



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-19-106  
Meeting 19-19  
July 24, 2019

## AGENDA ITEM 4

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Amendment to the Agreement with Grassroots Ecology for Native Planting and Interpretive Work at Cooley Landing

### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Amend the agreement with Grassroots Ecology in the amount of \$90,470 to install native plants at Cooley Landing Park and portions of Ravenswood Open Space Preserve during a three-year period beginning July 2019, for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$180,470.

### SUMMARY

In September 2016, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) Board of Directors (Board) approved an agreement with Grassroots Ecology for native plant restoration and interpretive work at Cooley Landing Park (Cooley Landing) over a three-year period for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$90,000 (R-16-116). Grassroots Ecology's work implements a conceptual planting scheme that was originally developed as part of the overall vision for Cooley Landing. The container planting augments the erosion control hydroseeding that the City of East Palo Alto (City) installed in the first two phases of construction. With the current contract reaching the end of its third and final year, Grassroots Ecology submitted a letter, dated February 26, 2019, to the District's General Manager requesting an additional \$90,470 to support another three years of restoration planting. As before, this next phase of work will continue to enhance and restore habitat at Cooley Landing, provide opportunities for interpretation, expand visitor and volunteer diversity, and encourage stewardship within the community. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20 budget includes sufficient funds to cover expenses through June 2020. If approved, future fiscal year budgets would include funds to continue Grassroots Ecology's work through June 2022. This work is eligible for reimbursement under Measure AA.

### BACKGROUND

In February 2010, the Board authorized a Partnership Agreement with the 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). Cooley Landing includes portions of the Preserve that extend along the Cooley Landing peninsula. The City completed Phases I (site remediation), II (road and site improvements), III (Education Center), and Phases IV and V (additional park amenities, secondary trails) of the Cooley Landing Vision Plan. The most recent improvements associated with Phases IV and V include a new standalone restroom, street lights, a picnic area, an outdoor classroom and shade structure, interpretive signage, and new seating and pathways around the site. With recent completion of Phases IV and V, the area around the Education Center has re-opened to the public.

Grassroots Ecology is a local 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, allowing Grassroots Ecology to 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.

## **DISCUSSION**

Since 2016 and over the last three years, Grassroots Ecology has conducted over 70 work events at Cooley Landing with over 2,000 students and volunteers. Volunteers installed hundreds of plants in various locations around the site. As part of their scope of work, Grassroots Ecology completed revegetation of bioswales along the existing drive into Cooley Landing, added native plants at key focal areas around the Cooley Landing Education Center and throughout the site, and coordinated with construction activities associated with Phases IV and V. Under a separate contract with the City, Grassroots Ecology also installed native plants around a new picnic area and restroom.

As part of their current contract, Grassroots Ecology also worked with a local artist, Linda Gass, to convert a temporary land art installation into a more permanent interpretive feature using native 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. Building on the success of the installation and its educational value, the temporary land art has become a unique, interactive, three-dimensional feature with two new interpretive panels.

The proposed amendment between the District and Grassroots Ecology spans three years beginning in July 2019 and includes installation of native plantings at focal points around the park, a native plant trash screen by the parking lot, and an ethnobotany garden (Attachment 1). This work will continue to enhance, beautify and restore habitat at Cooley Landing while also expanding visitor and volunteer diversity, providing educational opportunities, and encouraging stewardship within the community.

Grassroots Ecology continues to pursue new grant opportunities to enhance their work at Cooley Landing. District funding has been instrumental in securing other grants because Grassroots Ecology can leverage it as matching funds. Some of the grantors include the Packard Foundation, Bohannon Foundation, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

The FY2019-20 adopted budget includes \$35,000 for the Cooley Landing Interpretive Facilities Design and Implementation project (MAA02-001). There are sufficient funds in the project budget to cover the recommended action and expenditures through June 2020. Additional funds would be requested in future year budgets as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

<b>Cooley Landing Interpretive Facilities Design and Implementation MAA02-001</b>	<b>Prior Year Actuals</b>	<b>FY2019-20 Projected</b>	<b>FY2020-21 Projected</b>	<b>FY2021-22 Projected</b>	<b>Estimated Future Years</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>MAA02-001 Budget:</b>	<b>\$869,569</b>	<b>\$35,000</b>	<b>\$30,000</b>	<b>\$25,470</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$960,039</b>
Spent-to-Date (as of 06/24/19):	(\$869,569)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	<b>(\$869,569)</b>
Encumbrances:	(\$488,561)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	<b>(\$488,561)</b>
Grassroots Ecology Contract Amendment:	\$0	(\$35,000)	(\$30,000)	(\$25,470)	\$0	<b>(\$90,470)</b>
<b>Budget Remaining (Proposed):</b>	<b>(\$488,561)</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>(\$488,561)</b>

The following table outlines the Measure AA Portfolio #02, Bayfront Habitat Protection and Public Access Partnerships, budget, costs-to-date, and the fiscal impact related to the Cooley Landing Interpretive Facilities Design and Implementation project (MAA02-001). This project supports wetland restoration and associated interpretive facilities

<b>MAA02 Portfolio Allocation:</b>	<b>\$5,052,000</b>
Life-to-Date Spent (as of 06/24/19):	(\$1,670,552)
Encumbrances:	(\$564,991)
Grassroots Ecology Contract Amendment:	(\$90,470)
<b>Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):</b>	<b>\$2,725,987</b>

## BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item was not previously reviewed by a Committee. The previous agreement with Grassroots Ecology was approved by the full Board on September 27, 2016 (R-16-116).

## 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 East Palo Alto City Council on February 15, 2011. No further CEQA review is required.

## NEXT STEPS

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

Attachment

1. Grassroots Ecology letter dated February 26, 2019 and proposed planting plan

Responsible Department Head:  
Jane Mark, AICP, Planning Manager

Prepared by:  
Tina Hugg, PLA, ASLA, Senior Planner, Planning Department



February 26, 2019

Board of Directors  
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
330 Distel Circle  
Los Altos, CA 94022

Re: Cooley Landing Native Planting Project

Dear Members of the Board:

Thank you for this opportunity to share our proposal for Measure AA funds to support community-based implementation of native plantings at Cooley Landing to further implement the 2010 *Vision Plan for Cooley Landing*. This request is in alignment with one of the goals of the Measure AA funds: to restore and enhance open space lands.

Grassroots Ecology has been working with the City of East Palo Alto and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District over the last three years to carry out native plantings at key locations at Cooley Landing. This capital improvement work could not have happened without the support of a prior round of Measure AA funding from the District. Now, with the latest construction at the site complete, we are ready to implement the next round of planting projects to enhance habitat value, beautify the site for all users, and support educational activities at the park.

Over the last 3 years we have involved 2,200 students and volunteers in hands-on activities at Cooley Landing. We are requesting a total of \$90,470 over the next three years to support the capital aspects of our stewardship work, as outlined in the attached proposal. Other elements of our program, including interpretive events, education, trash cleanups, and invasive plant removal, will be funded by other sources. District funding is instrumental in securing other grants because we can leverage it as matching funds.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of the Cooley Landing Planting Project for inclusion in the FY 2019-20 Budget and Action Plan. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. We look forward to continuing our partnerships with the District at this important open space.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alex Von Feldt".

Alex Von Feldt  
Executive Director



**Cooley Landing Native Planting Project**  
**Proposed Scope of Work**  
 February 20, 2019

Grassroots Ecology requests Measure AA funding to continue to implement elements of the *Vision Plan for Cooley Landing* (City of East Palo Alto, 2010), as outlined below.

**Background**

Grassroots Ecology is currently serving as Outdoor Steward of Cooley Landing under a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of East Palo Alto. Under the MOU, Grassroots Ecology is authorized to organize community workdays to carry out habitat restoration and trash cleanups and to host interpretive walks and other events that educate youth and community members on bayland ecology. District Measure AA funding to date has supported the habitat restoration and capital improvement portions of this work. We have now completed the following:

- Installed plantings at focal point sites as shown in Figure 1, attached. These sites included the area around a seating plaza near the main parking lot, and the “central swale,” a low point in the landscape where hydroseed had been overtaken by invasive Italian thistle and mustard.
- Worked with local artist Linda Gass to install an approximately 200-foot long line of *Juncus patens* that marks the historic shoreline prior to the landfill operation at Cooley Landing. The artist also designed an interpretive panel about the installation, which was produced and installed by the City of East Palo Alto as part of their overall signage program for the site.
- Prepared, planted and established native species in the 600-foot long bioswale along the access drive.

These planting projects were implemented through workdays with community volunteers, service groups, and schools, with the goal of involving as many people as possible in hands-on restoration and learning. Since the beginning of the project in July 2016, Grassroots Ecology worked with 2,200 volunteers at the site, with about 75% youth. We have connected with local community and youth groups including College Track, Eastside Prep, East Palo Alto Charter School (EPACS), East Palo Alto Stanford Academy (EPASA), Menlo-Atherton High School, Woodside High School Green Academy, The Primary School in East Palo Alto, California WorkAbility Program, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Youth Community Service Summer Program (YCS), and numerous other middle and high schools in the area.

One of our key partnerships is with San Mateo County’s Youth Exploring Sea Level Rise Science (YESS) program, which brings high school students to Cooley Landing to learn about sea level rise issues and participate in hands-on restoration. County staff have provided the educational element while Grassroots Ecology took students out to install plants. Eleven field trips were held through this partnership, bringing 311 students to the site.

Using the Measure AA funds as “seed funding” for the capital improvement components of site stewardship, we were able to raise additional money from other sources to offer a full range of programs at this site, including Coastal Cleanup Day trash cleanups, interpretive programs such as bird watching and scavenger hunts, and invasive plant removal with volunteers throughout the preserve. These efforts were supported through other (non-Measure AA) funding sources secured by Grassroots Ecology and are integral to the overall stewardship effort at Cooley Landing.

## Project Goals

Our overall goal is to establish a diversity of native plants that will enhance the basic erosion control hydroseeding at Cooley Landing in order to support wildlife, to beautify the park for visitors, and to support educational activities that occur at the park. We will work towards this goal by following the Cooley Landing Vision Plan that was laid out for the park through a public process. That process identified “explore locally relevant environmental and historical topics,” “protect native habitat,” and “become a showpiece by and for East Palo Alto” among its priorities for the park.

Figure 1, attached, shows completed and proposed future planting areas using the conceptual site plan from the Vision Plan document as a base. In addition to planting at “focal point” trail junctions and viewing areas, Grassroots Ecology proposes to further enhance native habitat with additional planting in the marsh-upland transition zone boundary, strategic planting to mitigate trash blowing into the bay, and a traditional plant uses garden to support educational programs. We will also continue to pursue other funding sources to support our interpretive programs, education, and preserve-wide invasives removal.

## Proposed Project

We propose to carry out the following tasks over the next three years:

### Task 1: Project Planning, Outreach, and Coordination

- Reporting to MROSD on a quarterly basis
- Coordination with the City of East Palo Alto
- Public outreach, including presentations to MROSD Board of Directors and the East Palo Alto City Council as needed
- Budget tracking and project management

### Task 2: Native Planting of Trail Junctions and Marsh Transition Zones

- Continue to implement the Cooley Landing Vision Plan with the installation of native plantings at trail junctions and focal points. The latest phase of construction included a new segment of trail that is closer to the bayshore; we have not planted in this area before because we were waiting for construction to finish.
- Enhance upland refugia immediately adjacent to marsh habitat by installing appropriate native species to provide cover during high water events.

### Task 3: Native Plant Trash Screen by Parking Lot

- The first (west) parking lot is a site that we have observed to be heavily impacted by litter. In order to reduce the trash that is likely blowing into the bay, Grassroots Ecology proposes to plant the 3,000-square foot area adjacent to the parking lot with native plants that can help to capture the trash. We often incorporate trash pickup as part of our volunteer workdays as it is also a good point of education for people to see where trash is coming from and how it can impact waterways. By using a diverse palette of native plants, this zone will also support many native insects and birds as well as provide additional transition zone refugia in high tide events.

### Task 4: Ethnobotany Garden

- Design and install an ethnobotany garden area to showcase plants used for traditional purposes. The purpose of the garden would be for education and use in Grassroots Ecology’s interpretive programs as well as by community partners. Often native plant installations focus on the benefits of wildlife and the natural environment. This garden would be an opportunity for the community to learn about and connect with native California plant species on a cultural level. The location of the garden will be determined in partnership with the City and MROSD. We would like to see how the recently hydroseeded areas perform, as it is possible that some sections could be a good site for a garden. Grassroots Ecology will seek input from the local community of East Palo Alto in designing the garden.

**Budget**

Total budget for the above tasks is \$90,470 over 3 years (July 2019 - June 2022)

Task 1: Project Planning, Outreach and Coordination	\$17,820
Task 2: Native Planting of Trail Junctions	\$23,750
Task 3: Native Plant Trash Screen by Parking Lot	\$26,250
Task 4: Ethnobotany Garden	\$22,650
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$90,470</i>

**Photos of Volunteer Events**



*Community Workday*

*Great Backyard Bird Count*

*Planting the Living Shoreline*



*Eastside Prep at Coastal Cleanup Day*

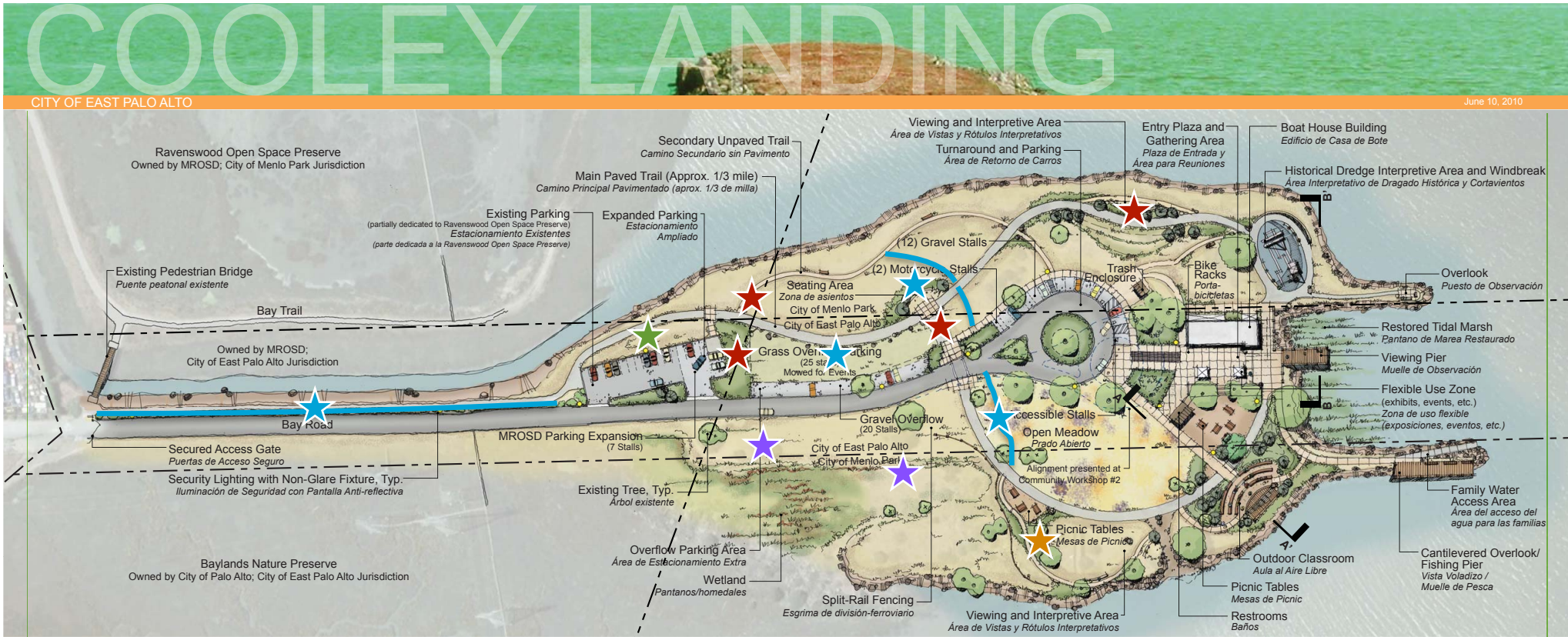


*Youth Exploring Sea Level Rise Science (YESS)*

*Earth Day Community Event on the Bioswale*



Figure 1: Grassroots Ecology Proposed Planting Plan  
Shown on plan graphic from the 2010 Vision Plan for Cooley Landing



Concept Plan - Alternative Parking Configuration

- ★ Completed segments (bioswale, focal points, and Living Shoreline project)
- ★ Planned focal point planting areas
- ★ Parking lot trash screen planting area
- ★ Possible upland transition zone planting areas (actual location TBD)
- ★ Possible location of Ethnobotany Garden