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# Interpretive Center at the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve

## Conceptual Plan

October 31, 2005

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Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve Project Site, January 28, 2006 (Photo: Geoffrey Smith)

“The shape of a leaf serves, expresses the unique function of that particular leaf. Does the shape of a building or sound of a symphony serve and express the unique spiritual needs of the composer and his age (time)?”

– James Hubbell

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Revision history:

October 31, 2005: Document created

April 24, 2005: Updated, TECC funds commitment

## Proposal

The Olivenhain Municipal Water District (OMWD) proposes to partner with The Escondido Creek Conservancy (TECC) to construct an Interpretive Center (IC) at the staging area of the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve (EFRR). Initial funding for this project is \$137,000 consisting of:

- \$65,500 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) through the State of California Dept. of Parks and Recreation
- \$50,000 matching funds from a local NGO. TECC has committed to contribute these funds and become a partner in this project
- \$15,500 in matching staff time by OMWD

The facility is proposed to be located at the site of the existing outdoor interpretive kiosk at the staging area, at the south end of the parking lot, in the area referred to as the 'corral'. It would provide interpretive resources for park visitors, and would allow park rangers to have more presence at the park. The facility design included in the proposal consists of a simple 25' x 25' cinder block construction housing a utility closet and toilet facility.

TECC is being asked to participate as a funder and project team partner. TECC would be offered administrative office space, while retaining the facility's primary function as an interpretive center for public use.

A meeting was held at the offices of OMWD on September 29 to discuss this proposal.

Present from TECC were:

Leonard Wittwer, Board Member  
Geoffrey Smith, Executive Director.

OMWD leads present were:

Kim Thorner, Esq, Assistant General Manager  
David McCollom, General Manager  
Mandolyn Rodriguez, Staff Analyst  
Joey Randall, Ranger

### TECC Participation

The TECC Board of Directors reviewed the proposal at a meeting on October 24 and expressed a strong interest in working with the OMWD to further define the scope of the project, and to establish such details as relate to partnering, management, oversight, funding, design and operations.

A TECC Project Committee was established consisting of:

Tim Costanzo, Board Member  
Jeff Swenerton, Board Member  
Geoffrey Smith, Executive Director

At a meeting on March 27, 2006, the TECC BOD further solidified its support for the project with the following resolutions passed:

Resolution: Authorize \$50K maximum contribution for a minimum structure with office, naming rights, and input into the process. A 'dark skies' policy would govern useage.

Resolution: Board supports seeking additional funds to make the building more aesthetically pleasing, functional, and environmentally compatible with the area.

## Needs Assessment

The OMWD has a need for increased ranger presence in conjunction with trails use, and educational and interpretive services. TECC has identified a need for increased visibility and presence in the Escondido Creek watershed. EFRR visitation is increasing due to increased urbanization in the area, as well as increasing size of the EFRR. A facility design appropriate to the unique Harmony Grove setting would embrace the aesthetic and natural qualities of this special place in a holistic fashion.

## Narrative

This is a phenomenal opportunity for TECC to establish a long sought after physical presence in the watershed. Additional potential sources of matching funding are likely, and the basic design can be expanded upon subject to review and approval by the grantor and managing agencies.

The opportunity now exists to create a building with enduring aesthetic beauty, becoming of the spectacular setting.

Many examples of similar visitor centers exist in the San Diego Region, which can serve as examples pro and con of good design. The architectural firm of Hubbell and Hubbell has been contacted, and has provided some general parameters for building design and construction of the IC. This firm has crafted many 'holistic' structures throughout the world, including many here in San Diego. The principals have a particular affinity for the Harmony Grove area, and have a relationship with Questhaven Retreat, where they have done a lot of work subsequent to the Harmony Grove fire. Examples of their work are detailed in the appendix.

## Project Cost

Based on preliminary conversations with the Hubbell and Hubbell architectural firm, the 'ball park' costs would be as follows:

- If a contractor is building it, a very simple building using conventional materials will start around \$175 per sq. ft.
- A free-form Hubbell building might start around \$300 per sq. ft.

These costs can be reduced if volunteer labor is used. The design and architectural fees are approximately 10 % of the construction costs. This varies depending on what process the drawings have to go through and the type of permits that are required. So for a 5-700 sq. ft. building the costs would range from \$100,000 to \$250,000 and up. According to the Hubbell firm, a unique design consisting of 'classic' Hubbell architectural design, a partial

2<sup>nd</sup> story 'loft' for office space, and a sloping roof designed to accommodate photovoltaic solar panels, would cost in the \$400 - \$500,000 price range.

## Project Timeline

Oct – Nov 2005:	Initial discussions to establish partnering agreement
Dec – Feb 2006:	Permitting and compliance
Dec – July 2006:	Develop project budget
Dec – July 2006:	Identify and secure additional funding
Dec – ??? 2006:	Facility design selection process
???:	Select design and construction firms
???:	Commence construction
???:	Building occupation (anticipated 2007)

## Project Administration

A project administration team will be developed consisting of OMWD staff and TECC Executive Director, supported by TECC volunteer board members. It is anticipated that an architectural student intern would be retained early in the process to work with the architectural firm and administrative team.

## Pro/Con Analysis

Challenges and opportunities related to the proposal are identified:

### Pro

- Interpretive and educational opportunity
- Increased OMWD presence
- Increased TECC presence
- Leverage increased support for OMWD and TECC programs
- Reinforce partnership between OMWD and TECC
- Operational/administrative location for OMWD and TECC
- Educational programs for schools
- Center for volunteer recruitment
- If properly designed, the building itself would become a draw which would benefit capacity-building efforts of the EFRR and TECC

## Con

- Fundraising development process will take some time and effort (yet will also benefit TECC through community outreach and exposure)
- Project management
- Facility maintenance
- Vandalism potential
- Safety (remote location)
- No power available, would need to be brought in (included in original budget)
- Weak wireless cellular data coverage (Verizon)
- Weak wireless voice coverage (Verizon)
- Flood inundation risk
- Wild fire risk
- Difficult place to conduct administrative business
- No on-site storage for tools and equipment (could be phase two of project)

## Project Suggestions and Ideas List

During discussions the following conceptual ideas were identified for consideration in the project design. This is a 'wish list' which will need to be prioritized:

- Provide space for tools storage
- Aesthetically pleasing 'holistic' design
- Provide an outdoor educational venue 'amphitheater'
- Install a 'dry composting' toilet in the facility, due to the inability of the site to 'percolate' for septic. (No sewer is available in the Elfin Forest community.)
- Native American participation in the facility and interpretive design should be accommodated. Mr. Mark Mahado is a Luiseno and a likely choice. The San Pasqual Indian Reservation is located in the Escondido Creek Watershed, and should be consulted. At minimum, local tribal elders should be informed of construction plans, and be called upon to bless the site prior to commencement of construction, and again at dedication.
- Building design could be set into a slope and incorporate 'earth shelter' (soil on top) design concepts

- Install 7/24 video surveillance system
- Setting building into hillside below the driveway would: create a less-imposing structure; reduce opportunity for vandalism since there would be less area not visible from Harmony Grove Road; provide for greater access by fire emergency vehicles (Note: State grant funder has stipulated that the structure must be situated on already-disturbed soil, meaning the existing parking lot.)
- Building construction materials must be able to withstand flood inundation (i.e., cement only, non-porous materials.)
- Possibility of using volunteers and nonprofits specializing in 'green building' utilizing youth in education
- Power: 120/240 would need to be extended to this location.
- Telephone: PacBell phone service currently exists on site at the pay phone, and could be easily extended to the new facility
- SolarPower: Incorporate rooftop solar into the design
- Design interpretive elements into the exterior of the building so that interpretative can occur passively, and without requiring visitors to enter the building to learn.
- Construct an aesthetically appropriate stone barrier wall to provide protection to the building from potential rising waters during flood events
- Initiate a capital campaign to build support for the project and to help defray costs. Elements of such a campaign would include a fundraising 'thermometer' situated on Harmony Grove Road; brick or paving stone naming opportunities; name board of financial and in-kind supporters
- Seek additional grant funding for the project:
  - Regional Water Quality Control Board Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) funding.
  - The San Diego Foundation
  - Private donors
- Utilize local university interns for building and interpretive design coordination
- Utilize the Hubbell Ilan-Lael foundation for appropriate design methodology. The mission of the foundation: "To find through the arts both visionary and physical patterns and direction that bring humanity's inner and outer world in harmony with the changing rhythm of our times." - James T. Hubbell, founder
- Create a partial two-story structure with OMWD and TECC administrative space on second level to a) protect from flood damage, and b) free up entire ground floor for public interpretational and educational support activities
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## Appendix – Survey Questions

Examples of interpretive center projects in the region. Design committee will research these and other existing facilities to determine:

- Cost
- What worked
- What didn't work
- What agencies would do differently
- Cost
- Design issues
- Administrative issues

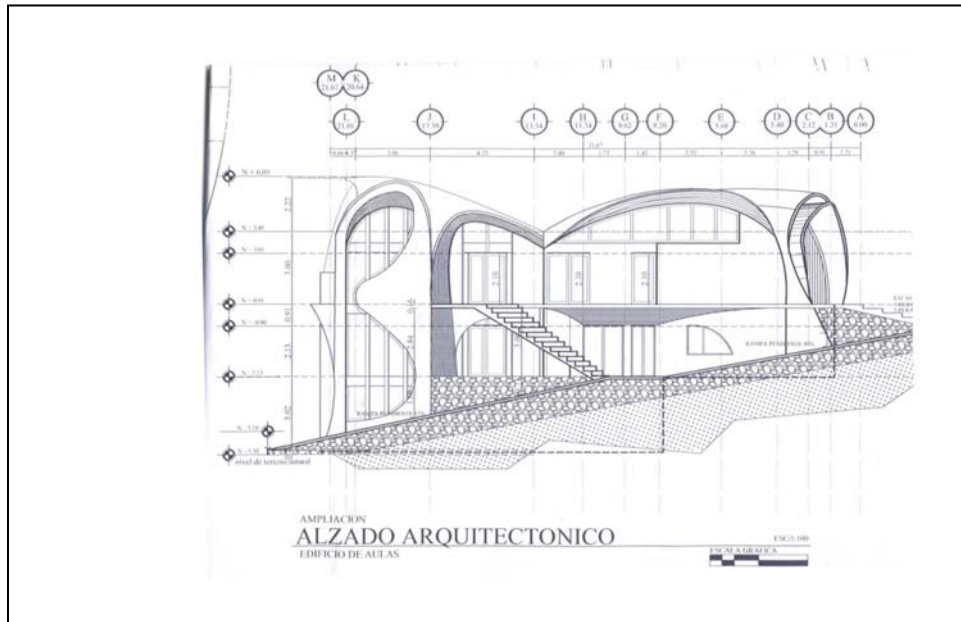
(Due to large size of photographic image content, the following appendix information is not transmitted via email)

## Appendix – Example Buildings

### Colegio La Esperanza, High School, Tecate, Mexico

Design by: James Hubbell

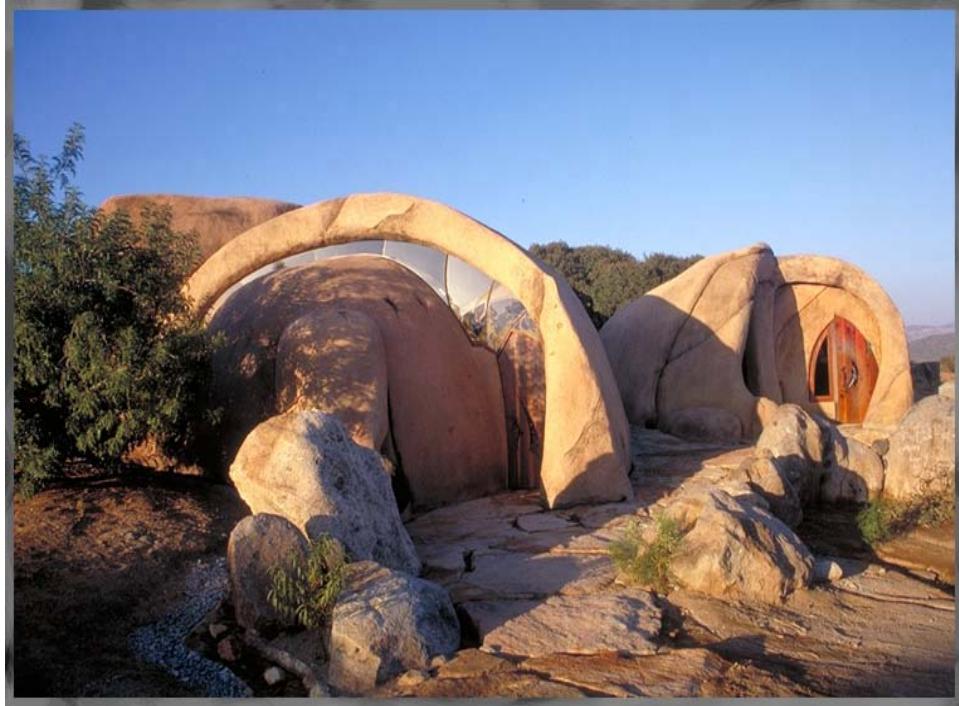
Agency: The Americas Foundation, <http://www.americasfoundation.net>



## **'Las Piedras' Childrens' Nature Center, Tecate, Mexico**

Design by: James Hubbell  
Agency:

<http://hubbellandhubbell.com/current.htm> -- current projects of Hubbell and Hubbell



**Earth Discovery Institute, Crestridge Ecological Reserve, Crest**

Design by: James Hubbell  
Agency: Earth Discovery Institute

<http://www.earthdiscovery.org>  
<http://hubbellandhubbell.com/current.htm>



## Rainbow Hill Residence, Julian

Design by: James Hubbell  
Agency: Phil and Wendy Gay

<http://www.rainbowhill.com>



## Visitor Center, Mission Trails Regional Park, San Diego

Design by:

Agency: City of San Diego, Park and Recreation Department, Open Space Division

[http://www.mtrp.org/visitor\\_center.asp](http://www.mtrp.org/visitor_center.asp)



## Visitor Center, Tecolote Open Space Park, San Diego

Design by:

Agency: City of San Diego, Park and Recreation Dept, Open Space

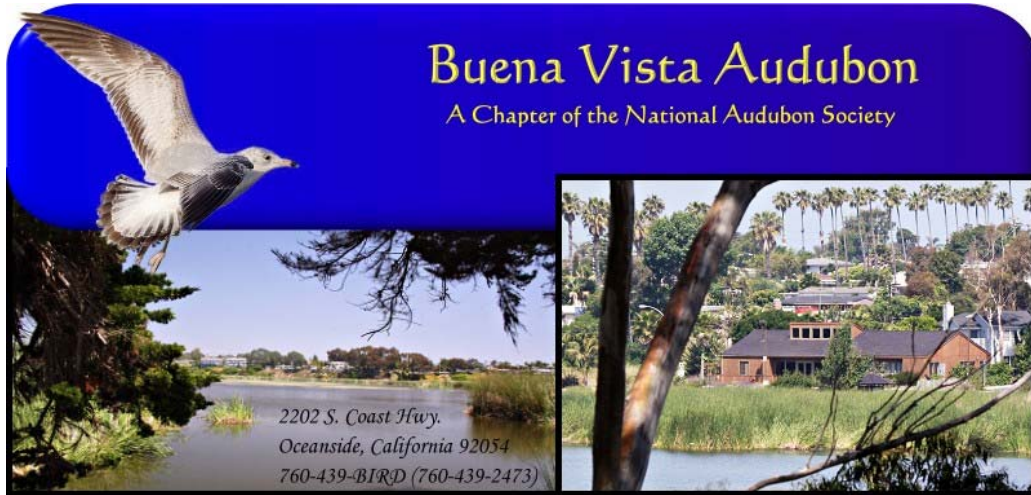
Division <http://www.sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/parks/teclte.shtml>



**Buena Vista Audubon Nature Center, Oceanside**

Design by:  
Agency: Buena Vista Audubon Society

<http://www.bvaudubon.org/>



*Conservation through education, advocacy, and monitoring*



## **Chula Vista Nature Center, Chula Vista**

Design by:

Agency: City of Chula Vista

<http://www.chulavistanaturecenter.org/>



## Tijuana River Estuarine Reserve, Imperial Beach

Design by:

Agency: County of San Diego; CA Dept of Fish and Game; US Fish and Wildlife Service; NOAA; City of Imperial Beach



## **Agua Hedionda Lagoon Foundation Discovery Center**

Design by:  
Agency: Agua Hedionda Lagoon Foundation

[www.aguahedionda.org](http://www.aguahedionda.org)

A pre-constructed construction sales office that was transported to the site at Cannon Road and Faraday in three parts, assembled, finished and landscaped. Donated building. Costs \$200 – 400k. Building completed October 2004. Currently developing interpretive plan.

