

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

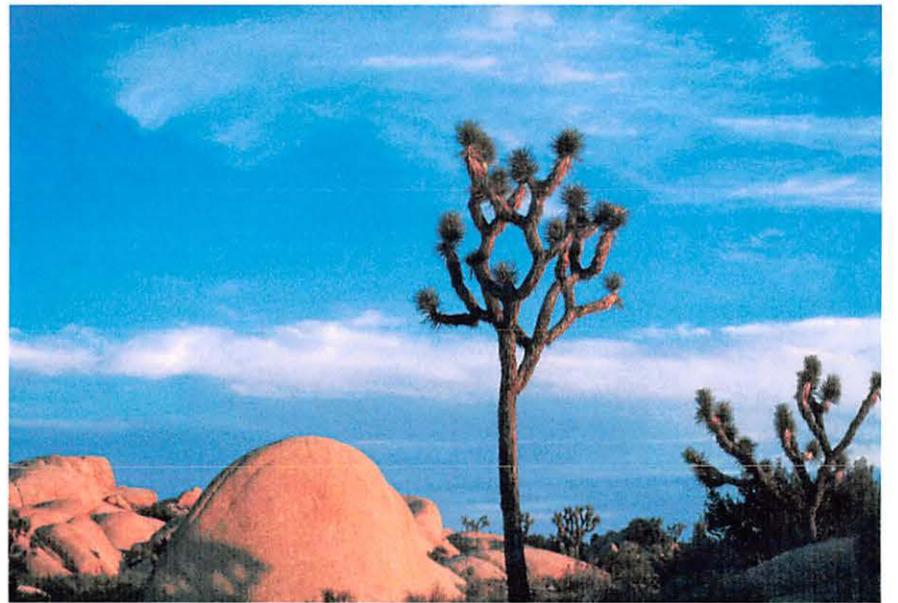
Joshua Tree National Park



The Oasis of Mara Visitor Information and Cultural Center

A Partnership Venture by the City of Twentynine Palms and Joshua Tree National Park





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What Is the Oasis of Mara Visitor Information and Cultural Center?

A Facility for the Future

The City of Twentynine Palms and Joshua Tree National park have agreed to partner on the development of a new city/park visitor information facility designed to better serve travelers to the area.

Since 1936, the community of Twentynine Palms has served as the gateway to Joshua Tree National Park. Over the years, this relationship between the park and community has grown into a model of cooperation in the advancement of visitor services and sustainable economic growth.

In 1996, Joshua Tree National Park released the final, approved version of its General Management Plan (GMP). This master plan for the park was prepared over a period of years and included public input from community leaders, local governments, other federal and state agencies, and members of the general public.

The plan recognized a variety of shortcomings in the park's infrastructure. Particularly critical was the need for new facilities dedicated to providing information, orientation, and educational services to the visiting public. Construction of a new, or significantly upgraded visitor center at the park's headquarters in Twentynine Palms was a top priority of the GMP. This new facility was envisioned as a cultural center that will not only assist the traveling public with information but will also house exhibits on the human history of the Joshua Tree region, store significant park museum collections, and provide display space for works created through the park's art programs.

In September, 1996, the park convened a design charette using the services of the Denver Service Center, the architectural and design wing of the National Park Service. The design charette developed a number of design concepts each of which had several variations. After once again involving the general public in its deliberations, the park

settled on design concept 3B as its preferred alternative for development of the Oasis of Mara Cultural Center. The 3B concept has been embraced by the City of Twentynine Palms, and the city has incorporated the 3B alternative into its own master plan.

In 2000, the City of Twentynine Palms also began planning for the development of a City Visitor Center. The City identified a need for a facility to provide information to regional travelers, workspace for the local Chamber of Commerce, and a location from which to promote the community's economic growth. The City is currently in the process of assessing options for the development of a City Visitor Center and analyzing potential development and operational costs.

In 2002, the idea of combining efforts to build a joint City/Park Visitor Information and Cultural Center was raised as a means to maximize efficiencies, expand use of limited fiscal resources and to avoid duplication of effort. The Oasis of Mara Visitor Information and Cultural Center will replace the existing National Park Service Visitor Center in Twentynine Palms and also serve as a central information point for people seeking information on city services and attractions.

This prospectus describes conceptually how the Oasis of Mara Center will operate, the entities involved and the services envisioned at the Center, and the benefits of the city/park partnership. Following this, a more detailed Development Concept Plan for the entire Oasis of Mara complex will provide the architectural guidance and cost estimates for the project as well as further discuss how the partnership will evolve and how the management of the facility will take place.

Rising along the Pinto Mountain fault, the life-giving waters of the Oasis of Mara have attracted travelers for centuries. Photo by Stephen Willard.

The Oasis of Mara, A Brief History

"...a large group of springs aligned over a distance of nearly a mile from east to west. At the west end...three or four large pools discharge a considerable quantity of water, which runs for a half mile or more into the desert." 1920 survey report

In the desert, oases are special places. The presence of water, that rarest of desert commodities, allows a richness of life to flourish and makes an oasis a hub of natural and human activity. The Oasis of Mara has been a cornerstone of the Joshua Tree National Park story for thousands of years.

The oasis was first settled and named by Serrano Indians. The Serrano called the spot *Mar-rah* meaning "the place of little springs and much grass." Legend holds they came to the oasis because a medicine man told them it was a good place to live and that they would have many boy babies. The medicine man instructed them to plant a palm tree each time a boy was born. In the first year, the Serrano planted 29 palm trees at the oasis. The palms also provided the Serrano with many essentials for living including food, clothing, cooking implements, and housing. In addition, the palms are habitat for a wide variety of desert creatures from colorful orioles to the palm-boring beetle.

Early American survey parties arrived at the Oasis of Mara in the 1850s and found the area under cultivation by the Serrano. Corn, beans, pumpkins, and squash were all grown with the life-giving waters that rise at the oasis along the Pinto Mountain Fault. The Chemuehevi Indians settled at the Oasis of Mara in 1867 and intermingled peacefully with the Serrano.

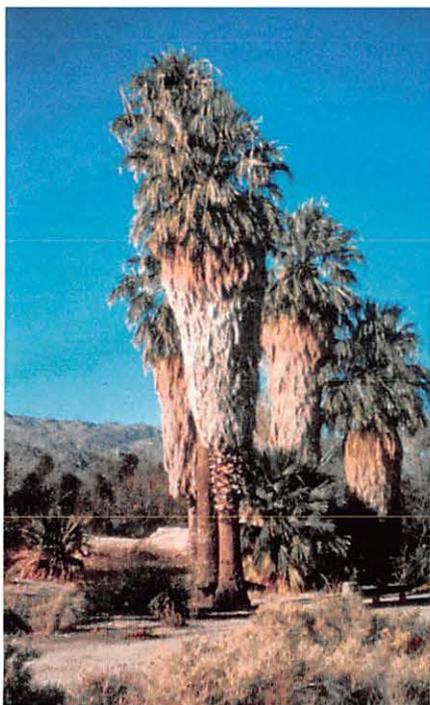
By 1870, white settlers began to arrive. Fortune hunters attracted to California by the discoveries at Sutter's Mill drifted into the desert looking for new bonanzas. The Anaconda Mine began operation south of the Oasis in 1874. The Lost Horse Mine, the Desert Queen, and other claims soon followed bringing more prospectors and miners to the region. Trees began to be cut at the Oasis, and water siphoned away to support the growing mining operations.

On the heels of the miners, cattlemen moved to the area in the 1880s to take advantage of the high desert grasslands of the Pinto and Little San Bernardino Mountains. The McHaney brothers ran an active cattle trade that was alleged to include stolen cattle that were pastured in isolated rocky coves near Hidden Valley.

Bill McHaney became the first non-Indian to live at the Oasis in 1879. Later, Jack Rankin and Billy Neaves built an adobe house at the east end of the Oasis. It stood for over 40 years and served as a residence, a stage line stop, and meeting place. The Barker and Shays Cattle Company dug a 600-gallon well around 1900 for use by the growing population. A 1902 census found 37 Serrano and Chemehuevi families living at the Oasis. As more non-Indians arrived, the Indian families began to drift away, and by 1913, the Serrano and Chemuehevi were all gone.

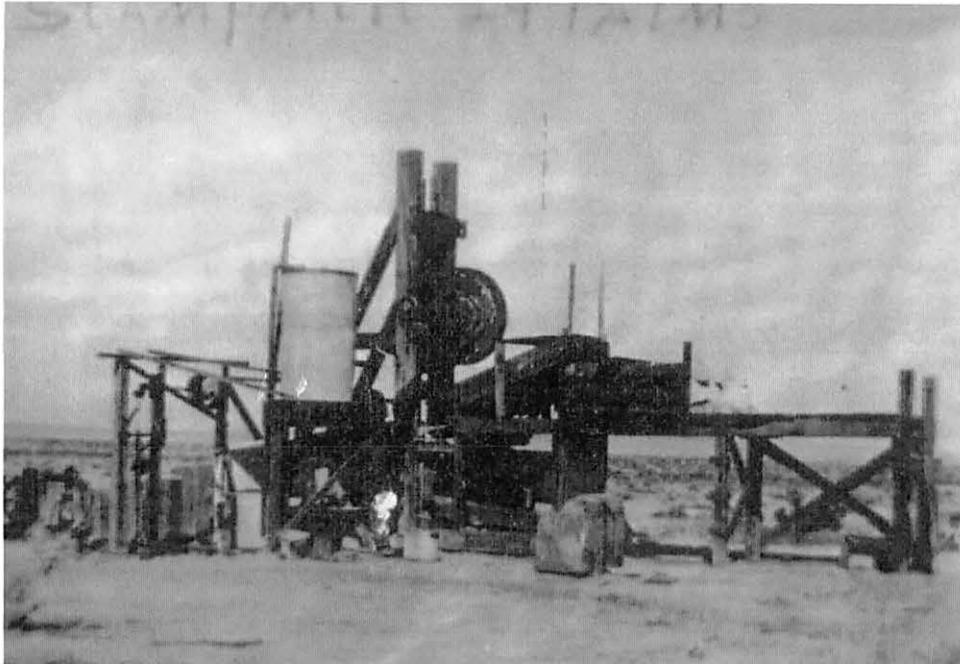
Following World War I, the town of Twentynine Palms saw an influx of veterans from the battlefields of France, drawn to the area by its warm, healthful climate. The establishment in 1936 of a vast stretch of the desert above town as Joshua Tree National Monument drew more people to the area. Signifying the close partnership between the community and the park, the Twentynine Palms Corporation donated the Oasis of Mara to the National Park Service in 1950 to use as its headquarters and primary visitor center.

The present visitor center was constructed in 1964. Today, more than 140,000 people annually visit the Oasis Visitor Center where they receive information about the park and learn about its natural and human history. While the history of the area continues to evolve, the park and the community recognize that new visitor facilities are needed to better serve the more than 1.3 million people who visit the area each year.

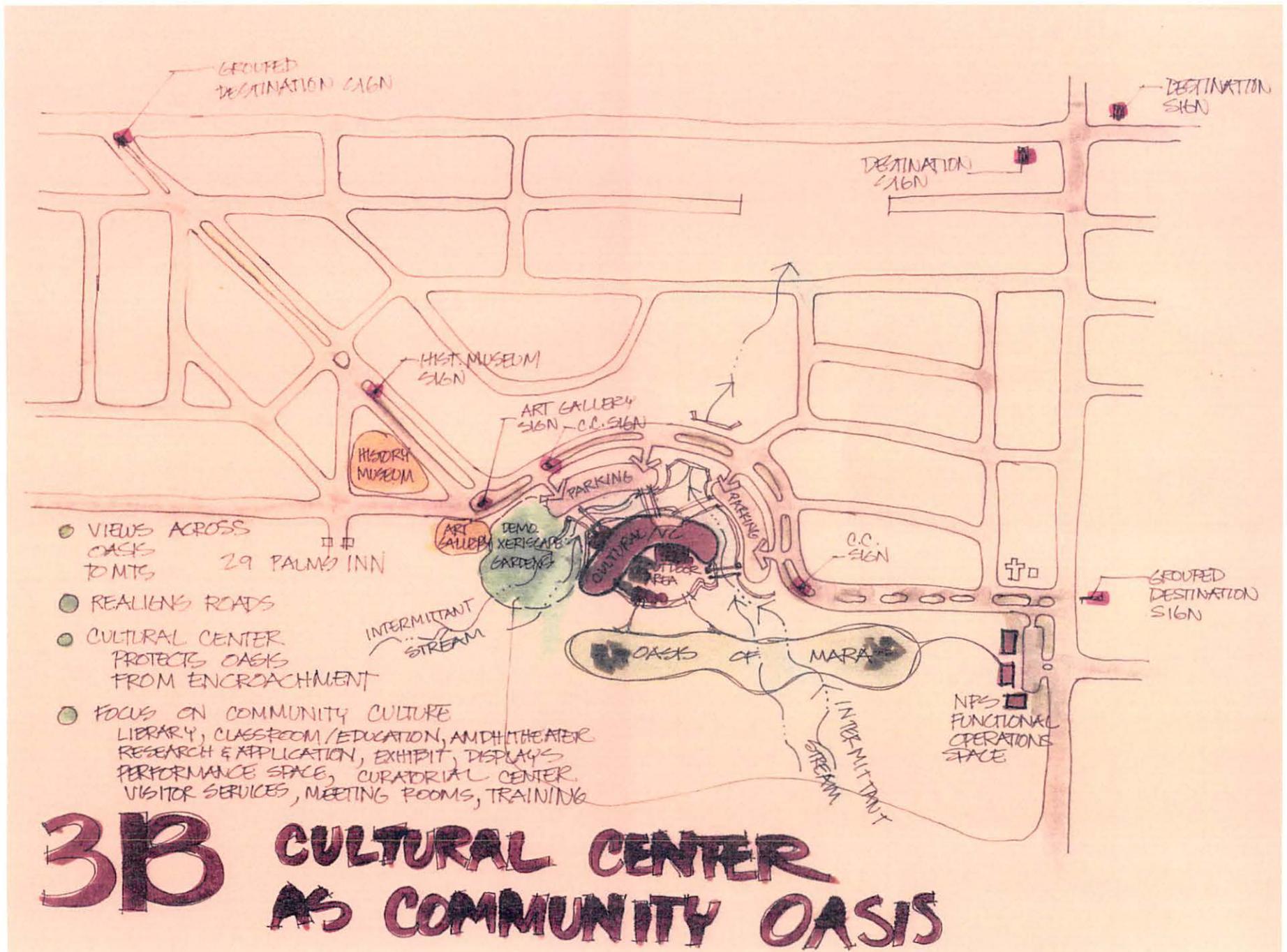




Old adobe house at the
Oasis of Mara

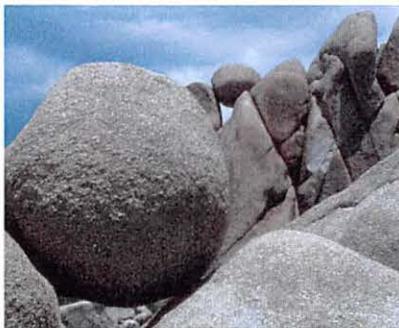


A stamp mill at
Twentynine Palms
processed gold ore
from local mines.



A Community Partnership Facility

The 3B concept, called the "Cultural Center As Community Oasis," places the Oasis of Mara as the cultural heart of the area. National Park Drive will be realigned to the north to pull the road away from the Oasis. Visitor information facilities will be sited at the west end of the Oasis to provide a strong physical connection to the Twentynine Palms Historical Society Museum and the Twentynine Palms Art Gallery. The new facilities look south toward the Oasis and Pinto Mountains and will be built in harmony with the scenic vista and the site's natural drainages.



Geologic wonders await visitors to Joshua Tree National Park.

A Partnership in Operation

The Oasis of Mara Visitor Information and Cultural Center will replace the existing National Park Service visitor center located on the southwest corner of Utah Trail and National Park Drive. The new Cultural Center will provide needed public information and support facilities to serve area visitors on behalf of the following entities: Joshua Tree National Park, the City of Twentynine Palms, the 29 Palms Chamber of Commerce.

Land for the proposed City/Park Visitor Center and Cultural Center will be held in ownership by the City of Twentynine Palms. The Visitor Center, Cultural Center and the Center support amenities will be legislatively designated as a federal administrative site and become property of the National Park Service.

Two separate, yet connected buildings will be constructed. One serving as the City/Park Visitor Information Center and the other as the City/Park Cultural Center.

The City/Park Visitor Center will serve to provide information to visitors about recreational opportunities and trip planning for the park, the City, and the region.

The Cultural Center will show case the history of the region through the arts, displays, park museum artifacts, and historical objects associated with southwest culture. We envision partnerships with other established museum facilities such as the Smithsonian and the Autry Museum for the loan of artifacts for display in the Cultural Center. The Cultural Center will be a destination of it's own.

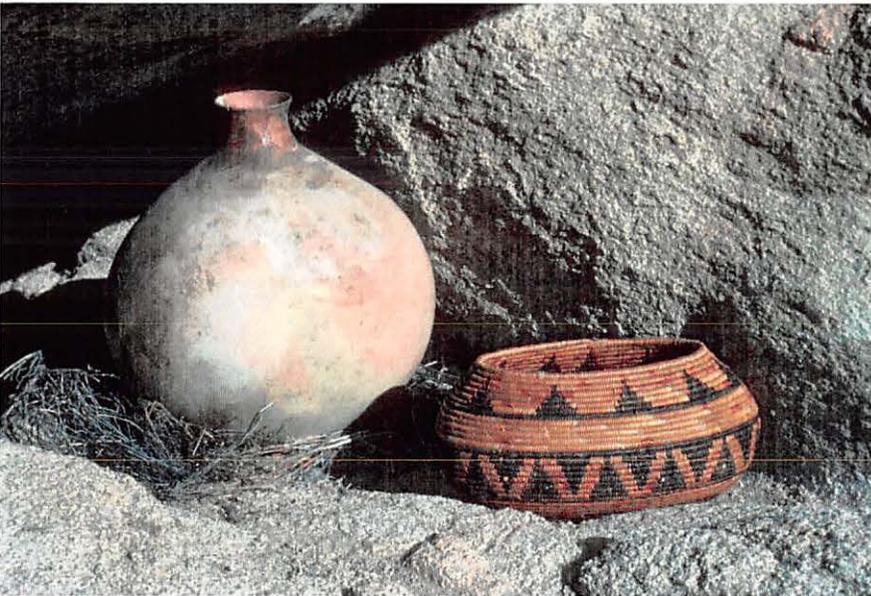
Within the Visitor Center an area will be dedicated as a merchandise sales area. Management of the sales area will be by the National Park Association, a 501 (c) 3, non-profit

organization. Through a formal agreement the City will have the opportunity to sell items through the Park Association. The National Park Service standards and guidelines will be the approved standards for selecting and approving sales items.

Dedicated space within the Visitor Center would be provided for the City Chamber of Commerce, The Park Association, and Park Visitor Center staff. Common space would be provided for a meeting room, break/lunch room, auditorium, employee restrooms, merchandise storage, and janitorial closets. Dedicated space within the Cultural Center would be provided for the Center Manager and museum storage.

A management agreement between the City and the Park detailing cost apportions for building maintenance, utilities, grounds maintenance, will be established. It is envisioned that the open space surrounding the Centers will remain undeveloped to ensure a natural setting. Common areas external to the buildings include public and employee parking areas, patios, walkways, seating, tables and public restrooms.

Costs for construction of the Visitor Center, Cultural Center and associated support amenities will be shared by the federal government line-item construction program, donations from a fund raising campaign, and other cost-sharing opportunities. The City will seek funds for the necessary land purchases to site the Centers. The Park will seek funds for environmental compliance. The City will seek architectural and engineering design costs for rerouting Park Boulevard. Road construction/realignment funds will be sought by both the City and the Park from State or Federal highway improvement programs.



Many things need to happen for before area visitors are able to enjoy the Oasis Visitor Information and Cultural Center. The following timeline represents our current thinking on the significant accomplishments that are needed before the Center can open its doors.

<u>Event</u>	<u>Target Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Target Date</u>
1. Select and approve a site for locating the City/Park Visitor Center and Cultural Center. Responsible parties: The City of Twentynine Palms (City) and Joshua Tree National Park (Park).	January 1, 2003	7. Secure funding for construction of the Visitor and Cultural Center complex. Responsible parties include the City and the Park.	January 1, 2006
2. Initiate Environmental Compliance (EIS/EIR) documentation for the establishment of the Visitor and Cultural Center Complex. Responsible parties include the City and the Park.	June 1, 2003	8. Secure funding for exhibit design and production. Responsible parties include the City and the Park.	June 1, 2006
3. Initiate planning and compliance for the realignment of National Park Drive. Responsible party is the City and the Park.	June 1, 2004	9. Begin construction of the Visitor Center and Cultural Center Complex. Responsible parties include the City and the Park.	November 1, 2006
4. Begin work on design and construction drawings for the Visitor Center and Cultural center and associated support amenities. Responsible parties the City and the Park.	January 1, 2005	10. Install exhibits and interior fixtures for the Cultural Center and Visitor Center. Responsible parties include the City and the Park.	November 1, 2008
5. Secure funding for realignment of National Park Drive. Responsible parties include the City and the Park.	October 1, 2005	11. Grand Opening	April 1, 2009
6. Begin construction to realign National Park Drive. Responsible parties the City.	January 1, 2006		



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