

Millions of dollars in state earmarks support outdoors projects in Newport, Huntington and Costa Mesa

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The sculpture garden in Newport Beach's Civic Center Park will get \$500,000 to expand its arts education function. (File Photo)

The newly signed state budget includes allocations for trail restoration in Huntington Beach, a playground in Costa Mesa, the sculpture garden outside Newport Beach City Hall and the restoration of historic cottages at Crystal Cove.

Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Laguna Beach) announced Friday that she had secured funding for the projects among \$14.5 million in grants for her 74th Assembly District, which includes all or parts of Huntington, Newport, Costa Mesa and Laguna Beach, plus Irvine and Laguna Woods.

These local projects will receive:

- \$2.9 million for the restoration of 17 historic cottages located along the shores of Crystal Cove in Newport Beach.
- \$1.7 million to help restore two miles of multiuse trail at Bluff Top Park in Huntington Beach.

- \$1 million for the children’s playground and community stage at Costa Mesa’s Lions Park.
- \$500,000 for the City Arts Commission of Newport Beach for arts education programs at the Civic Center Park sculpture garden.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed California’s \$214.8 billion budget for fiscal 2019-20 on Thursday. Petrie-Norris said one of her goals when she was elected last year was to bring the area’s fair share of state money back to Orange County. She said in an interview Friday that by collaborating with local city councils and other leaders, she was able to negotiate the earmarks with the state budget team in Sacramento.

The smallest of the checks will be cut for Newport Beach to expand the educational component of its rotating sculpture garden, which unveiled its fourth phase of 10 hand-picked modern works this month.

The expanded programming could bring in school groups for field trips to the 14-acre park, which has hosted sculptures from artists around the country since 2014. In addition to the rotating exhibits, it’s also home to a few permanent pieces, including the life-sized, bronze of President Ronald Reagan.

Just below Newport Coast, the Crystal Cove structures are the last of the 46 Depression-era cottages in Crystal Cove State Park to be restored. They have sat empty for 18 years. Once open, they will provide low-cost accommodations on and just above the beach. The property is within Newport city limits, state-owned and managed by a nonprofit conservancy.

“This critical funding will kick-off the vision for completion that so many have for this park,” conservancy founder Laura Davick said in a prepared statement. Construction on the infrastructure portion started in December, and an estimate for the actual cottage restoration will be determined this summer. Private and public fundraising continues. It wasn’t immediately clear if the \$1 million for Lions Park will augment or supplant the \$2.05 million the City Council set aside for the Westside park’s playground in September from funds no longer needed for a field and bleachers project at Costa Mesa High School and renovations at the Jack R. Hammett Sports Complex.

Lions Park is in the midst of a renaissance. The new, 23,615-square-foot Donald Dungan Library opened on the grounds in May near the existing, much smaller library that will now be converted into a community center.

The aging playground structure was installed in 1995. The even older Korean War-era Grumman F9F Panther jet, installed in 1960 near the present day playground, will stay. With \$1.7 million set aside for Huntington Beach, city officials will work to restore two miles of its multi-use Blufftop trail along Pacific Coast Highway. The project may include widening the existing path, improving lighting in the area, installing new railing and landscape improvements.

Other allocations for the 74th District include \$4.5 million for the Orange County Fire Authority to prevent wildfires, \$2.9 million for a partnership with OC United Way to tackle veteran homelessness, and \$1 million for the Orange County Housing Finance Trust for the development of permanent supportive housing. Those dollars will be shared countywide. Petrie-Norris said she was especially excited about the partnership with the United Way and wants to end homelessness among military vets in Orange County.

Daily Pilot reporter Priscella Vega contributed to this report.