



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-21-18  
Meeting 21-03  
January 27, 2021

## AGENDA ITEM 6

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Project Brief for the Administrative Office Interpretive Elements Project

### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *deur*

Approve the proposed project brief with any additional Board-directed revisions to guide the planning and design of public-facing interpretive elements for the future Administrative Office located at 5050 El Camino Real in Los Altos.

### SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) has contracted with EDX Exhibits to provide planning and design services for public-facing interpretive elements at the District's future Administration Office located at 5050 El Camino Real. The goal of this project is to provide members of the public who visit the administrative office with opportunities to create meaningful personal connections with multiple interpretive themes inspired by the District's work and mission. The General Manager recommends approving the proposed project brief with any additional final revisions requested by the Board.

### DISCUSSION

#### Background

Since purchasing the current 330 Distel Circle, Los Altos office building in 1990, the District's success in growing the regional greenbelt, restoring natural lands, and expanding public access has created the need for additional office space. As a forward-thinking and fiscally prudent public agency, the District planned for its long-term office space needs by setting aside general reserve funds. After exploring alternatives, purchasing and repurposing an existing, larger office building and selling the current building to offset costs emerged as the most cost-efficient, environmentally sound long-term solution.

At the July 2017 public meeting, the Board of Directors (Board) adopted a resolution to enter into a purchase and sale agreement for the building located at 5050 El Camino Real in Los Altos (R-17-90). Escrow closed on February 1, 2019. Construction to repurpose the building to meet District needs in fulfilling its mission and serving the public is scheduled to occur in early 2021 and be completed in March 2022. This new office space presents multiple opportunities to enhance public awareness of the District and foster a deeper connection to the local natural resources and iconic Bay Area landscapes through informative and inspirational interpretive elements.

### **Opportunity to Connect Constituencies to Open Space Values Close to Home**

The new Administrative Office building located at 5050 El Camino is scheduled to open in March 2022. In the course of carrying out its mission as a public agency, the District invites the public to attend regular Board and committee meetings at its office. People also frequently visit the office seeking information on the preserves and public programs. In addition, staff hold meetings with outside partners and consultants at the office and conduct trainings for volunteers. These public interactions present an opportunity to incorporate interpretive elements as part of the building experience that invite the public to further explore and engage with the District's mission and work, gain added knowledge and appreciation about local biodiversity, and expand personal connections to the greater Bay Area region and natural landscapes.

### **Interpretation**

Interpretation is a philosophy and practice of communication and education formalized many years ago by Freeman Tilden through his extensive work with the National Park Service. It is used by parks, museums, zoos and in many other applications, and is defined by the National Association of Interpretation as:

*A mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource.*

The primary aim of interpretation is to evoke curiosity and engagement. Interpretation can enhance a visitor's experience, leading them to develop an appreciation for and meaningful personal connections to the subject being interpreted. Interpretation is guided by a set of principles and professionally established methods, which include identifying:

- **Tangible resources:** Places, objects, people or events for the audience to care about and understand.
- **Intangible meanings and universal concepts** that the tangible resources represent.
- **Theme statements:** Overarching big ideas for the audience to connect with, guiding the overall interpretive project.

A simple example that shows how these foundational concepts are used in interpretation is District Ranger Marianne Chance's recent presentation about her experience fighting the CZU August Lightning Complex Fire. She began with a theme statement: *This year, we have all faced overwhelming challenges, much like a firefighter battling the CZU August Lightning Complex Fire.* And connected tangible resources (*firefighters, wildland fire*) with intangible meanings and universal concepts (*challenges, tenacity, teamwork, inner strength, survival*), giving her audiences opportunities to create meaningful personal connections to her story.

District Visitor Services staff and docent volunteers are provided foundational training to develop interpretive skills and use interpretative techniques on docent naturalist-led hikes, school field trips, at the Daniels Nature Center, and as part of ranger engagement with preserve visitors. Additionally, interpretive signs are posted in preserves and interpretive displays, and exhibits can be found at the Daniels Nature Center. Public Affairs incorporates many tenets of interpretation into public outreach and communication planning through storytelling, connecting people to place-based experiences, and working collaboratively with Visitor Services to identify and develop interpretive opportunities across projects and programs.

Much like other interpretive programs offered by the District, the new administrative office building offers an excellent venue for engaging the public in a meaningful and enriched interpretation experience.

### **Project Consultant**

After a competitive consultant selection process in the fall of 2020, EDX Exhibits (EDX) was determined to be the most qualified firm to complete Phase 1 of this project: interpretive planning and design (R-20-133). EDX was chosen based on their design quality and relevance, expertise and competency, commitment to accessibility and diversity, and overall cost.

### **Project Scope**

The following areas in and around the 5050 El Camino Real building have been identified as spaces and locations where public-facing interpretive elements and design features are desired.

#### **Entry Lobby/Foyer**

Visitors will enter the building through a ground-level set of doors into a foyer with approximate dimensions of 38 feet by 16 feet enclosed by windows with a high ceiling. There are two wall spaces available with approximate dimensions of 9 feet by 9 feet with floor space to allow for a three-dimensional interpretive exhibit.

#### **Main Lobby/Atrium**

The main lobby has approximate floor-space dimensions of 38 feet by 23 feet. The lobby and atrium contain a 24-foot by 9-foot wall space identified for interpretive elements. The lobby and atrium will include a reception desk area and a visitor seating area with ample space for interpretive elements or design features. Considerations include:

- Large-scale wrap photo for the elevator shaft
- Backlit wall-size photo as a hall divider
- Four framed photos or other art along the upstairs hallway
- Large-scale photo adjacent to the stairwell leading to the second floor
- Topographic map

#### **Outdoor Areas**

- Two to three interpretive panels along the walkway between the sidewalk at El Camino Real and the building's front door is available.
- The retaining wall adjacent to the southern access of the underground garage with dimensions of 50 feet by 6 feet contains space for a possible mural.
- Four large-scale banners on the building exterior facing El Camino Real, with dimensions of approximately 20 feet by 5 feet, are envisioned.
- Other outdoor areas are also available.

### **Project Brief**

A project team made up of EDX and District staff from multiple departments held two meetings on December 14 and 15 with a virtual tour of the building spaces. Prior to these meetings, the consultant reviewed the District's mission statements and Vision Plan, Board-adopted strategic goals and objectives, prior Board input on the interpretive elements, the Districtwide Interpretive Planning Guide, and the most recent public survey results.

Based on the results of their research and recent discussions, the consultant created a proposed project brief (Attachment 1) that is being presented to the full Board for feedback and

concurrence. When final, this document will provide the guiding interpretive foundations upon which the project design and plans will be implemented and fabricated, including:

- **Defined project goals**  
The brief identifies the following proposed project goals: introduce the whole and the why of the District, convey how the District cares for the land and the benefits that care provides to the region and our communities, and welcoming and inviting people to make personal connections to their open space lands.
- **Outline of tangible resources**  
These are the places, objects, people or events for the audience to care about and understand. The proposed tangible resources in the brief are identified in the District’s Board-approved 2014 Vision Plan, which was developed with extensive public input.
- **Identified intangible meanings and universal concepts**  
These are intangible meanings that the tangible resources represent that provide opportunities for emotional connections. Most of the proposed intangible resources presented the brief are taken from the District’s Board-approved 2014 Vision Plan.
- **Preliminary theme statements, including one overarching theme or “big idea”**  
Theme statements are important because they provide a foundation that guides the overall interpretive project. The three proposed interpretive themes identified in the brief are: *the Midpen agency, the importance of open space* and *open space is for everyone*. The proposed big idea identified in the brief is: *Open space belongs to everyone: it preserves our natural world, sustains healthy living, and offers enriched experiences for people to connect with nature*.

### Project Timeline

Phase 1 of this project encompasses planning and design according to the following schedule and scope.

#### Phase I: Interpretive Planning and Design Timeline

SCHEDULE	SCOPE
<b>Dec. – Jan. 2020-21</b>	<b>Transmit pertinent information and create a project brief</b> that includes the proposed interpretive foundations that the design will be based on, including an overarching theme that reflects the District's missions, Vision Plan, and Board direction. Include identification of tangible elements to be interpreted and associated intangible elements and universal concepts. Finalize Project Brief with Board feedback on January 27, 2021.
<b>Feb.-Mar. 2021</b>	<b>Create 2-3 design alternatives</b> that explore differing organizing themes, visitor flow, and how the established themes can best be communicated through panels, interactive and tactile elements, and/or audio-visual elements. Include a cost estimate for fabrication of each scheme. Present to the full Board for selection of a preferred alternative on March 10, 2021.

<p><b>Mar. - July 2021</b></p>	<p><b>Develop design for the preferred alternative, including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals and objectives for each exhibit area or primary element.</li> <li>• Plans and elevations for all exhibit components.</li> <li>• Sketches and descriptions of proposed interactive and tactile elements.</li> <li>• Initial layouts and first draft text for all graphic panels including font selection and color palettes and layout for interpretive panels.</li> <li>• Digital modeling of the exhibit scheme to help communicate exhibit design to District staff and Board.</li> <li>• Strategies for programmatic accessibility to bring exhibit content alive for visitors with low vision and blindness, hearing impairments and cognitive differences</li> <li>• Cost estimate for fabrication and installation of the design</li> </ul> <p>Seek Board review and feedback on July 14, 2021.</p>
<p><b>July-Aug. 2021</b></p>	<p><b>Create a final design document, including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully dimensioned plans, elevations, and sections</li> <li>• Detailed drawings of interactive and tactile elements</li> <li>• Fully developed Audio/Visual treatments and coordination with project design team to ensure all elements work seamlessly with the project design</li> <li>• Final layouts with final text and photos/graphics for all graphic panels</li> <li>• Fabrication and installation cost estimate</li> </ul> <p>Present the final design document to the full Board on August 25, 2021.</p>
<p><b>Sept.- Oct. 2021</b></p>	<p>Incorporate all final corrections to the final design and production document, and hand-off to fabricator for Phase II work.</p>

Fabrication and installation forms the second phase of this project and will require a separate competitive request for proposals process. Phase II work is expected to begin in the fall of 2021 with fabrication and installation complete before the District moves into 5050 El Camino Real in March 2022.

## FISCAL IMPACT

At each major milestone, the District presents a revised cost estimate to ensure that the overall administrative office project remains within the May 2019 Board-approved project budget of \$27.4 million (R-19-64). The latest 100% project cost estimate is approximately \$26.8 million, below the Board approved project budget.

Funding sources for the project include using *Committed for Infrastructure* reserve funds, any future additions to the reserve, rent income, parity bond proceeds, and interest earned from the parity bonds. Partial reimbursement will also come from the future sale of the current 330 Distel Circle office (R-20-117).

The administrative office interpretive elements project is divided into two phases:

- Phase 1: Planning and Design (the subject of this Agenda Item)
- Phase 2: Fabrication and Installation of the approved interpretive elements (future phase)

The FY21 adopted budget includes \$8,488,000 for the New Administrative Office (AO) Facility project #31202. Staff has identified \$200,000 within the Board-approved project budget to cover both phases of this Interpretive project component. There are sufficient funds in the project budget to cover the recommended action and expenditures through the end of the fiscal year for the Phase I scope of work. Funding for FY22 will be requested as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

New Administration Office (AO) Facility #31202	Prior Year Actuals	FY21 Adopted	FY22 Projected	FY23 Projected	Estimated Future Years	TOTAL
Acquisition:	\$31,742,406	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$31,742,406
Planning/Design/Construction <sup>2</sup> :	\$1,744,869	\$8,402,000	\$17,253,131	\$0	\$0	\$27,400,000 <sup>1</sup>
Move-in and Closeout <sup>3</sup> :	\$0	\$86,000	\$1,051,927	\$0	\$0	\$1,137,927
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$33,487,275</b>	<b>\$8,488,000</b>	<b>\$18,305,058</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$60,280,333</b>
Acquisition and associated costs Spent-to-Date (as of 01/06/2021):	(\$31,742,406)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$31,742,406)
Spent-to-Date (as of 01/06/2021):	(\$1,744,869)	(\$43,140)	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$1,788,009)
Encumbrances, including EDX Exhibits Contract:	\$0	(\$596,343)	(\$296,823)	\$0	\$0	(\$893,166)
BHM Construction Inc. Contract including 10% Contingency <sup>4</sup> :	\$0	(\$7,848,517)	(\$14,134,126)	\$0	\$0	(\$21,982,643)
<b>Budget Remaining (Proposed):</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$3,874,109</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$3,874,109</b>

<sup>1</sup>Amount includes Board approved project budget of \$27.4M

<sup>2</sup>FY22 amount reflects revised, updated estimate based on current accelerated schedule

<sup>3</sup>The FY22 projection of \$1.05 million has not been approved by the Board and will be reviewed by the Board as part of the FY22 Budget and Action Plan process

<sup>4</sup>BHM Construction Inc., Award of Contract approved by the Board at the 01/20/2021 Special Meeting

The recommended action is not funded by Measure AA.

## BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item was not reviewed by a Board committee. Given full Board interest, future study sessions will be held in 2021 as identified in this report to review proposed design options and content.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act and additionally to the administrative office interested parties list.

## CEQA COMPLIANCE

Award of contract is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

## NEXT STEPS

If approved, the consultant and multi-department staff project team will incorporate Board feedback to finalize the project brief and proceed with developing alternative design options to bring back to the Board on March 10, 2021.

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