



Legislation Text

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TO:

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

THROUGH:

Bruce Moe, Acting City Manager

FROM:

Mark Leyman, Director of Parks and Recreation

Martin Betz, Cultural Arts Manager

Linda Robb, Management Analyst

SUBJECT:

Discussion of Strand Alcove Bench & Tree and Bench Donation Programs (Parks and Recreation Director Leyman).

DISCUSS AND PROVIDE DIRECTION

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council discuss and provide direction on the Strand Alcove Bench and Tree and Bench donation programs.

The fiscal implications will vary based upon City Council direction. Strand alcove benches range in price from \$8,500 to \$17,000 per bench, depending on which model is selected. Should the City elect to purchase these benches with its own funds in lieu of receiving donations, Public Art Trust Fund dollars are an eligible source of funding.

Currently, the City receives approximately \$2,000 annually for Tree and Bench Donation installations. However, if this program was discontinued, the City would likely not install new trees and benches unless there was a specific need or request.

BACKGROUND:

Strand Alcove Bench Program

The Strand Alcove Bench Program was originally proposed as part of the City's 2005 Work Plan and fully implemented in 2007 (Attachment 1). It is a donor-based model designed to create an artistic feel along the Strand and provide bench seating at 46 individual locations that:

- Are of high artistic quality and consistent with the City's cultural identity of surf, sand and sea;
- Provide a comfortable space to rest and enjoy the ocean and surrounding views;
- Are appropriate to the site; and
- Are durable, safe, vandal-resistant, environmentally sound, and require minimum maintenance.

There are four pre-approved bench designs available to choose from: The Wave I and II, The Loop, and The Puddle. In addition to these four designs, artists have the ability to propose a custom bench design concept. Any newly proposed designs may be presented to the Cultural Arts Commission before being presented to the City Council for final consideration and approval. There was one additional design originally approved, but the negative public reaction to the two Shell Bench designs installed in 2015 resulted in its removal from the approved design list.

Once a bench design is selected and the Strand alcove location is approved by the City, the donor works directly with the artist on the actual production of the bench. The donor is advised that the contract to fabricate and pay for the bench is strictly between the artist and the donor. After fabrication, the bench is delivered to the City Yard for installation by Public Works at its designated alcove on the Strand. After installation, a plaque is purchased and installed by the City, and a certificate of appreciation and a letter affirming the donation is sent to the donor.

The existing City/donor agreement and criteria for a Strand alcove bench donation does not address the term of donation, maintenance, removal, and responsibility for damage or repair. The City currently provides all maintenance and repair work that may be necessary.

Tree and Bench Donation Program

The Tree and Bench Donation Program was approved by the City Council on October 15, 2002 (Attachment 2). It was created to establish a process by which community members could make commemorative donations of pre-approved trees, benches and picnic pads that fall outside the realm of commissioned art works such as the Strand alcove benches. The Tree and Bench Donation Program does not include installations along the Strand or at the Manhattan Beach Pier.

Once the Parks and Recreation Department receives an application to donate a park bench, picnic pad or tree, the Public Works Department is contacted to determine which location options are available. The donor is given the location information, confirms the installation details and submits a payment (monetary donation). Once the bench, picnic pad and/or tree has been installed, the donor receives a plaque for a bench donation or a certificate for a tree donation. The cost/donation is \$1,342 for a park bench, \$1,246 for a picnic bench and \$6,946 for a picnic bench plus picnic pad. The cost/donation for a tree is \$295.

DISCUSSION:

Strand Alcove Bench Program

To date, 39 benches have been installed along the Strand with seven locations remaining in the total inventory. All remaining locations are on the north end of the Strand between Rosecrans north to Gull Street. With the current rate of donations, the alcoves will be filled in 2-3 years.

Overall, the response from the community regarding the availability of the program has been positive. However, there are some program challenges in implementation and long term responsibility, which include:

- The program does not address some specific aspects of the donation, such as term of the installation, who is responsible for maintenance, who is responsible for damage and repairs, and who pays for the cost of removal at the end of the term.

- Although the City is not involved in the production/fabrication aspects of the bench, due to the complexity and nature of the project, staff works closely with the donor to facilitate the success of the donation. This can be time consuming.
- Donors complain about the restrictive plaque wording. The approved language for plaques is: Donated by _____ and Artist _____. The wording is also inconsistent with the Tree and Bench Donation program, which has additional recognition wording options.

Tree and Bench Donation Program

Since 2002, an average of two trees and one bench are donated each year. Although the program has only had a minimal number of donors, the response from the community has been positive regarding the availability of the program.

The primary challenge of this program is inventorying available locations for benches, picnic pads and tree plantings that meet the donor's needs/desires. There are additional impacts to the City in maintaining the benches and trees once installed.

To donate a tree within the City, donors typically submit an application to celebrate a special event or individual's life. The program does not permit a plaque to be posted at the installation location, although it does acknowledge the person or event with a certificate signed by the Mayor and City Council. Wording on the certificate may include the following phrases:

- Dedicated to _____
- In Memory of _____
- In Honor of _____

To donate a park bench or picnic pad, donors submit an application to purchase a pre-approved bench with a small plaque placed on the front of the bench back. The plaque includes 50 characters and may include the following phrases:

- Dedicated to _____
- Donated by _____
- Commemorating _____
- In Recognition of _____

Parks and Recreation administers the program and Public Works is responsible for the inventory and installation of the trees and benches.

Staff recommends that City Council consider either terminating these programs due to the low participation rate for tree and bench installations and few remaining Strand alcove locations, or suspending the programs while the Parks and Recreation Department evaluates and makes recommendations for improvements to clarify some uncertainties of the program (e.g., term, maintenance responsibilities, repair, allowable language on the plaques themselves). If the program continues after program improvements are made, then staff also recommends increasing advertising efforts to promote the availability of the program.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES:

Strand Alcove Bench Program

Alternative #1:

Discontinue the Strand Alcove Program and instead direct staff to purchase and select future designs for the remaining seven alcoves using Public Art Trust Fund dollars.

PROS:

City maintains ownership of benches and may purchase designs of choice to fill the remaining alcoves. Allows for greater diversity of bench designs, and clearly establishes maintenance and repair responsibilities.

CONS:

Donors interested in the remaining seven locations may be disappointed to learn that the program is no longer available to them.

Alternative #2:

Maintain but suspend the current program until certain program elements can be clarified, including adding consistent donor recognition language for both strand alcove and park benches and a specific term for the donation (such as a 20-year term for the bench donation).

PROS:

Allows donors to purchase strand alcove benches to recognize a loved one or family member while improving the program guidelines.

CONS:

There is the potential for lack of diversity among the remaining Strand alcoves since the majority of benches donated and installed are the least expensive and popular design by Stacey Dukes ("Wave").

Tree and Bench Donation Program

ALTERNATIVE #1:

Discontinue the program and purchase trees and park benches through the existing Public Works park maintenance budget on an as-needed basis.

PROS:

Reduce administration for a program with minimal community use.

CONS:

Individuals will not be able to donate trees and park benches.

ALTERNATIVE #2:

Maintain the current program with consistent donor recognition language for both strand alcove and park benches.

PROS:

Allows residents to commemorate loved ones or family members by donating benches or trees to the City.

CONS:

Continuing administration on a program that has minimal community interest and increases the City's maintenance responsibilities for installations that may not otherwise be needed.

Alternative Recognition Programs

Based upon City Council direction, staff may also explore alternative recognition opportunities in lieu of tree, bench and alcove donations. Recognition alternatives may include: pavers or bricks, tile walls or murals, etc. Further, staff can develop a comprehensive donation policy to include a variety

of donation options including: cash, park amenities, sponsorships or naming rights for City Council consideration.

PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST:

Staff determined that public outreach was not required for this item.

LEGAL REVIEW

The City Attorney has reviewed this report and determined that no additional legal analysis is necessary.

Attachments:

1. Strand Bench Donation Program
2. Tree and Bench Donation Program