

RIVERSIDE PUBLIC UTILITIES

Board Memorandum

BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

DATE: JULY 22, 2019

ITEM NO:

SUBJECT: CASA BLANCA CUSTOMER RESOURCE CENTER RENOVATION PROJECT UPDATE AND PROPOSED KATHLEEN GONZALES MEMORIAL WATERWISE GARDEN REVITALIZATION AND CASA BLANCA CUSTOMER RESOURCE CENTER ATRIUM IN THE AMOUNT OF \$198,742

ISSUES:

Receive and file an update on the Casa Blanca Customer Resource Center Renovation Project; conceptually approve the Kathleen Gonzales Memorial Waterwise Garden and Atrium revitalization project at the Casa Blanca Customer Resource Center; and recommend that the City Council approve partially funding the project with the carryover of unexpended Fiscal Year 2018/19 funds in the amount of \$198,742 from the Water Conservation Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Board of Public Utilities:

1. Receive and file an update on the Casa Blanca Customer Resource Center Renovation Project;
2. Conceptually approve the Kathleen Gonzales Memorial Waterwise Garden and Atrium revitalization project at the Casa Blanca Customer Resource Center; and
3. Recommend that the City Council approve partially funding the project with the carryover of unexpended Fiscal Year 2018/19 funds in the amount of \$198,742 from the Water Conservation Fund.

BACKGROUND:

In June 2001, the City Council approved the purchase, design and architecture of the Casa Blanca Energy Demonstration and Customer Service Center located at 3025 Madison Avenue. Known as the Casa Blanca Customer Resource Center (CRC), the CRC was created for the purpose of providing Riverside Public Utilities' (RPU) customers with a more accessible customer service center. The CRC was to provide additional parking, state-of-the-art energy efficient technology, available products, rebates and services to the areas residents. In addition, the CRC would provide information on RPU's many customer resource programs promoting energy and water efficiency.

Over the years, the CRC has been home to numerous RPU Divisions. The facility currently houses the Utility Customer Service Center and the City Clerk's Passport Services, and is adjacent to the SSgt. Salvador J. Lara Casa Blanca Library and the Kathleen Gonzales Memorial Waterwise Garden.

DISCUSSION:

The CRC Renovation Project (Project) seeks to re-envision the current workspace in the CRC into a large customer educational lobby and interactive space where staff can assist customers in signing up for utility assistance programs and services. The Project also seeks to revitalize the Kathleen Gonzales Memorial Waterwise Garden and CRC lobby atrium and provide workshops and customer education classes, with a focus on serving low- and fixed income customers and disadvantaged communities within the City of Riverside. The location is centrally located within the City, providing services to surrounding areas including the Casa Blanca, Magnolia Center, Hawarden Hills, Arlington, Arlanza and La Sierra neighborhoods. Additionally, CRC would offer an alternative location for customers to apply for and receive information about utility assistance programs.

In an effort to meet the City's "Streamline Riverside" initiative, customers would be able to visit the CRC and have access to a "one-stop shop" for the following services:

1. Bill payments and customer account support;
2. Sharing Households Assist Riverside's Energy (SHARE), RPU's monthly and emergency utility payment assistance program;
3. Utilicare, RPU's medical support and adjusted rate structure program;
4. Energy Savings Assistance Program (ESAP), which offers a no-cost energy efficient home improvement program for low-income qualified customers; and
5. Resources for rebate assistance, education and application support.

Additionally, this location would provide partnership opportunities with organizations such as the Community Action Partnership of Riverside County (CAP) to provide customers with a more convenient location to receive a full range of utility assistance and benefits through programs such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and CAP's Weatherization Program.

CRC also provides further partnership opportunities with other City Departments to offer Riverside residents with concierge-type access to a variety of assistance programs and services. Potential partnership opportunities include:

1. Riverside Housing Authority, to provide information about housing rehabilitation, homeownership assistance and affordable rental housing;
2. Office of Homeless Solutions, to provide an additional location to support the Housing First Initiative, including providing space for Office of Homeless Solutions staff to have a more centralized location to launch supportive services to assist homeless individuals and families in achieving housing stability; and
3. Grow Riverside, Riverside Food Systems Alliance, Eastside Heal Zone and Riverside Food Co-operative, to provide access to information about healthy food options and local agricultural developments.

The CRC will provide a central location and access to a variety of City services to assist residents and property owners in their efforts to maintain and improve quality of life. These relationships and this shared space with other City Departments provides additional resources and staff to improve efficiency and better serve the residents of the City of Riverside.

In order to begin operations, reconfigurations to the existing space is required to create a reception desk, a customer waiting area, and offices where customers can receive personal assistance with the processing of their applications. A proposed CRC floor plan and lobby rendering are attached.

In addition to the re-envisioning of the CRC, the opportunity to revitalize the Kathleen Gonzales Memorial

Waterwise Garden and CRC lobby atrium can act as a conservation, demonstration and instruction center to provide increased access for community programs and services. The Kathleen Gonzales Memorial Waterwise Garden, located behind the Casa Blanca Library and the CRC lobby atrium are resources to provide water savings ideas that customers can incorporate into the landscape design and gardening practices at their own homes.

The restored Garden and atrium will feature California-native, drought-tolerant and water efficient plants that demonstrate various methods of landscaping and irrigation techniques. The demonstration garden will be landscaped with pocket gardens to model climate-appropriate residential front and back yard designs, including a California-native garden, a succulent garden, a woodland garden, a Mediterranean garden, an edible garden and a drought-tolerant turf demonstration. In addition, each plant throughout the Garden and atrium would have interpretive signage showing plant types, water use and landscape design strategies.

To promote education and outreach, displays would be provided showing water use efficiency and organic agricultural practices, allowing for a hands-on approach to education. These proposed exhibits may range from the history of California water, local Riverside-specific water history, Grow Riverside strategies, and up-to-date water statistics concerning Riverside's water supplies and educational storyboards for visiting children. To further educational resources, the Garden and atrium will provide references and trained staff to assist customers with projects they are performing at their homes and to apply for water efficiency incentives. The Garden provides an amphitheater meeting space available for community meetings, workshops and water conservation events.

The Chief Financial Officer concurs with this report.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Public Utilities is requesting that carryover requests for Fiscal Year 2018/19 include unspent funds in the amount of \$198,742 from the Water Conservation Fund Account No. 6220200-453001 be carried over to Fiscal Year 2019/20 to assist in funding the project identified herein. Staff will return to request project approval, provide the total fiscal impact of the project, and identify additional Fiscal Year 2019/20 Water Conservation Fund funding for the project. If the carryover is not approved, the project may be delayed one (1) fiscal year until funding is available.

Prepared by:	Daniel E. Garcia, Utilities Assistant General Manager/Resources
Approved by:	Todd M. Corbin, Utilities General Manager
Approved by:	Al Zelinka, FAICP, City Manager
Approved as to form:	Gary G. Geuss, City Attorney

Certifies availability of funds:	Brian Seinturier, Utilities Fiscal Manager
-------------------------------------	--

Attachments:

1. Proposed CRC Floor Plan
2. Proposed CRC Lobby Rendering
3. Water Wise Garden Site Plan
4. Presentation