



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-20-113
Meeting 20-28
December 7, 2020

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Potential Focus Areas for Fiscal Year 2021-22

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *den*

Discuss and provide feedback on the potential focus areas for Fiscal Year 2021-22.

SUMMARY

Each year, the Board of Directors (Board) holds two retreats as part of the annual budget process. For the budget development cycle ending June 30, 2022 (FY22), these retreats are scheduled on Monday, December 7, 2020 and Tuesday, March 4, 2021. This annual Board Retreat Meeting 1 (Strategic Planning) provides the Board with an early opportunity to set the overall course for the coming year at a broad policy level. Board feedback on the potential focus areas that will likely emerge in the coming year will guide the development of the FY22 Budget and Action Plan.

DISCUSSION

Specific operational and capital projects that form the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) Annual Budget and Action Plan are derived from the following:

- Measure AA Five-Year Project List and Parking Lot List
- Vision Plan Priority Actions
- District Mission/Coastside Mission
- Board-approved annual Strategic Goals and Objectives
- Climate Action Plan
- Board-approved Preserve Plans and Use and Management Plans/Amendments
- Prior Capital Improvement and Action Plans (CIAP) to identify next phases of projects
- Partnership and grant agreements
- Full Board discussions and direction on topics of interest

Based on an early review of upcoming efforts and emerging issues, the following seven potential focus areas have been identified heading into FY22 as deserving Board discussion and feedback:

1. Preparations for the new Administrative Office (AO)
2. Post-COVID adjustments
3. Wildfire resiliency
4. Management and response to higher preserve visitation
5. Evaluation of potential E-bike use amidst a wide range of public sentiment

6. Net-zero impacts and resource management priorities
7. 50th Anniversary planning and activities

A brief description of each follows below.

Preparations for the new Administrative Office (AO)

Significant work remains in FY22 to complete everything involved with the new Administrative Office located at 5050 El Camino Real, including: interior and exterior construction to prepare the office for District use; purchase and installation of owner-furnished elements; consideration of expanded remote work options and subsequent interior office space adjustments; preparation for and completion of the office move; training on and trouble-shooting the new office systems; design, manufacturing, and installation of interpretive and educational features; and hosting of a public open house. Further details are provided below:

- To prepare for the office move and increase records management efficiency and transparency, District staff continues to make progress on the Records Management project. The Board approved the District-wide records retention schedule in March 2020, and staff are reviewing and inventorying documents for electronic filing, and identifying which are past their retention and can be disposed. In early 2021, staff will bring forward a contract for Board approval to implement an electronic document management system (EDMS) and secure document scanning services to digitize documents and create an electronic records repository. The EDMS and creation of a trusted electronic documents system will allow the District to reduce the amount of hard copy documents that are relocated to the 5050 El Camino Real building and increase efficiency and transparency when accessing historic documents.
- Move management is an important component of the AO Project. Once construction is underway in spring 2021, a Move Management Team with representatives from the General Manager's Office, Engineering and Construction, Administrative Services, and Land and Facilities Departments will come together to coordinate the spring 2022 move. Key tasks will include cataloging and evaluating the reuse of existing furniture, identifying possible sources for second-hand office furniture, entering into a procurement contract(s) for new furniture as needed, developing the move-in schedule, and identifying and coordinating needed resources for the move.
- The pandemic has required the District to substantially change its work environment, with most administrative office staff still working exclusively from home. This unplanned "experiment" has shown that the District can remain highly productive, moving projects forward in a remote environment. The approved AO design allows for flexibility in scaling down the District's office space use to scale up the available lease space if the District opts to expand its long-term remote work options and telecommute policy. District staff will hold internal discussions on long-term business operational changes and consider possible adjustments to the interior space accordingly. These changes will be made with the goal in mind of ensuring staff productivity and effective business operations while maximizing lease revenue to further offset project costs.
- Planning is underway for the interpretation and educational elements of the new public spaces to tell the stories of the District's work in preserving open space and working lands, restoring the natural resources, and creating opportunities for public enjoyment of nature. During the coming year, staff will be working with a hired consultant and the Board to finalize the designs and move forward with the manufacturing and installation

of these educational elements. As part of the project, the District is also planning a public open house event that will be integrated into the 50th Anniversary community-wide celebrations.

Post-COVID adjustments

The pandemic has necessitated many “temporary” changes to District processes and procedures. Looking forward toward a post-pandemic period, staff is reflecting on what the District has learned over the last nearly nine months and the changes that the agency may want to refine and continue into the future to improve communications and workplace efficiencies, enhance workforce retention strategies, reduce operational greenhouse gas emissions, and facilitate greater public participation and engagement. Changes under consideration include:

- Hybrid use of video and remote electronic communication tools with in-person oral communications to facilitate greater participation at public meetings.
- Increased telecommuting to support the District’s Climate Action Plan goals of reducing employee-based emissions while furthering employee recruitment and retention goals.
- Expanded employee scheduling and reporting flexibilities such as longer-shifts, alternate hours, and reporting directly to field locations directly from home.
- Continued use and possible expansion of remote communication tools to support person-to-person, team-to-team communications across all levels and facilitate All Staff communications.
- Greater emphasis and expansion of social media communications and outreach, including use of educational and interpretive videos/webinars, expanded content, and more regular postings.
- Maintaining close communication and coordination with partner agencies to share information, coordinate on issues and needs of mutual interest, and partner on region-wide efforts.

Wildfire resiliency

California is intensifying its focus on wildland fire prevention, community resilience, forest management, and utility oversight given repeated years of catastrophic fires that are expected to continue as climatic changes create drier conditions and longer fire seasons. Locally, this focus is reflected in the increasing demands and opportunities to work with neighbors, municipalities and fire agencies to expand fuel management work and reduce fire risk. While the focus on fire prevention, preparation, and suppression may bring new funding opportunities, these also require additional staff time to remain responsive and be poised to leverage new grants and partnerships. Even with these outside resources, expanding fuel management activities will likely require allocating additional District funding and either adding staff or redirecting staff from capital project work. Moreover, in light of the longer fire seasons and heightened sensitivities about fire weather, the District has and will likely continue to dedicate more time to address an increase in “Red Flag” days and related preserve closures, as well as the resulting concentration of visitor use at preserves that remain open.

Management and response to higher preserve visitation

Shelter-in-place restrictions and limitations on group activities and indoor-based businesses and recreation centers, in response to the pandemic, created a high demand for safe, outdoor open space and nature experiences. Many people are relying on their regional and local parks and open spaces to seek a respite from day-to-day stresses and anxieties for their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. As a result, preserves are experiencing heightened levels of visitation.

This increased visitation is highlighting a growing public appreciation for open space and the essential services the District provides to the greater public. The visitation presents opportunities to further expand public awareness and support for open space preservation as many people connect with the land for the very first time, are reconnecting after a long hiatus or have increased their frequency of visits.

At the same time, these levels of visitation present new challenges with preserve parking areas not well equipped to meet the demands during peak days and times, resulting in high roadside overflow parking that impacts roadways and neighboring communities. As the District considers new multi-modal solutions at Rancho San Antonio and Purisima Creek Redwoods that can be applied elsewhere at other preserves, it will be important to balance multiple considerations: public desires for safe nature connections; local resident concerns; protection of natural resource values; and equity of access. FY22 presents opportunities to think differently about how people access preserves and how the District can partner with other entities to offer innovative solutions that do not yet exist for the Peninsula, Coast, and South Bay. Although economic conditions and ongoing social distancing requirements may slow progress, elements can be formulated and made ready to implement once the right time arrives.

Evaluation of potential E-bike use amidst a wide range of public sentiment

Over the last several years, public interest in electric bicycles (e-bikes) for transportation and recreation has grown steadily across the country. This trend is reflected locally by the increased use on public roadways and allowance by some land management agencies on various trail networks. Although not currently permitted, rangers have reported a rise in e-bike use in District preserves. Over the last two years, the District has received numerous public requests to consider e-bike access. When the topic has been discussed at Board meetings, the District received a wide range of public comments reflecting sentiments in favor and in opposition to e-bike use. Significant staff time will be dedicated to the pilot program for e-bike use on paved and improved trails in Ravenswood Open Space Preserve and Rancho San Antonio County Park and Open Space Preserve.

Unfortunately, there is limited research on the use of e-bikes in a natural open space setting and their effects on other visitors, unpaved trail surfaces/trail maintenance, and sensitive natural resources. Next fiscal year, staff will be challenged with the task of providing information for the Board to determine whether a pilot program to evaluate e-bike use on unimproved District trails is compatible with the District's mission, goals, and core values. This work may necessitate homegrown research to collect sufficient data to make informed extrapolations and arrive at useful findings for Board consideration. If a pilot program for e-bikes on unimproved trails is approved, the District may have the opportunity to partner with e-bike advocates in the community to develop and implement an e-bike/bike educational campaign for promoting safe e-bike/bike use and proper trail and natural resource care etiquette in District preserves.

Net-zero impacts and resource management priorities

Over the course of the last year, various members of the Board have raised questions about net-zero impacts as a goal for capital projects. Net-zero impacts refers to the addition of natural resource improvements and benefits as part of public access improvements and other capital projects to compensate for any potential impacts that may result from the construction and operation of the new facilities. This concept goes beyond mitigation required by permitting agencies. The concept of net-zero has come up in the context of the proposed Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connection Project and potential new parking and trail improvements to open the

central area of La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve. This concept is best considered in the broader context of District-wide resource management work and priorities, which the Natural Resources Department is preparing to present in March 2021 at an upcoming Board study session. An important tradeoff that the Board will need to weigh as part of these discussions relates directly to staff capacity and/or funding – in particular, determining how best to allocate limited staff capacity and funding between achieving net-zero impacts on a smaller scale and project by project basis versus working on larger or regional, high impact habitat restoration projects that focus on sensitive, rare and/or at-risk resources. Staff chooses degraded sites for access improvements such as parking lots and avoids sensitive natural resources when laying out trails. Habitat improvements located in close proximity to these improvements will tend to cost more and deliver less impact in restoring natural resources. Additionally, by their proximity to public access, restored sites will be at increased risk of degradation.

50th Anniversary Planning and Activities

The District will be celebrating 50 years of outstanding accomplishments, tremendous public support, instrumental partnerships, and visionary leadership that has culminated in over 64,000 acres of preserved open space lands, protection of rare and sensitive natural resources, support of local agriculture, and over 240 miles of trails that provide people with essential connections to nature. Plans are in development to commemorate the District's 50th Anniversary through a series of events and activities in calendar year 2022. Preliminary details of the year-long festivities will be presented to the full Board on December 16 and include a science symposium and gathering, a documentary video, increased outreach at community events, in preserves and at an open house for the new administrative office, and other planned activities. The next two years, including FY22, will require considerable staff and consultant resources to prepare and finalize implementation plans, and kick off celebration events and activities. The robust plan will require a significant allocation of staffing resources from across the entire organization. The Board of Directors are also expected to take on significant roles in the festivities.

For each of the seven items discussed above, staff will provide introductory verbal comments at the Board Retreat to help initiate a broader Board discussion to arrive at feedback and guidance for staff to fold into the FY22 Budget and Action Plan.

FISCAL IMPACT

The discussion of the potential focus areas has no immediate fiscal impact. This action will inform, together with Board confirmation of District priorities on March 4, 2021, the development of the FY22 Budget and CIAP as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan development process.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item was brought directly to the full Board given full Board interest and importance.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

On March 4, 2021, the Board will confirm the District-wide priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. The outcomes of the December 7, 2020 and March 4, 2021 Board retreat meetings will guide the development of the FY22 Budget and Action Plan.

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