



Administrative Report

N.1., File # 22-4280

Meeting Date: 6/7/2022

To: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

From: GREG KAPOVICH, WATERFRONT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTOR

TITLE

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING A WATERFRONT EDUCATION FACILITY AND PROGRAMMING CONCEPT TITLED OCEAN ENCOUNTER

APPROVAL OF THE CONCEPT AND DIRECTION TO STAFF TO PREPARE DRAFT PLANS, AGREEMENTS, AND OTHER APPLICABLE FACILITY IMPLEMENTATION DOCUMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Redondo Beach is in the process of completing a master plan for the City's waterfront public amenities. The City has contracted with a consultant team, SWA, to assess current conditions, perform community outreach, and collaborate with a Working Committee, comprised of community stakeholders, to develop a draft plan for review by the Harbor Commission and City Council. SWA has completed the public outreach phase of this effort. One idea that has received universal support, from both the community and Working Committee, is the installation of an interactive educational facility on the site located west of Seaside Lagoon, currently occupied by Joe's Crab Shack. The site is city-owned and the existing tenant is on a month-to-month lease.

A unique and timely waterfront education center concept that would fit well at the Joe's Crab Shack site has been developed by a team of scientists in the marine biology, agriculture, aquaculture, medical and technological fields, lead by Thomas Grimm. The concept, titled "Ocean Encounter", which includes a preliminary design for a new technologically advanced and interactive education facility and a number of exciting and contemporary education and ocean restoration programs, was presented to the Harbor Commission in April and received unanimous support.

The Ocean Encounter concept is also supported by private philanthropists (who have expressed interest in funding the project), the UC medical education community (which would like to assist in the development of education curriculum and research and ocean restoration efforts at the site and in King Harbor), and the SEED Foundation (which is developing a charter school in LA and is interested in becoming an educational partner at the facility). It is also expected that partnerships with USC and Caltech would be developed, as there is currently no waterfront education facility of this type in the Santa Monica Bay.

Given the overwhelming community feedback in support of an educational facility, the number of potential world-class educational partners, and the anticipated private philanthropy that is available to

finance the project, staff recommends the City Council approve the concept and work with Mr. Grimm to develop a plan for facility implementation.

BACKGROUND

The City Council has made the revitalization of the waterfront a strategic priority for many years, the key to which is the creation, upgrade, or replacement of many of the public amenities within the area. These public amenities serve as the underpinning upon which other revitalization activities can occur including the attraction of private investment to the waterfront and the improvement of various offerings available to residents and visitors including recreational, educational, entertainment and other public facility uses.

As mentioned above, the City has contracted with a consultant team, SWA, to assess current conditions, develop a community participation plan, and collaborate with a Working Committee comprised of community stakeholders. The consultant has been charged to gather input from the community and Working Committee, and develop a draft plan that addresses which public amenities should be rebuilt, renovated, or newly added; where the amenities should be located; and what recreational, operational, and other functional elements should be included in the design.

SWA has concluded the public outreach phase of the process (the last public meeting was held on May 31st and had roughly 200 attendees) which included an interactive project website, social media posts, public workshops, and surveys. Next steps include continued dialogue with the Working Committee and digesting the community feedback received in order to develop a draft amenities plan. One idea in particular that was universally supported by both the community and Working Committee was the installation of an interactive educational facility on the waterfront. The facility would attract both residents and visitors and would help to cultivate interest in the area as well as in ocean conservation. Furthermore, community input has demonstrated the preferred location for such an educational facility to be the site located west of Seaside Lagoon currently occupied by Joe's Crab Shack. The site is City-owned and the existing tenant is on a month-to-month lease that the City can terminate with just 60-days' notice.

Due to the overwhelming support for a new educational facility within the waterfront, staff has invited Thomas Grimm to present to the City Council a potential programming idea called Ocean Encounter. Mr. Grimm is the owner and operator of the Carlsbad Aquafarm, a facility that has been in operation for over 50 years and specializes in growing shellfish in an ecologically-mindful manner in a way that has contributed to coastal conservation and habitat restoration. Ocean Encounter would aim to engage and deepen the community's connection with the coastal environment, inform the public about challenges facing the world's oceans, promote seafood for sustained brain and heart health, and address the issue of seafood sustainability. Mr. Grimm plans to achieve his vision through immersive experiences such as augmented reality as well as exhibits for restoration aquaculture, aquaponic gardens, and a studio kitchen.

Mr Grimm's team includes Belinda Zhang, head of research and development for Foxconn (which is the developer of the iPhone). Ms. Zhang also created an underwater drone company called QySea, a technology that would be utilized by Ocean Encounter as part of their educational program. The team also includes educators from John Hopkins University that specialize in marine biology and ocean restoration, as well as representatives from the University of California medical system. Prospective partnership discussions have also begun with the SEED School of LA, a non-profit organization that

provides a diverse range of educational opportunities to underserved students.

Mr. Grimm previously made a presentation on the Ocean Encounter concept to the Harbor Commission at the April 2022 meeting. Overall, the programming concept was well-received by the Harbor Commission; specific comments included a desire to incorporate an “on-the-water” experience that gets users to physically explore the ocean, a request to create partnerships with other local non-profit organizations, and the inclusion of an underwater robotics program.

If City Council has an interest in further pursuing this effort, staff is requesting direction to continue working with Mr. Grimm to locate the Ocean Encounter program at the Joe’s Crab Shack site. Potential next steps include staff returning to City Council for consideration of either a memorandum of understanding, negotiation of a lease with a non-profit organization, funding agreement, and/or design contract. In addition, the project would be subject to the typical entitlement process consisting of public hearings with the Planning Commission, Harbor Commission, City Council, and Coastal Commission.

COORDINATION

The Ocean Encounter concept has been prepared by a team of scientists and has support from a number of education and philanthropic groups. The concept was reviewed by the Harbor Commission and received unanimous support.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with staff’s work with Mr. Grimm on implementation of the Ocean Encounter concept. It is anticipated that funding for construction and operation of the facility would be largely provided by private philanthropists and prospective education grants.

APPROVED BY:

Mike Witzansky, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

Ocean Encounter Presentation to Harbor Commission on 04.11.22
Letter of Support from UC San Diego