009

**TO:** City Council

**FROM:** Robert A. Clarke, City Engineer

**SUBJECT:** Priorities for SACOG Community Design Grant Applications

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**Recommendation:**

Adopt the attached resolution directing staff to submit an application for a project that combines improvements along the First, Third and B Street corridors, and authorizes the Mayor and City Manager to sign the necessary documents required for submittal of the application for the 2009 Community Design grant program.

**Fiscal Impact:**

Providing direction to staff on which projects to submit for the grant program will have no direct fiscal impact. Should any City application be successful in competition for grant funds, there would be a direct savings to the City by reducing the potential amount of local funds necessary to deliver the project.

**Council Goal(s)**

Submitting an application for the Community Design grant program addresses Council goals to maintain and improve the City's infrastructure and for fiscal responsibility by pursuing grant opportunities that will free up local fund sources to address other City needs.

**Background & Analysis:**

The Community Design Grant Program was established in 2003 by the SACOG Board of Directors to provide financial assistance to implement the principles of the Blueprint Project: mixed land uses, transportation options, housing choice, compact development, use existing assets, quality design, and natural resource protection. The program offers funding for projects by local jurisdictions that implement these principles.

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan for 2035 authorized the Community Design Program through 2035. The MTP included \$500 million dedicated to directly fund public agencies (possibly in partnership with private developers and community organizations) for projects that support the goals of the Plan. The intent of the Community Design Program is to use regional transportation funding to promote the construction of land use developments (or land use and related projects) that lead to fewer vehicles miles traveled and more walking, biking, and transit usage. The program results from the recognition that land use influences travel behavior and can be a powerful tool to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional transportation system. If it is convenient for people to travel to common destinations by walking, biking, or public transit, the Sacramento region can reap air quality and congestion-relief benefits at the local and regional scale.

This is the fourth cycle of funding for this program and the SACOG Board of Directors has dedicated a minimum of \$12 million for this round. Project applications require a pre-submittal letter to determine eligibility due by August 19<sup>th</sup>, a complete application due by September 3<sup>rd</sup>, and all project work to be completed by September 30, 2013.

Because federal transportation funds are used for this program, awarded projects must be “federal aid eligible”. This means that projects must have a significant element involving transportation – the construction of infrastructure, environmental review, design or right-of-way purchase are general tasks that are eligible for these funds. The most common prototype project is one where the grant funds street improvements along a corridor that has infill development with private capital committed. Planning activities by themselves are not eligible.

### Categories

There are three categories of project applications, as defined by the amount of funding requested. The most common category, referred to as Category #1 (formerly called “Conventional”), is for federal-aid projects that seek funding between \$100,000 to \$7 million. Typically, projects in this category include transportation infrastructure projects. These infrastructure projects must either (1) connect directly to a site, corridor, or neighborhood development or redevelopment project that incorporates Blueprint Principles, or (2) supports a land use plan for development or redevelopment that incorporates the Principles, or (3) support an existing community that conforms to the Principles but lacks transportation infrastructure for alternative modes.

Category #2 projects are federal-aid eligible “Complete Streets” projects seeking \$2 million to \$7 million. These projects seek improvements within transportation corridors into more pedestrian and transit-friendly environments with associated land use changes.

Category #3 projects seek exactly \$100,000. These projects must be federal-aid eligible, although they may not necessarily be awarded federal funding; this is the only category in which projects may be awarded non-federal funding sources. Only cities and counties may apply for funding in this category, and they are not allowed to submit applications in any other category. The submittal requirements would be less than applications in the other two categories. Applicants may only submit one application. Projects in this category would compete only with others in this category.

### Federal Eligibility

All projects must be federal aid eligible and will primarily lead to or include construction. Generally speaking, federal aid eligible projects are those that significantly contain transportation infrastructure. Activities or tasks within the project must be either categorized as “construction”, “environmental”, “design” or “right-of way”. The following are examples of projects that are generally considered federal aid eligible:

- Transportation infrastructure directly connected to a land development project, land use plan, or in an existing “Blueprint friendly” community
- Bicycle and pedestrian paths, tunnels, and bridges
- On-street bike lanes
- Pedestrian plazas

- Pedestrian street crossings
- Streetscaping such as median landscaping, street trees, lighting, and furniture
- Traffic calming (but not interfering with public transit, bicycling or walking)
- Transit buses and services that serve the site (operations limited to 3 years)
- Transit stop amenities such as shelters, restrooms, and benches
- Transit transfer centers

In 2007 City staff submitted a project application during the second round of this program for improvements for the Eighth Street corridor from L Street to Pole Line Road. One of the project's goals was to improve access to and visibility of the Manor Shopping Center by making corridor improvements that would encourage new tenants to locate there and improve the economic health of the Center. The improvements would help link potential infill sites (notably the Chiles Ranch site) with the Center by making the corridor safer and more convenient for pedestrian mobility. SACOG granted the City \$650,000 for the work which is now under construction and expected to be completed this summer.

#### Potential Projects

City staff representing programs responsible for Redevelopment and Economic Development met with Public Works to identify potential projects that would compete well for this grant opportunity. The following list is the result of the collaboration;

- First Street Bike/Ped Improvements between D Street and UCD  
This scope is from the Downtown/UCD Connections Study in 2006
- Third Street Corridor Improvements from A Street to B Street  
From the B Street Visioning Plan
- Fifth Street Corridor Improvements from A Street to L Street  
Currently going through a community process to determine the preferred scope
- B Street Corridor Improvements between First Street and Fifth Street  
Intersection improvements and potential corridor pedestrian enhancements
- Olive Drive Improvements from I-80 to Richards Blvd  
Pedestrian and bicycle safety along the corridor and connection to downtown
- Cowell Blvd Improvements from Research Park Drive to the Pelz Overcrossing  
Gap completion in greenbelt for bikes and peds, plus roundabout at Cowell/Chiles
- New access to the US 40 Bike Path  
New access to the bike corridor from the Pelz Overcrossing, or Pole Line Road structures

In an effort to weigh the relative merits of these projects to determine priorities for the City, it is instructive to bear in mind the following considerations;

1. The three different categories and the dollar limits related to each,
2. How well the scope of work has been defined for the proposed projects,
3. Whether the project has gone through any level of community discussion to determine support for the specific project scope
4. Can the project be delivered within the timeframe (September 2013) or are there environmental and agency approval challenges, and
5. How strong a link can be made between the project and SACOG's Blueprint Principles.

The following table attempts to summarize staff’s relative assessment of each project against the five issues above:

PROJECT	Category	Scope Well Defined	Community Support	Deliverable by 2013	Blueprint Principles
First Street	1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Modest
Third Street	1	Moderately	Limited	Yes	Strong
Fifth Street	1	Two options	Divided	Yes	Strong
B Street	1	Moderately	No	Yes	Modest
Olive Drive	1 or 2	Moderately	Limited	Maybe	Strong
Cowell Blvd.	1	Moderately	No	Yes	Modest
US 40 Bike Path Access	1 or 2	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Weak

Before assessing the relative merits of the projects, it should be noted that, while some of the projects would have stronger cases relative to SACOG’s Blueprint Principles, staff believes good arguments can be made to support any of the above projects. However, in order to make the strongest arguments for the projects with scopes that have not been well defined, staff would have to include specific improvements that might generate concern for some community members during subsequent public review. Because of this, staff is not recommending any projects of a controversial nature that have not been previously approved by the City Council.

Likewise, any project that does not have a well defined scope, or is potentially very controversial could take a long time to gain approval of a detailed scope which might make it difficult to make the project completion deadline, or result in a changed scope that might not be consistent enough with the original scope approved by SACOG and thereby jeopardize receiving the grant funds. For these reasons, staff does not recommend the Fifth Street Corridor project for this cycle of the grant program.

SACOG has made a point of emphasizing delivery as a key concern due to the fact that a number of projects approved in previous cycles were not completed within the required timelines. Because of this, staff believes the projects that would require significant involvement and approvals from outside agencies, or might require lengthy environmental approval processes that could be challenged, should not be considered. That would eliminate the US 40 Bike Path Access since it would likely require approvals from the railroad company and/or Caltrans.

Staff believes the Cowell project is substantially being addressed by the New Harmony residential development and is likely to have major elements of this project completed within two years and is therefore not a priority for grant funds at this time.

Of the remaining projects, staff suggests some combination of the First, Third and B Street projects would make a strong application that would link the UCD-Downtown Connection Study and the B Street Visioning rezoning efforts to improving the connectivity between Central Park, City Hall, the UC Davis campus and the downtown business area. Staff also believes a project

scope for the Olive Drive corridor with the inclusion of a crossing of the railroad tracks could make a strong application as well.

Given uncertainty about the availability of sufficient right of way along the Olive Drive corridor to incorporate bike/ped improvements and the necessary interaction with Union Pacific for a crossing of the tracks, staff recommends the City submit an application that combines elements of the First, Third and B Street corridors into one project and direct staff to proceed with the preparation of an application.

This grant program has a call for projects every two years. In addition, some of these projects, or elements within them, are eligible for other grant programs that are anticipated to request applications over the next two year period. If Council chooses to prioritize other projects on the list, it will allow staff to initiate efforts to prepare the projects to a state of readiness to compete for these other funding opportunities.

Attachment: Resolution

**RESOLUTION NO. 09-XXX, SERIES 2009**

**A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS FROM THE  
SACOG COMMUNITY DESIGN GRANT PROGRAM FOR THE  
FIRST STREET / THIRD STREET / B STREET CORRIDORS**

WHEREAS, to implement the SACOG blueprint principles to encourage smart growth, reduce total vehicle miles traveled, and encourage more walking, biking, and transit usage; and

WHEREAS, SACOG has called for project applications for the Community Design Grant Program

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Davis hereby:

1. Approve the submittal of a project application for the First Street/Third Street/B Street corridors to the SACOG Community Design Grant Program.
2. Authorize the Mayor and City Manager to execute documents in support of the City's application.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the City Council of the City of Davis on this third day of August, 2009, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

Ruth Uy Asmundson, PhD  
Mayor

ATTEST:

Zoe S. Mirabile, CMC  
City Clerk