



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-16-116  
Meeting 16-24  
September 28, 2016

### AGENDA ITEM 3

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Agreement with Grassroots Ecology (formerly Acterra Stewardship) for Native Planting and Interpretive Work at Cooley Landing

#### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Enter into an agreement with Grassroots Ecology in the amount of \$90,000 to manage volunteer service projects for native plant restoration and interpretive work during a three-year period at Cooley Landing Park, which includes portions of Ravenswood Open Space Preserve. The full scope of work is eligible for Measure AA reimbursement.

#### SUMMARY

Grassroots Ecology is an environmental nonprofit that focuses on a broad range of programs, from habitat restoration and native plant propagation to carbon reduction. Their emphasis is on teaching people how to become effective environmental change agents in their communities, neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. They serve as an outdoor steward of Cooley Landing under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of East Palo Alto (City), providing land stewardship programs and activities at Cooley Landing Park. Cooley Landing Park includes portions of Ravenswood Open Space Preserve that extend along the Cooley Landing peninsula.

The proposed three-year scope of work includes planting existing bioswales along the access drive, revegetating key focal points and drainage swales, and coordinating with a local artist to implement a land art installation using native plant material. This work aims to enhance and restore habitat at Cooley Landing, which includes District land, provide opportunities for interpretation, expand visitor and volunteer diversity, and encourage stewardship within the community. These costs are Measure AA (MAA) eligible under Portfolio #2. The Fiscal Year 2016-17 budget includes sufficient funds to cover expenses through June 2017. If approved, future fiscal year budgets would include additional funds to span the three-year period.

#### MEASURE AA

This project is part of MAA Expenditure Plan Portfolio #2, *Regional: Bayfront Habitat Protection and Public Access Partnerships*, with a total funding allocation of \$5,052,000 to, in part, support wetland restoration and associated interpretive facilities. In addition, this specific project, **(AA02-001)**, is included in the Board-approved MAA 5-year Project List.

## DISCUSSION

In February 2010, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) Board of Directors (Board) authorized a Partnership Agreement with the City of East Palo Alto (City) for the construction and operation of improvements in the Cooley Landing Area of Ravenswood Open Space Preserve (Preserve) with the goal of developing the site into a city park (R-10-29). The City has completed Phases I (site remediation), II (road and site improvements), and III (Education Center), and is working towards initiating design work for Phases IV and V of the Cooley Landing Vision Plan, which include additional trails, gathering spaces, and interpretive features.

In 2015, the City released a Request for Proposals for an operator and manager of the Education Center, which opened in early 2016. Grassroots Ecology, then Acterra, expressed interest in the site's habitat restoration and stewardship opportunities and proposed to be outdoor stewards of Cooley Landing. Subsequent discussions between Grassroots Ecology and the City resulted in the current MOU. Grassroots Ecology is authorized to use the Education Center as needed and organize community workdays to implement habitat restoration activities, conduct site clean ups, and host interpretive walks and other events that educate youth and community members about bayland ecology.

Funding for Grassroots Ecology's outdoor steward services comes in part from a California State Coastal Conservancy grant. Grassroots Ecology continues to pursue new grant opportunities to enhance their work at Cooley Landing. Securing an agreement and matching funds from the District would be advantageous and timely for Grassroots Ecology, as they are pursuing a grant with Johnson Foundation that will be considered by that foundation's board on October 5, 2016.

The proposed agreement between the District and Grassroots Ecology spans three years and includes the installation of bioswales along the existing drive into Cooley Landing, new plantings at key focal areas around the Cooley Landing Education Center and throughout the site, and new vegetation in the existing rock drainage swales. Grassroots Ecology will also work with a local artist, Linda Gass, to convert a temporary land art installation into a more permanent interpretive feature using plants. In 2015, Ms. Gass was selected to participate with three other artists in the Palo Alto Art Center and Junior Museum and Zoo's Creative Ecology Art and Science Residency. During her residency, she worked with art and science educators and the community to explore Cooley Landing, and together created a temporary land art installation loosely depicting the original shoreline before dumping activities created what is now the Cooley Landing peninsula. The City's Cooley Landing Vision Plan calls for interpretive features in later phases, and this land art would be a unique, interactive, three-dimensional interpretive element.

## FISCAL IMPACT

The Fiscal Year 2016-17 budget includes sufficient funds to cover costs for the first year of the proposed three-year contract. The Fiscal Year 2016-17 budget includes \$180,000 for the overall Cooley Landing project, and this recommendation to approve the \$90,000 contract is contemplated within this overall budgeted amount. The full scope of this project is eligible for Measure AA reimbursement.

<b>MAA 002 Portfolio Allocation</b>	<b>\$5,052,000</b>
Spent to Date:	\$77,174
Encumbrances:	\$3,662

FY 2017 Cooley Landing (AA02-001):	\$180,000
FY 2017 Bay Trail (AA02-002):	\$209,600
<b>Balance Remaining (Proposed):</b>	<b>\$4,581,564</b>

### **BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW**

This item was not previously reviewed by a Committee.

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

### **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Cooley Landing Vision Plan was certified by the City Council on February 15, 2011. No further CEQA review is required.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Pending Board approval, the District will execute the agreement with Grassroots Ecology.

Responsible Department Head:  
Jane Mark, AICP, Planning Manager

Prepared by:  
Tina Hugg, Senior Planner, Planning Department