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City Manager's Report
January 23, 2024, City Council Meeting
Prepared by: Melissa McConnell, Interim City Engineer
Item #: 15.1

Subject: Receive and file a status update for the Clay Street Bridge Replacement Project (CIP #406171).

Recommendation: Receive and file the Clay Street Bridge Replacement Project status update.

Purpose: The purpose of this item is to provide the City Council and public a status update for the project and to announce the release of the Recirculated Draft Environmental Impact Report (REIR) for 45-day public review, beginning on Friday, January 26, 2024.

Strategic Plan Strategy: Infrastructure – Update and Maintain City Owned Infrastructure

Background: The Clay Street Bridge Replacement and Realignment project has been considered by the City for nearly 60 years and first memorialized and adopted into planning documents dating back to 1974 in the Master Street Plan and Improvement Program (adopted by City Council in January of 1975). The project, originally identified “Project No. 9 – Clay Street” in the Master Street Plan, identified Clay Street as a collector and acknowledged need to provide better north to south connecting roads to the north residential area by realigning Clay Street, bifurcating the Ivy Lot parking lot, widening Clay Street to 40 feet, and construction of a new 2-lane bridge over the creek that ultimately intersects at Main Street and Cedar Ravine. Since that time, City documents consistently recommend and advocate this much needed project to improve connectivity, emergency access, and safety to all bridge users. In September of 2006, the City received approval for the project to be included into the Highway Bridge Program (HBP) for replacement based on the Bridge Inspection Report (BIR), which notes the structural integrity and functionality of the bridge.

Discussion:

CEQA and NEPA Environmental Processes

Though similar in approach, these two processes do have some distinct differences and considerations, which are illustrated by the need of preparing 2 separate environmental documents. In 2013, the City began the current CEQA document in the form of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The draft EIR was circulated for 45-day public review and comment period on March 2, 2018 and closed on April 18, 2018. Comments were received and a comment response matrix has been under development since that time.

While completing the technical studies portion of the NEPA process, the team decided to take a more insistent approach to protecting cultural resources in Placerville by making the assumption that, for the purposes of this project, Main Street is historically eligible as a historic district on both the state

or national registers. It must be acknowledged that this assumed district doesn't currently exist; and, in order for eligibility and registration to truly be established, there is an extensive process that must be completed through the [National Register Bulletin](#) and [California Register of Historical Resources](#). To establish eligibility, four criteria must be met, which is beyond the scope and purpose of this bridge replacement project.

It is also important to note that this is a public safety project that includes a potential bridge replacement, not a concentrated effort to create a Historic District. The City operated a [Historical Advisory Committee](#) (HAC) that recommended a prior version of a Draft Downtown Placerville Historic District (adopted by the HAC on June 16, 2012) as a local historic district (not on the National or California Registers). Due to various reasons, the HAC was suspended in 2015, and the effort to pursue the district registration was never completed. The Clay Street Bridge project documents have now moved forward assuming that the local historic district was created and are evaluating what the impacts would be to that assumed district.

It is this intensive and extensive effort that has been the focus of the project for some time now. Because this is a different approach to the historic resources evaluation than what was presented in the Draft EIR released in March of 2018, and, due to the time lapse since the 2018 circulation and changes in CEQA guidance since that time, the EIR will be revised and recirculated for consistency. Recirculation of the EIR was delayed due to workload surges and resource shortages by both the City and Caltrans.

On April 11, 2023, the City Council approved an amendment to the Consulting Services Agreement with Dewberry Engineers to complete the EIR in place of the former consultant, MBI, following the retirement of critical staff on the MBI team. Since that time, Dewberry has been working to complete both the NEPA and CEQA processes.

First, Dewberry continued to finalize the documents for Section 106 (cultural resources) compliance. A Programmatic Agreement and Cultural Resource Management Plan were approved by the local Caltrans Agency and sent to the Cultural Studies Office (CSO). Dewberry is working on addressing comments from the CSO before the final documents are sent to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for approval. Once all the Section 106 documents are with SHPO, the City, Caltrans and Dewberry will update the Environmental Assessment (EA) for compliance with NEPA approval.

As part of the CEQA process, Dewberry also drafted the Revised EIR (REIR) for City and legal review. Dewberry is revising the document to address staff and legal comments. The Draft REIR will be complete and will be recirculated for 45-day public review, beginning on Friday, January 26, 2024. The document will be available for download on the City's website and a copy will also be available at the Development Services Department and Engineering Department. The City plans to hold a public meeting during the 45-day public review period of the REIR.

After public circulation, the City and Dewberry will draft and subsequently respond to each significant environmental issue raised in comments on REIR received in writing through a Response to Comments chapter in the Final EIR. Comments received on the original Draft EIR pertaining to issues or features of the project that are mooted by the REIR will not be responded to in the Response to Comments chapter. The Response to Comments will be provided to each agency or person who provided written comments on the REIR a minimum of ten business days before the scheduled City

Council hearing on the Final EIR and proposed project.

At that time, the City Council will consider the Final EIR (which includes the original Draft EIR, REIR, technical appendices, all public comments, and responses) and the project, and will take final action on the project. A public hearing will be held by the City Council to consider the Final EIR, take public testimony, and then approve, conditionally approve, or deny the project.

Following approval of the project and Final EIR by the City Council and NEPA approval from Caltrans, the approved project would then move forward into the final design phase.

Options:

1. Receive and file the project status update.
2. Direct staff to take other action.

Environmental: This project is subject to both CEQA and NEPA compliance, both of which are underway and nearing completion.

Cost: There is no cost associated with this item.

Budget Impact: There is no budget impact associated with this item.



M. Cleve Morris, City Manager



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