TO:       HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM:    CITY MANAGER           DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES

DATE:    SEPTEMBER 15, 2008   CMR: 367:08


RECOMMENDATION
Staff recommends that Council approve and adopt the attached Park Improvement Ordinance for improvements to the building formerly known as the Palo Alto Sea Scouts Base Building (Sea Scout Building) within the Byxbee Park and the City-owned Baylands.

BACKGROUND
The Sea Scout Building is a 2,209 square foot wood frame structure located in the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve. The building is currently in poor condition and its floors have been subject to flooding during biannual extreme high tides. After a lengthy RFP process, Environmental Volunteers (EV) was selected to restore the building in exchange for a forty-year lease.

On July 9, 2007, Council approved a two-year Option to Lease with EV. This option period permitted EV to prepare detailed construction documents, solicit necessary funding for the proposed renovations and construction, and to obtain the necessary permits for the renovation and improvement of the Sea Scout building (CMR:291:07.) EV currently plans to rehabilitate and relocate the building onto a new foundation in order to use the structure as its office headquarters. EV proposes to use the small rooms in the building for its offices and the large, two-story high central room of over 1,000 square feet for an EcoCenter that will house EV-related meetings and training sessions. It will also accommodate other groups that might need meeting space. Additionally, EV
intends to provide ecologically-oriented classes and exhibits at the site for Palo Alto residents and the general public (Attachment A-1).

The Environmental Volunteers’ use of the building would fulfill the following objectives:
- Provide public benefit and public access
- Preserve and maintain the historic significance of the property
- Not adversely impact the Palo Alto Baylands Preserve
- Promote use by non-profit groups benefiting youth, seniors, wildlife and/or the environment
- Relocate the building to higher ground and improve, maintain and operate the property at no cost to the City.

The Environmental Volunteers have satisfied all of the conditions of the Option to Lease and have recently exercised their option to enter into a forty-year lease of the property.

**DISCUSSION**

Palo Alto Municipal Code 22.08.005 requires that, prior to approving or commencing any substantial building, construction, reconstruction or development in any dedicated parkland, the Council shall approve and adopt by ordinance (Attachment 1) a plan showing the improvements. The site plan (Attachment A) must show, “as applicable, the nature, function, size, extent and general appearance of the proposed project.”

The Sea Scouts Building has been closed to the public since the Sea Scouts failed to renew their lease in 2002. Over the years, the building has fallen into disrepair and a rotting wooden foundation has caused the building to sink. As a result, the building presently has extensive water damage on the floors and interior of the building.

**Proposed Improvements:**
The proposed ordinance allows for the improvement of the existing building, the renovation of the building’s deck and promenade, the connection of new pedestrian and bicycle trails to the existing Marsh Front Trail, the addition of a public restroom, and the addition of a three-car parking area. Other than the temporary relocation of the building in order to build a new and higher foundation in the building’s original location, no changes to the defining historic characteristics of the building will occur. In addition, no plans for additional or exterior alterations are proposed. The plan for rehabilitation and adaptive re-use will be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s standards for Historic Rehabilitation and in accordance with the City’s analysis that the building needs to be at a higher elevation to avoid water incursion problems from high tides.

The Environmental Volunteers have worked closely with various City departments to design repairs that will not only restore the historic features of the building, but will also enhance accessibility to the building and ensure that it is well protected from tidal waters in the future. The purposes of the new EcoCenter will augment and complement other
educational and conservation activities at the Baylands and will help to advance environmental programs of the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive Center.

**PROJECT REVIEW**
This project has been reviewed by the following boards and commissions:

**Park and Recreation Commission**
At its June 26, 2007 regular meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed the proposed conceptual project for consistency with park uses for recreation and conservation (Attachment B). The Commission received comments from the public on the proposed improvement and asked staff to respond.

**Architectural Review Board**
At its August 21, 2008, regular meeting, the Architectural Review Board reviewed the project. The plans were approved by consent.

The Environmental Volunteers have been responsible for securing all necessary permits for this project. This project has been coordinated between the Utilities Department, the Public Works Department and the Transportation Division.

In addition to permits required by the City building inspection division, the EV have also obtained permits from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Army Corps of Engineers, Bay Conservation and Development Commission, California State Fish & Game Department, and United States Fish & Wildlife Service.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**
The improvements of the Lucie Stern Maritime Center (EcoCenter) and the associated trail connection improvements, parking lot and public restroom have been funded by the Environmental Volunteers as part of a Council-approved forty-year lease of the facility. As a part of the lease agreement, the Environmental Volunteers will also be responsible for maintaining the EcoCenter, deck promenade and parking areas. Once constructed and accepted by the City, the City will be responsible for the on-going maintenance of the public restroom at the Duck Pond. The cost of maintenance of the restroom is estimated at $900 per year. Savings from the rent of the current porta-potty will pay for the maintenance of the new restroom facility.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**
Improvement and maintenance of City facilities furthers Policy N-1 of the Comprehensive Plan by managing open space areas in a manner that meets habitat protection goals, public safety concerns, and low impact recreation needs. This improvement also further implements Policy C-19 of the Comprehensive Plan by providing better access to persons with disabilities at public facilities.
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
The Planning Director adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration for this project on August 20, 2008.

ATTACHMENTS
Attachment A: Park Amendment Ordinance
   A-1: Project Description
   A-2: Project Site Plan
Attachment B: Adopted minutes from the June 26, 2007 Parks and Recreation Commission

PREPARED BY: ________________________________
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CITY MANAGER APPROVAL: ________________________________
   JAMES KEENE
   City Manager