

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: 3/21/05
Prepared Date: 3/11/05
Reviewed by: _____

SUBJECT: Buchanan Street Landscape Improvements

REPORT BY: Judy Lieberman, Assistant City Administrator

RECOMMENDATION

1. Authorize staff to proceed to prepare this project for bidding.
2. Authorize staff to submit a grant to the Alameda County Waste Management Authority and Recycling Board (ACWMA/RB) for \$15,000 for this project.

BACKGROUND

There are 10 Buchanan Street medians between San Pablo Avenue and the freeway ramp. Over the past 10 years the landscaping on these medians has fallen into a state of disrepair, and re-landscaping has become necessary.

In March of 2004 the City submitted a grant proposal to the Alameda County Waste Management Authority and Recycling Board (ACWMA/RB) for \$7,500, using a \$5,000 matching amount. The grant was part of the "Bay Friendly Landscaping" project and certain design, construction and maintenance standards, designed for maximum sustainability, were to be followed. The grant provided \$7,500 of in-kind services to the City by having a LEED-certified landscape architect, (Sentient Landscape) hired by the ACWMA/RB, develop the design and plans for the medians. The City then used our \$5,000 match for the preparation of construction documents, a preliminary cost estimate, and a maintenance plan. The full maintenance plan has not yet been received.

DISCUSSION

Current Status and Timing: Planning and design for the project started at the end of May, 2004, and the project plans are now completed. The original plans will be shown for Council review at the meeting. In addition, the Public Works Department has worked with D&H Landscaping to assess and repair the existing irrigation system on the medians. The City's arborist has taken soil samples and assessed measures that might be necessary to improve soil conditions. The next step in the project is to prepare bid documents and go out to bid, and to apply to the ACWMA/RB for additional funds for the project. If feasible, bid documents would be prepared and the bid could be let in

May. Construction could begin at the end of this summer or in early fall. The number of medians that can be re-landscaped will depend upon the bids received, and upon the potential reconstruction of the “Buchanan Street Merge” per the Traffic Management Plan. This would impact medians #7 and #8, and it is likely that in this case, only medians #1 through 6 would be re-landscaped.

Maintenance: The design plan includes a preliminary maintenance plan for the medians, which is attached. The level of care required for this project is higher than the existing time spent by our maintenance crew. This could be addressed either through additional crew time during the period that the City’s parks are being renovated, and/or through a contract with a landscaping company. The total cost of maintenance will depend upon the number of medians which are re-landscaped. In addition, the financial impacts of keeping the median landscaping in good condition will depend upon how effective the “Bay Friendly Landscaping” design and maintenance principles turn out to be. The ACWMA/RB and the landscape designer feel that this will be a low impact and low maintenance project based upon their design. However, since this is a new concept for median design, it remains to be seen how low maintenance this project will turn out to be in terms of crew time.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The project cost for all ten medians was roughly estimated by the landscape designer at \$100,000, and this amount has been allocated from Landscape & Lighting Assessment District 88-1 (LLAD 88-1) for the project. The City will also apply to the ACWMA/RB for a \$15,000 grant, which would include \$10,000 for capital costs, and \$5,000 for maintenance.

Funds for increased on-going maintenance per the specifications associated with this plan will need to be determined. Potential sources of funding include LLAD#88-1 or a shift in maintenance crew time from park maintenance to medians during the renovation period. As noted above, a good estimate of maintenance costs will rely in part upon the success of the “Bay Friendly Landscaping” model.

Maintenance Specifications

From plans, as prepared by Sentient Landscape, dated 3/8/05.

1. Weeding and Plant Debris:
 - a. Leaf litter and seed free vegetative debris smaller than 4" shall be reincorporated as mulch in planting areas
 - b. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides is prohibited.
 - c. Weed management shall strictly adhere to "Certified Organic Agricultural Practices" unless authorized by City. Weeds will be removed by hand. Care shall be taken to prevent weed seeds from germinating or spreading.
2. Animal, Pest and Disease Management: Animal, Pest and Disease management shall adhere to "Certified Organic Agricultural Practices" unless otherwise authorized by City. All plant material shall be protected from damage by animals, pests and disease.
3. Maintenance Schedule
 - a. A bi-weekly to monthly site maintenance program will include:
 - i. The evaluation of all plant materials and planting beds. Stressed plant material or obvious signs of planting bed erosion may indicate a problem with the irrigation system. Such problems will be addressed and fixed immediately. Stressed plants should be checked for gopher damage or other "pest" related damage.
 - ii. Planting bed weeding and mulch application when necessary
 - iii. Plant pruning/cutting back dead material and flower heads as required.
 - iv. An evaluation and maintenance of the operation of each irrigation station
 - b. Seasonal Site maintenance program will include:
 - i. Record water usage for irrigation system
 - ii. Winter pruning and cutting back
 - iii. Check/replace batteries and operation of irrigation system timers
 - iv. Organic fertilization of any plants that do not exhibit vigorous growth and vital coloration
 - v. Replacement plants as required by City.