
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: Westwood Hills Nature Center Project

RECOMMENDED ACTION: In anticipation of Council action at its June 19 meeting, a representative of the Park and Recreation Advisory Commission and staff desire to present their recommendation to retain the architectural firm of HGA for the design of the Westwood Hills Nature Center's Interpretive Center Building and surrounding area.

POLICY CONSIDERATION: Is the City Council comfortable with staff continuing to move forward with this project by entering into a contract with HGA for architectural services?

SUMMARY: Staff solicited proposals from architectural firms to design the Westwood Hills Nature Center's Interpretive Center Building and surrounding areas. Staff created a Request for Proposal that was sent out through the Sun Sailor, Quest Construction Data Network, Dodge Data and Analytics, as well as emailed directly to local and nationwide firms. On April 24, 2017 there were 11 proposals submitted. Six firms were interviewed on May 10 and 11 by a committee made up of City staff and George Foulkes from PRAC. Second round interviews were held with two firms on May 18. We received excellent proposals from firms who were very qualified. On June 7, staff recommended HGA to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission because of their vast experience with unique architectural design as well as specific expertise in animal exhibit design and visitor experience. The PRAC made the following recommendation: *Commissioner Cantor made a motion to recommend the City Council enter into a contract with HGA to provide architectural services for the Westwood Hills Nature Center project. Commissioner Foulkes seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 6 – 0.* HGA has eight branches located throughout the country and has been headquartered in the Twin Cities since 1953.

FINANCIAL OR BUDGET CONSIDERATION: The city would be entering into a \$1.3 million contract with HGA for architectural services which include schematic design, design development, construction documents and continual work on the project. The City's CIP has \$300,000 in 2017 to begin preliminary design for the construction of a new Nature Center building, and an additional \$700,000 in 2018 for design. The current CIP estimates an \$11 million project in 2019.

NEXT STEPS: Enter into a contract with HGA for architectural design services. Staff will provide the City Council an update at the completion of each step below to check in and affirm direction to move to the next step:

1. June 19, 2017: Council to officially accept HGA as the architect firm
2. 2017 & 2018: Public input, schematic and design development
3. Early October 2018: Construction Documents
4. 2019 – 2020: Construction with completion in 2020.

VISION CONSIDERATION: St. Louis Park is committed to being a connected and engaged community. St. Louis Park is committed to being a leader in environmental stewardship.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS: Discussion

Prepared by: Jason T. West, Recreation Superintendent, Mark Oestreich, Westwood Hills Nature Center Manager

Reviewed by: Cynthia S. Walsh, Director of Ops & Rec, Brian Hoffman, Inspections Director

Approved by: Tom Harmening, City Manager

DISCUSSION

BACKGROUND: The City completed a comprehensive Master Plan for the Westwood Hills Nature Center in May 2016. This plan addresses facility development and programming goals for the Westwood Hills Nature Center. The plan includes the nature center facilities, outdoor programming sites, infrastructure and programming needs. The master plan serves as the vision, guiding principles, resource allocation and action plan to meet the identified needs of the community and to assist the city in planning for future building development at Westwood Hills Nature Center. Citizen input played a key role in shaping this plan.

Per the master plan, the new interpretive center building will expand programming, offer rental opportunities, create a multi-use facility, improve staff workspace, increase storage capacity, create a separate exhibit/exploration area and accommodate educational groups while allowing the general public a gathering area where they can enjoy the facility separate from large groups.

PRESENT CONSIDERATIONS:

Purpose and Goals

Based on the discussion from the October 10, 2016 Council meeting, below are the purpose and goals for Westwood Hills Nature Center project.

- The current size of the Interpretive Center Building is 2,700 sq. ft. The proposed size of the building is projected to be 12,000 to 15,000 sq. ft., similar size to Eastman which is 14,000 sq. ft.
- Energy efficient based on the most current standards with a goal of a Net Zero design
- Low maintenance both inside and out
- Building location closer to the parking lot
- Separate community gathering space that does not interfere with programming
- Warmer and inviting feel
- Maintain and expand three classrooms for adult and youth program
- Create the three classrooms so that they can open into one large room for large assembly programs and rental space
- Flexibility/accommodating for Hearing Loop
- Target audience is everyone
 - Increased adult programming outside and inside of Interpretive Center building
 - Interactive exhibits that users can enjoy without interfering with programs taking place
 - Increased youth and family programming that can occur simultaneously with programs occurring in other rooms
- Restrooms available for public even during off hours
- Enhance the existing partnership with St. Louis Park School District through programming opportunities for Pre-K to senior adults
- Appropriate staff office space and work areas
- Public gathering area (i.e. interpretive exhibits, animal display, etc.)
- Adequate storage locations
- Consider creating a small rental room that can be used by book clubs or neighborhood groups

NEXT STEPS: Staff will be finalizing the timelines and public input process this summer. We will be bringing this project back to the City Council throughout the course of the project for input and policy considerations.

FINANCIAL AND BUDGET IMPLICATIONS: The City's CIP has \$300,000 in 2017 to begin preliminary design for the construction of a new Nature Center building, the current CIP estimates an \$11 million project in 2019. Based on a 20-year bond at a rate of 3.5% (only an estimate) the annual impact to the medina value home (\$240,100) would range \$32-\$35 per year. The size and term of the bond will be modified as we annually update the CIP and the estimates.