



County of Monterey Planning Commission

Agenda Item No. 3
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PLN220090 - CALTRANS/GARRAPATA BRIDGE RAILS

Public hearing to consider denying the replacement of bridge rails on Garrapata Bridge, Highway 1, Big Sur.

Project Location: Garrapata Creek Bridge near post mile 63.0 on HWY 1, Big Sur Land Use Plan.

Proposed CEQA action: Find that denial of the project qualifies for a statutory exemption from CEQA per CEQA Guidelines section 15270.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning Commission adopt a resolution to:

- 1) Find that denial of the project qualifies for a statutory exemption from CEQA per CEQA Guidelines section 15270; and
- 2) Deny a Combined Development Permit consisting of:
 - a. A Coastal Development Permit and Design Approval to allow the replacement of the bridge rails on the historic Garrapata Bridge;
 - b. A Coastal Development Permit to allow development within the Critical Viewshed;
 - c. A Coastal Development Permit to allow development within 750 feet of known archaeological resources, and
 - d. A Coastal Development Permit to allow development within 100 feet of environmentally sensitive habitat areas.

A draft resolution for denial, including findings with is attached for consideration (**Exhibit A**).

PROJECT INFORMATION:

Agent: Mitch Dallas

Project Owner: California Department of Transportation (CalTrans)

Zoning: PQP-D (CZ)

Plan Area: Big Sur Land Use Plan

Flagged and Staked: No

SUMMARY:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to remove and replace the bridge rails on the Garrapata Creek bridge. The project was considered at the February 22, 2023 Planning Commission hearing. At the hearing, the Planning Commission considered the evidence included in the staff report, written comments submitted prior to the hearing, and oral testimony and comments presented at the hearing.

After deliberation, the Planning Commission adopted a motion of intent to deny the project and directed staff to prepare a draft resolution with findings and evidence for denial that would be brought back to the Planning Commission for their consideration at the March 8, 2023 Planning Commission hearing. This draft resolution for denial is attached as **Exhibit A**.

DISCUSSION:

This bridge is one of seven historic bridges in Big Sur, six of which have open spandrel designs. All seven bridges are part of the Carmel San Simeon Historic District (CSSHD), a non-contiguous district named after the rural state highway constructed between 1922 and 1938, which stretches approximately 75 miles from the San Carpoforo Creek in San Luis Obispo County to the Carmel River in Monterey County. The Garrapata Creek Bridge is also individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and the California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR).

The existing bridge rails on Garrapata bridge are steel reinforced concrete rails with arched openings on both sides of the bridge that were constructed in 1931 with the original bridge construction. These bridge rails are showing signs of deterioration with areas of exposed rebar. Additionally, the bridge rails do not meet current traffic safety standards. For these reasons, Caltrans is proposing to replace the existing bridge rails with new bridge rails meeting current safety standards. New bridge rails meeting current safety standards will be bulkier than the current bridge rail impacting historic and visual qualities.

Since 6 other concrete bridges are in a similar condition (most showing less deterioration than the Garrapata bridge rails), Caltrans prepared an “Tier 1 Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR)” for the replacement of bridge rails on all of the historic concrete bridges. Only the Garrapata bridge rail replacement is moving forward at this time and Caltrans has completed a “Tier 2” environmental analysis specific to the Garrapata Bridge Rail project.

The historic concrete arched bridges are an important part of the visual fabric of the internationally renowned beauty and experience of driving Highway 1 in the Big Sur area. With the historic and visual importance of these bridges, careful attention needs to be paid to the justification for bridge rail replacement as well as alternative options and designs. To this end, the Planning Commission believes that non-standard approaches to bridge rail repair and or replacement are called for in this case.

The possibility of obtaining an exception or variance to the current crash test ratings and standards is not clear. Rather, Caltrans is unwilling to vary from the adopted standards citing health, life, safety and liability concerns and prioritizing this over visual and historic impact reductions. The Planning Commission expressed a desire to explore every possible option that address some level of safety for travelers on Highway 1 while preserving the visual experience for those travelers.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines section 15270 statutorily exempts projects which a public agency rejects or disapproves. The Planning Commission’s action to deny the project fits within this exemption, the County is a public agency disapproving of a project, and Statutory exemptions from CEQA are not qualified by the exceptions applicable to categorical exemptions in

CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

This project has been reviewed by HCD Planning, HCD-Environmental Services, and Public Works.

On November 8, 2022, the Big Sur Land Use Advisory Committee (LUAC) considered the proposed project. The LUAC recommend approval with changes by a vote of 4 ayes to 1 no (**Exhibit I**). Comments were made that the reduced opening sizes in the proposed replacement rails obscure the viewshed and the openings should be widened to their original height and width and that the historic design be maintained while attempting to meet current safety standards. Staff has considered these comments and the current safety standards mandate a maximum opening size in the railing and crash test ratings for the current speed and size of vehicles are based on State and Federal adopted standards. The new railings will meet the current safety standards without substantially adversely impacting the historic integrity of the bridge.

On January 25, 2023, the Historic Resources Review Board (HRRB) considered the proposed project. After receiving additional information on the design and justification, the HRRB 6-0 with 1 absent to recommend approval of the project with 2 conditions. The first condition is that the final color be approved by the Chief of Planning to match the existing rails as closely as possible, and the second condition was that speed studies and other alternatives be explored for each bridge.

Prepared by: Phil Angelo, Associate Planner x5731

Reviewed by: Craig Spencer, Chief of Planning

Approved by: Erik Lundquist, AICP, Housing and Community Development Director

The following attachments are on file with the HCD:

Exhibit A - Draft Resolution of Denial

Exhibit B - Proposed Plans

Exhibit C - Big Sur LUAC Recommendation

Exhibit D - Historic Resources Review Board Recommendation

Exhibit E - Vicinity Map

cc: Front Counter Copy; Planning Commission; Craig Spencer, Chief of Planning; Phil Angelo, Planner; Mitch Dallas, CalTrans (applicant); Keep Big Sur Wild, Christina McGinnis; Martha Diehl; The Open Monterey Project (Molly Erickson); LandWatch (Executive Director); Project Files PLN220090.