Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Bayou Greenways 2020 – Clear Creek Riparian Corridor Acquisition

PROPORAL NUMBER

TX-3

LOCATION

Adjacent to the Coastal Zone Boundaries for Texas Coastal Management Program, within 25 miles of the coastal zone

SPONSOR(S)

Texas

TYPE OF FUNDING REQUESTED (Planning, Technical Assistance, Implementation)

Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

4 February 2015

A. Comprehensive Plan Goals

Of the goals addressed by the proposal, which is the single primary goal?
Proposals should discuss how the proposed activity is designed to address the primary goal.
Check one:

- (●) Restore and Conserve Habitat – Restore and conserve the health, diversity and resilience of key coastal, estuarine and marine habitats.
- ( ) Restore Water Quality – Restore and protect water quality of the Gulf Coast region's fresh, estuarine and marine waters.
- ( ) Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources – Restore and protect healthy, diverse and sustainable living coastal and marine resources.
- ( ) Enhance Community Resilience – Build upon and sustain communities with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes.
- ( ) Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy.

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, Clear Creek Riparian Corridor Acquisition project, located in Harris County Texas, is part of an overarching initiative called the Bayou Greenways project. The Bayou Greenways project is proposing to receive RESTORE Act funding because it aims to acquire, preserve and restore nearly 4,500 acres of riparian buffer corridors along the major waterways (bayous and creeks) running predominately through Harris County and the City of Houston. These bayous are connected to a region known as the Trinity-San Jacinto Estuary (Galveston Bay) - the largest watershed on the Texas coast. This region faces conservation challenges because it is adjacent to the most populated

B. Comprehensive Plan Objectives

Proposals must clearly identify which objectives the proposal will address

1. Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

2. Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

3. Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

4. Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

Notes:

As articulated in the proposal, scientific reviews of the water quality enhancements by the preservation of land, as well as the additional plantings of trees and native prairies is well documented (Sweeney; Riparian Restoration; etc.). Likewise, the value of environmental corridors for habitat are documented and because these corridors will exceed the minimal proposed of 200 feet, these benefits should be value-adds to the ecological system as a whole.

The proposal also states that preserving and restoring the bayou corridors has long been emphasized as a conservation priority within the region and specifically within the Galveston Bay Estuary Program's strategic plan. In its Charting the

8. Of these objectives which is the single primary objective the proposal addresses?

Check one:

- (●) Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats
- ( ) Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources
- ( ) Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources
- ( ) Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines
- ( ) Promote Community Resilience
- ( ) Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education
- ( ) Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes

C. RESTORE Act and Comprehensive Plan Priority Criteria

All proposals must explain if the proposal addresses one or more of the priority criteria as established by the RESTORE Act and Initial Comprehensive Plan and, if so, how.

1. This project is projected to make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region, without regard to geographic location within the Gulf Coast region.

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

2. This is a large-scale project/program that is projected to substantially contribute to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast ecosystem.

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

3. This project is contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans for the restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region.

(●) YES ( ) NO

4. This project will restore long-term resiliency of the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands most impacted by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

(●) YES ( ) NO

5. Promote Community Resilience

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

6. Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the Bayou Greenways program will create primary environmental corridors by ensuring a minimum width of 200 feet and by linking over 4000 acres and 300 miles of corridor together. While the minimum width for this program is 200 feet, this proposal seeks to acquire entire parcels along the bayou corridors, thus creating linear greenspaces throughout the region to accommodate not only the eventual trail system, but to achieve the highest maximum benefit for flood mitigation and water quality improvements. Preserving and restoring the bayou corridors has long been emphasized as a conservation priority within the region and specifically within the Galveston Bay Estuary Program's strategic plan. In its Charting the Course to 2015: Galveston Bay Strategic Action Plan, the program stated that

D. Comprehensive Plan Commitments

All proposals must demonstrate how the proposal will achieve any or all of the commitments in the Comprehensive Plan. The commitments in the Comprehensive Plan are as follows:

Does the proposal articulate how it will achieve the following commitments in the comprehensive plan?

1. Science-based Decision-Making

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, to aid in the evaluation of potential land acquisition, the Houston Parks Board (in partnership with the Conservation Fund and Houston Wilderness) developed a GIS-based acquisition framework in 2005 to facilitate identification, evaluation and prioritization of new and equitably distributed parkland acquisition opportunities. Properties along the bayous were the the highest scoring properties evaluated. This in part, led to the Bayou Greenways project. In 2011, the Bayou Greenways Benefits Analysis Report validated the program's value proposition, concluding that there is unlikely to be any other investment in the greater Houston area that will have a comparable impact on the quality of place, transform its park system, contribute to the health of Houstonians and the natural environment, and reposition the city for

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As indicated in the proposal, preserving and restoring the bayou corridors has long been emphasized as a conservation priority within the region and specifically within the Galveston Bay Estuary Program's strategic plan. In its Charting the Course to 2015: Galveston Bay Strategic Action Plan, the program stated that "[s]pecial consideration should be also given to other particularly valuable areas, such as stream corridors that are exceptionally valuable to habitat, water quality and recreation." As stated in the proposal, the best available science supports the idea that riparian forest buffers and riparian corridors are a best management practice and improve the amount of in-stream activity of the ecosystem as well

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, because the Bayou Greenways program was initially funded through a bond election, separate entities took on the task of engaging Houstonians. After the election, the Houston Parks Board went back into the community, traveling to nearly 50 different community events to explain the project, how it was funded and next steps. The proposal anticipates as the Bayou Greenways project continues, outreach and education activities will expand including the scheduled city-wide event in April 2015 entitled Bayou Greenway Day. Through these efforts, Houstonians will become increasingly aware of the benefits associated with preserving and restoring bayous' riparian corridors for

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

◉ YES ◯ NO ◯ Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the project has support in the region, including from the Galveston Bay Council, the coordinating body for the Galveston Bay Estuary Program for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) (support letters were included in the proposal). Many partners are noted as participating in the current project (and anticipate to continue into the future) including the City of Houston, HCFCD, various City of Houston Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ) and Management Districts and several non-profit organizations. Many of these entities provide matches to federal or state grants or complete projects in tandem and coordination with the Bayou Greenways project. The project is also one of the projects considered for the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (GEBF) by a coalition of Texas conservation organizations including: Audubon Texas,

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

◉ YES ◯ NO

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, one measure of success will be to complete the Bayou Greenways 2020 project within the given time. The Houston Parks Board and City of Houston are on track to achieve this goal with multiple activities simultaneously underway including land acquisition, project design, trail construction, removal of existing buildings and hardscapes if applicable, habitat restoration and maintenance activities. Another measure of success will be the establishment of, not only the linear greenways along each bayou necessary to establish corridors, but also additional pockets of green space to create hubs of habitat for native plants and animals and to provide amplified opportunity for

E. Meeting Commitments and Tracking and Measuring Progress

1. Does the proposal articulate how it will meet and achieve its commitments?

◉ YES ◯ NO ◯ Not articulated

2. Does the proposal have a plan for tracking and measuring progress?

◉ YES ◯ NO

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, there are uncertainties and risks associated with inflation of costs, availability of land and negotiating with landowners, as well as public opinion. These uncertainties however are minimized by the Houston Parks Board's commitment to the region and a team in place to implement this project. The proposal anticipates a project timeline of less than 12 months to assess, review, negotiate and close on these properties. If awarded this $7 million, the Houston Parks Board estimates that approximately an additional $21 million in private funding would be leveraged. This is based on an estimate, in the proposal, at today's prices that the completion of the corridor acquisition to Clear Lake and the Bay will cost an additional $21 million that will be privately raised through individuals, grants or foundations. In

F. Proposal Emphasis Areas

Does the submission describe how the proposed project or program addresses the following four considerations:

1. Is the proposed activity **foundational** in the sense that the project or program forms an initial core step (or steps) in addressing a significant ecosystem issue, and can future activities be tiered to substantially increase the benefits?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, by acquiring the greenspaces highlighted in the proposal, the project would preserve the habitat, buffer and the absorptive potential of these properties. When leveraged with the entire Bayou Greenways program, the positive effects of these acquisitions are compounded and the benefits can increase. For the Bayou Greenways program, the Houston Parks Board will create primary environmental corridors by ensuring a minimum width of 200 feet and by linking over 4000 acres and 300 miles of corridor together. While the minimum width for this program is 200 feet, this proposal, along with a majority of the acquisitions, seeks to acquire entire parcels along the bayou corridors,

2. Will the proposed activity be **sustainable** over time?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the submission, completion of the Bayou Greenways program within the city limits of Houston will be implemented under an interlocal agreement between the City of Houston and the Houston Parks Board. Under the terms of this agreement (approved by City Council on June 26, 2013) funds raised from private sources would be utilized for parkland acquisition along the bayou corridors and the design of trails and associated amenities, while $100 million in public funds would be utilized for construction of a connected trail system. The proposal notes that the Houston Parks Board and the City are committed to completing the project within the city limits by the year 2020. The county-wide Bayou

3. Is the proposed activity **likely to succeed**?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, Houstonians are aware of the importance of protecting and preserve green spaces in the region, and acquiring land so that it can be sheltered from development. The Houston Parks Board is beginning to accomplish this through the Bayou Greenways project to connect greenspaces along Houston's bayous with parks and trails. The citizens of Houston have been receptive about "taking back" the bayous. In the November 2012 election, Houston voters approved the bond referendum providing $166 million in local parks funding, $100 million of which was dedicated to completing the Bayou Greenways project inside Houston's city limits. The bond passed by a margin with 68% of the vote

4. Does the proposed activity **benefit** the human **community**?
(examples of benefits may include, but are not limited to: how a project will utilize local workers, how a project will benefit geographically or socially vulnerable communities, how a project will benefit the natural resources critical to natural-resource dependent industries such as fisheries, tourism, etc.)

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the Crompton 2011 benefits analysis report outlines and quantifies some of the benefits of the Bayou Greenways project including environmental health (~$22.5 million yearly), Houstonians' physical and mental health and Houston's economic health. The Bayou Greenways can help to improve water and air quality, reduce flooding and protect wildlife habitats, and has the potential to improve humans quality of life by providing green space. This improved quality of life attracts tax-paying businesses and residents, raising property values and fueling the economy of surrounding communities.