



**SPECIAL MEETING**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT**

**Wednesday, March 6, 2024**

*The Board of Directors conducted this meeting in accordance with  
California Government Code section 54953.*

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MIDPENINSULA  
REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT**

President MacNiven called the regular meeting of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to order at 9:30 a.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Jed Cyr, Craig Gleason, Yoriko Kishimoto, Margaret MacNiven, and Curt Riffle

Members Absent: Karen Holman and Zoe Kersteen-Tucker

Staff Present: General Manager Ana Ruiz, General Counsel Hilary Stevenson, Controller Mike Foster, Assistant General Manager Susanna Chan, Assistant General Manager Brian Malone, Chief Financial Officer/Director of Administrative Services Stefan Jaskulak, District Clerk/Assistant to the General Manager Maria Soria, Executive Assistant/Deputy District Clerk Shaylynn Nelson, Executive Assistant/Deputy District Clerk Loana Hsu, Budget & Finance Manager Rafaela Ocegueda, Engineering and Construction Manager Jason Lin, Human Resources Manager Candice Basnight, Information Services & Technology Manager Casey Hiatt, Land & Facilities Manager Brandon Stewart, Natural Resources Manager Kirk Lenington, Planning Manager Jane Mark, Real Property Manager Allen Ishibashi, Visitor Services Manager Matthew Anderson, Management Analyst I Jordan McDaniel, Management Analyst II Elissa Martinez, Procurement Program Manager Sarah Araya, Grants Management Analyst II Daniel Morrison

President MacNiven announced the public has the opportunity to comment on the agenda, and the opportunity to listen to this meeting through the internet or via telephone. This information

can be found on the meeting agenda, which was physically posted at the District's Administrative Office, and on the District website.

### **REMOTE PARTICIPATION UNDER AB2449**

Director Holman joined the meeting at 10:25 a.m. Pursuant to AB2449, Director Holman provided notice she is participating in the Special Meeting using video teleconference under the just cause exemption of illness.

### **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

**Motion:** Director Kishimoto moved, and Director Cyr seconded the motion to adopt the agenda.

**ROLL CALL VOTE:**       **5-0-0 (Absent Directors Holman and Kersteen-Tucker)**

### **BOARD BUSINESS**

#### **1.     Fiscal Year 2024-25 through Fiscal Year 2026-27 Capital Improvement and Action Plan Review (R-24-27)**

General Manager Ana Ruiz provided opening remarks and provided an overview of the two-part retreat. The first part was held in December, focused on setting the direction for the upcoming fiscal year based on the organization's strategic plan, goals, objectives, and environmental scan. She stated that today's presentation will cover the proposed projects and programs, as well as discuss potential big priorities known as "Big Rocks" for the coming year.

Chief Financial Officer/Director of Administrative Services Stefan Jaskulak reviewed the budget planning cycle, provided a recap of the December 5, 2023 Strategic Plan Retreat, and described the preliminary fiscal year 2025 (FY25) budget by funds and areas of interest. He reviewed the five categories as the Big Rocks for next fiscal year, Climate Resilience and Biodiversity, Purisima Creek Redwoods, Public Access and Trails, Asset Management, and FOSM Implementation.

Director Riffle noted that the budget allocation for FY25 agriculture seemed lower than in previous years and requested additional information on the reduction. This question was deferred later for further discussion.

Director Kishimoto voiced her concern regarding the lack of emphasis on Regional Leadership, especially given the many new state and federal representatives. She commented on the need for education and leadership. Additionally, she inquired why the science/biodiversity symposium was not listed for the next fiscal year nor the following three years.

Natural Resources Manager Kirk Lenington reported that the science/biodiversity symposium was not scheduled to focus instead on the science panel work.

Director Riffle acknowledged the significance of the topics brought up by Director Kishimoto and suggested adding them to the "parking lot list" for further discussion along with the agriculture inquiry he had earlier.

Director Kishimoto commented that the regional leadership and the science/biodiversity symposium would fall under Goal 1 Objective 3, Goal 2 Objective 1, and Goal 3 Objective 1 of the Strategic Goals and Objectives.

Assistant General Manager Susanna Chan reviewed 11 projects in the land acquisition and preservation program, which includes one new project and ten continuing projects. The budget request for FY25 is \$637,000. Ms. Chan clarified that land acquisition costs are not included in the budget requests due to their speculative nature at the time of budget adoption. Instead, the Board approves budget adjustments when land acquisitions are approved. The budget requested includes costs for due diligence, such as surveys and technical studies necessary before purchasing the property.

Director Kishimoto requested an update on adding a potential parking area along Kings Mountain Road to access Teague Hill Open Space Preserve.

Assistant General Manager Brian Malone stated that currently the only access to Teague Hill is via the Skyline Trail and is managed by San Mateo County Parks, and there is minimal roadside parking available. He commented that Teague Hill has been designated as a District Leadership Academy project to explore interim management strategies for the area. However, addressing long-term access and parking issues would require comprehensive planning.

Director Kishimoto commented that the project is not scheduled for the next three years, and she encouraged pursuing the project.

Mr. Malone clarified that the project is not part of the Vision Plan or Measure AA goals. As a result, it does not receive priority status when creating the CIAP plan.

Director Holman joined the meeting at 10:25 a.m.

Mr. Malone reviewed the Natural Resources Protection and Restoration Projects that also includes agricultural work. He addressed the proportion of agricultural projects to the wildland fire and diversity projects. He noted that there has not been any significant change in agricultural projects, which has remained consistent over the past two years. The type of projects that run through the agriculture program typically involve activities like pond repairs and fencing, with costs typically ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000. On the other hand, diversity projects include high-dollar public access initiatives, and the District has been investing more in wildland fire programs, particularly in fuels management, forestry, and restoration. There are a robust number of agriculture projects, and the District has recently hired a new conservation grazing manager. Mr. Malone proceeded with his overview of the program, highlighting that it encompasses a total of 39 projects, consisting of 10 new and 29 continuing projects with a total budget of \$9.9M.

Director Riffle requested an update on the schedule for prescribed burns and the budget impact.

Mr. Malone stressed that the budget impact of prescribed burns primarily involves developing the burn plan, contracting Cal Fire, and hiring a contractor to prepare for the burn. Staffing is also a key concern for both the District and supporting agencies like Cal Fire.

Land & Facilities Manager Brandon Stewart stated that staff were unable to secure permits for prescribed burns this spring due to challenges with the Air Resource Board. Instead, staff will

focus on pile burns at Rancho de Guadalupe this spring. However, the plan is to conduct a prescribed fire in the fall, possibly at Russian Ridge.

Director Kishimoto expressed the need for the District to become more proficient in conducting prescribed burns, and that having only one prescribed burn a year is too slow of a pace and asked about other obstacles besides permitting.

Mr. Malone stated that the Air Quality Control Board imposes strict regulations to ensure clean air, which is a priority for both the Board and the District. As the District becomes more experienced and regulatory agencies become accustomed to prescribed burns, the potential for more frequent burns may increase. Additionally, aligning burn timing with resource availability poses another challenge. He stated that developing an in-house fire program in the future could offer more flexibility, currently the District's fire program focuses on partnering with agencies like Cal Fire. Furthermore, staff has reviewed the District's Suppression Program and will be looking to add additional staff from the maintenance program to this program, as well as pursuing Burn Boss certification.

Director Kishimoto asked if any staff members are currently certified as Burn Bosses.

Mr. Stewart stated that Conservation Grazing Program Manager Matthew Shapero is one class away from attaining his Burn Boss certification.

Director Kishimoto recommends having more than one Burn Boss and encourages ramping up the program.

Director Riffle requested an update in the fall on the progress of the prescribed burns. Additionally, he suggested it might be worth exploring ways to address these issues, such as advocating for changes in how agencies perceive and regulate prescribed burns.

Mr. Malone commented that overall, the support for prescribed burns is quite positive. In particular, Cal Fire has adopted having a burn program as a major component of reducing wildfire risk in California.

Director Kishimoto commented that the science symposium would be a great way to bring partners together and educate the public.

Mr. Malone stated that if the Board decides to add the science symposium as a project, it will take a concerted effort, and will involve a lot of staff time. The CIAP would need to be reviewed to consider what other projects could be removed.

Director Kishimoto expressed her disappointment for not including a regional biodiversity/science symposium. She commented that such events not only educate the public but also garner attention and support from various stakeholders. This includes initiatives like prescribed burns.

Mr. Malone stated that leadership work for landscape management is ongoing through various venues, notably the Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network. While organizing a symposium is a valuable endeavor, it would require Board discussion and potentially reallocating resources from other projects in the CIAP, and it would draw significant staff resources from the Natural Resources Department.

Ms. Chan continued the presentation and presented on the Public Access, Education and Outreach Projects program that consist of 39 projects with 5 new projects and 34 continuing projects with a budget of \$7.3M. She highlighted the key projects within the program.

Director Kishimoto inquired if the Bear Creek Stables Repair Project budget amount is approximately \$5M.

Ms. Chan stated that she will need to return to the Board and confirm the next steps for this Project. The Board approved additional funds in 2021. However, as the project progresses through the permitting process, the scope must be expanded to meet permit requirements. Staff will need to reassess the current scope and present this information to the Board for confirmation. Additionally, negotiations with the County are ongoing, particularly regarding exemptions to avoid road widening, which would entail significant costs and environmental impacts, including the removal of approximately 30 trees.

Director Kishimoto voiced her discomfort with approving the amount of money without additional information at this time.

Mr. Jaskulak noted that the Board would not be approving the budget amounts at today's meeting but rather the projects to include in the CIAP. The final proposed budget will be presented first to the Action Plan and Budget Committee (APBC) and then to the Board in June.

Ms. Chan assured the Board that staff will be returning to the Board before June, so that Board has all the information before approving this year's Project budget.

Director Riffle left at 11:33 a.m. and returned at 11:35 a.m.

Director Gleason shared that he recently received a briefing from Ms. Chan on the ADA barrier removal project, including the ADA improvements at Pulgas Ridge and the two trails at Skyline Ridge. He suggests shifting the focus towards identifying opportunities for accessibility and incorporating them into trail designs, emphasizing that each accessible feature adds significant value to the overall trail experience. He provided examples for potential opportunities on Pulgas Ridge and Skyline Ridge. He encourages this approach as a way to create more valuable and inclusive trails for all users.

Mr. Malone reviewed the Assets and Organizational Support Projects. There are 30 projects in this program, seven are new projects and there are 23 continuing projects with a budget of \$7.4M. Mr. Malone highlighted the key projects under this program.

Public comment opened at 12:15 p.m.

Ms. Soria reported there were no public speakers for this item.

Public comment closed at 12:15 p.m.

The Board convened into a recess at 12:18 p.m.

The Board reconvened the meeting at 12:45 p.m. with all six Directors present.

Ms. Ruiz provide an overview of the proposed FY25 CIAP “Big Rocks.” The five themes are Climate Resilience & Biodiversity, Purisima Creek Redwoods, Public Access and Trails, Asset Management, and FOSM Refresh Implementation. She continued to review specific projects under each theme.

President MacNiven asked if there is staff capacity for the “big rocks” projects.

Ms. Ruiz confirmed these projects are built into the proposed CIAP and are resource loaded.

Director Kishimoto suggested that Bear Creek Stables Repair does not need to be listed in the “big rocks” category. Instead, she would list the Bear Creek Redwoods Parking Area or Rancho San Antonio access improvements as it is the most visited preserve.

Director Riffle suggested narrowing the “big rocks” list down to 4 to 5 items if it is helpful to staff. He recommended keeping Bear Creek Stables Repair on the list since it is challenging, requires big decisions to be made, and has already been deferred for decades.

Director Gleason inquired what percentage of staff capacity would be utilized performing these projects and if there is flexibility to accommodate emergent projects.

Ms. Ruiz responded she would confirm the percentage but many of the projects require coordination and consultation with multiple departments. The purpose of the list is to identify which projects proceed regardless of issues that may arise and she believes there is enough flexibility to ensure these projects keep going.

Ms. Ruiz suggested bringing the big rocks to the APBC for review and then return the item to the Board with any future changes. She noted that the list helps staff focus on the projects the Board identifies as a priority since not every project can be a priority one.

Director Riffle asked how the General Manager would score the projects at the end of the year and noted the big rocks category adds an additional criterion to evaluate performance.

Ms. Ruiz responded that projects would be scored by analyzing if staff had accomplished the predetermined scope by the end of the fiscal year.

Director Riffle inquired how the District’s mission to protect and preserve is incorporated as a big rock. He expressed concern that the big rocks list does not identify a category which support that part of the mission to pursue, for example, an opportunity for a property transaction.

Ms. Ruiz explained the big rocks projects were ones which staff had a level of certainty in accomplishing and that land acquisitions are generally speculative. She suggested an asterisk for land acquisition work since it is hard to establish a timeline for milestones but assured that land acquisition projects will move forward.

President MacNiven suggested a category for projects which do not allow for a predetermined timeline, such as land acquisitions and climate-related emergencies.

Director Holman noted preservation is also about fires and habitat restoration and expressed concern that the category was not included.

Ms. Ruiz requested to refine the big rocks concept and present it to APBC before presenting again to the Board.

Director Gleason requested that the big rocks list allow for enough flexibility for staff to pivot to unforeseen projects, which may arise, such as land acquisitions.

Director Cyr noted this is a first draft for establishing a framework for staff to make quick, independent decisions. He requested staff to share with the Board in the future if the prioritizations were helpful.

Director Riffle noted that strengthening the District's regional presence was not listed in the big rocks list and inquired how it can be incorporated to aid the District in becoming a regional leader. He expressed concern that the District will not progress in having a regional impact if it is not listed as a priority.

Ms. Ruiz noted the District is a leader in many ways, such as with the mountain lion research and GIS applications work. Many agencies, for example, come to the District for data to help make land management decisions.

Mr. Lenington explained every Natural Resources project has a partnership with other land management agencies or academic researchers. He proposed creating a page in the budget book highlighting projects which a regional impact.

Director Gleason inquired if the District could partner with local agencies and provide funding to organize a biodiversity symposium to reduce staff time.

Mr. Malone explained there are agencies the District could contact to partner with but noted it would likely require a significant funding effort and considerable staff time.

Public comment opened at 1:39 p.m.

Ms. Soria reported there were no public speakers for this item.

Public comment closed at 1:39 p.m.

Director Riffle inquired and received confirmation that the refined big rocks list would be presented to APBC and returned to the Board for affirmation.

Mr. Malone noted that the Board should provide direction on whether to add the biodiversity/science symposium. He also explained that there is not any capacity to add a Teague Hill parking project without moving major projects off the CIAP list.

Director Kishimoto requested that staff consider the possibility of adding a biodiversity/science symposium into the CIAP within the next few years.

Director Cyr stated he is not in favor of adding a biodiversity/science symposium because of the amount of staff effort it would require.

President MacNiven concurred with Director Cyr.

Director Riffle moved and Director Cyr seconded the motion to approve the General Manager's recommendation as it was presented to the Board.

Director Kishimoto presented a substitute motion and Director Gleason seconded the motion to add to the General Manager's recommendation the inclusion of the biodiversity/science symposium to the CIAP within the next 3 years.

Director Riffle requested staff explain how adding the symposium would impact other projects.

Mr. Malone explained the science panel would likely be removed and there would possibly be further reaching impacts to other projects, in particular to the projects that the natural resources department support.

Ms. Ruiz clarified that the symposium likely could not be added until either years 2 or 3 of the CIAP.

Director Riffle asked Mr. Lenington to clarify how the addition of the symposium would affect the natural resources department and which projects would be removed.

Mr. Lenington noted that the restoration project at Russian Ridge may be delayed, or the scope may be reduced, and stated that it would be beneficial if staff can partner with other agencies.

**Motion:** Director Kishimoto moved, and Director Gleason seconded the substitute motion to:

1. Review and affirm the proposed Fiscal Year 24-25 through Fiscal Year 2026-27 Capital Improvement and Action Plan and amend to add a project to add a biodiversity/science symposium within the next three years.
2. Direct the General Manager to reevaluate staff and resource capacity and, if needed, return to the full Board with any additional recommendations for further discussion and direction.
3. Direct the General Manager to refine the "Big Rocks" list and bring it to the Action Plan and Budget Committee for their review and recommendation to the full Board for affirmation.

**ROLL CALL VOTE: 4-2-0 (President MacNiven and Director Cyr opposed)  
(Director Kersteen-Tucker absent)**

Public comment opened at 2:16 p.m.

Ms. Soria reported there were no public speakers for this item.

Public comment closed at 2:16 p.m.

**2. Receive implementation plan of the recommendations of the Financial and Operational Sustainability Model Refresh Report (R-24-28)**

Mr. Jaskulak presented on the implementation plan for the recommendations from the Financial Operational Sustainability Model Refresh Report. He outlined that the 49 recommendations



would be executed in phases, with some already underway since the beginning of the year, and the final ones set to start implementation in fiscal year 2027. He provided an overview of the implementation schedule across three trimesters per fiscal year and the assigned lead staff for each recommendation.

Director Riffle asked whether it would be beneficial to expedite the conversion of the halftime Human Resources Tech and halftime Accounting Tech position into full-time roles sooner than waiting for the second half of the timeline. Also adding the salary to the job descriptions, which is slated at the end of FY25 make it easier to hire.

Mr. Jaskulak stated that the salaries are already included in each advertisement. It is the job descriptions that are on the District's website that do not have the salaries. However, there is a table that has all the classification along with the salaries. The recommendation is to combine both documents or have the salaries on each job description.

Human Resources Manager Candice Basnight explained recruitment has begun for the Human Resources Management Analyst and believes she can accomplish the goals set out without having to expedite of the conversation of Human Resources Tech and halftime Accounting Tech position.

Director Riffle asked how staff will report back to the Board about any challenges.

Mr. Jaskulak stated historically he reports back to the Board at the December Board Retreat but staff would return to the Board sooner if there were roadblocks that require Board assistance.

Public comment opened at 2:32 p.m.

Ms. Soria reported there were no public speakers for this item.

Public comment closed at 2:32 p.m.

No Board action required.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

President MacNiven adjourned the regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District meeting at 2:35 p.m.

Maria Soria, MMC  
District Clerk