



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-21-34
Meeting 21-08
March 4, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 2

AGENDA ITEM

Approval of a Two-Year, Limited Term Public Affairs Specialist II Position

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

Capitalize on the strength of a current recruitment pool to approve a two-year, limited term Public Affairs Specialist II position to quickly add in-house capacity for the planning, preparation, and implementation of year-long public facing activities, events, and gatherings to commemorate 50 years of public support that has led to 50 years of accomplishments in land conservation, natural resource restoration, public access, and support of local agriculture.

SUMMARY

Planning and executing a year-long series of 50th anniversary celebrations, events, and activities is expected to require an investment of more than 5,600 hours of staff time across the remainder of this and the next two fiscal years, with the coordination, scheduling, planning, and logistics led by the Public Affairs department. The Public Affairs department is over capacity based on resource loading calculations for the upcoming fiscal year. Planning activities for the anniversary events are already underway and are beginning to impact existing resources. The General Manager recommends adding a two-year, limited term Public Affairs Specialist II position to quickly add capacity while capitalizing on the strength of a current recruitment pool that has been assembled to fill an existing vacancy in the department. There are sufficient salary savings in the current fiscal year budget to cover expenses through June 30. The proposed budgets for Fiscal Year 2021-22 (FY22) and FY23 would include funding for the position through the two-year term period.

DISCUSSION

The District's strategic communications plan published in 2019 recognized the need to move a level beyond effective communications, grounded in transparency, toward more proactive, sophisticated strategies designed to increase awareness, build positive regard and community partnerships, encourage broad engagement, and enhance the agency's reputation as a leader in open space preservation, natural resource protection, land management, and low-intensity public recreation. To help achieve that next level, the workflow of the Public Affairs department was realigned to match the District's project delivery process and create stronger collaboration across departments and deeper subject matter understanding within communication leads. The approximate 120 Capital Improvement and Action Plan projects by which the District organizes its work each year are each assigned a communication lead, charged with assisting the project team in message development, public notifications and engagement strategies, issue spotting, and progress promotion via the District's traditional communication channels (web, social media,

email, publications and press releases). Though this proactive approach is significantly more time-intensive for Public Affairs staff, it frees up other departmental project managers to attend to project needs without having to spend significant time on the nuances and details of public information communications, which is an area and function best suited to Public Affairs staff. This successful transition has served the District well in the past year. To be most effective, however, communications leads must have the bandwidth available to dive more deeply into projects to understand not only the potential issues but also the potential stories to be shared.

While this realignment complements the department's core Public Affairs programs (monthly e-newsletter, quarterly print newsletter, community outreach tabling and events, presentations, financial publications, governmental and partner relations, and special projects), it requires a significant allocation of staff capacity. The planned FY22 CIAP projects, including the 50th anniversary project, are anticipated to require more than 5,100 hours of communications support and issue spotting assistance, on top of the estimated 10,000 hours that are needed for ongoing management of core programs (listed above), daily administrative work, and capacity to address unanticipated communications issues. As currently staffed, the department is facing a deficit of at least 1,800 hours in FY22.

Adding a two-year, limited term full-time position to help manage the 50th anniversary events, activities, and gatherings through December 2022 will address the forecasted deficit in staff capacity and prevent a capacity drain that can lead to burn out and/or the inability to properly support District communications, outreach, and/or media needs in the upcoming year. Toward the end of its term (anticipated to be March 31, 2023), the position would assist Public Affairs with wrapping up contracts and invoicing and provide general workload support.

The duties of this position will mirror those of the Public Affairs Specialist II classification, with an assigned focus of serving as project manager for the overall planning and execution of 50th Anniversary events and activities. Based on lessons learned from the Mt. Umunhum grand opening and the Special Parks District Forum, managing large events in remote locations requires sophisticated planning and significant logistics, even with the assistance of contract consultants. This position would help manage the contracted consultant teams (with senior staff oversight), including coordinating partner and team meetings; reviewing content and proofreading deliverables; ensuring integrated communications; providing needed research and data; coordinating subject matter expertise and technical support from other departments; conducting sponsorship solicitation; coordinating with Board liaisons and updating the full Board on progress; and organizing volunteer assistance. In addition, the role will provide public affairs/external communications support for the Administrative Office Open House event, Bear Creek Redwoods Alma Opening, Good Neighbor Policy outreach, and Highway 17 Wildlife and Trail Crossing public outreach by participating in internal and external meetings, and creating public information content for website, newsletters and social media.

A recent recruitment to fill a vacant Public Affairs Specialist II position attracted a pool of well-qualified candidates from which this position can be quickly and cost-effectively filled. Given the need for capacity and a desire to leverage an existing qualified recruitment pool, the General Manager is expediting the position approval process and forwarding the request for Board approval.

FISCAL IMPACT

There are sufficient salary savings in the current fiscal year budget to cover the cost of the recommendation in FY21. Funds will be recommended in the fiscal year 2022 and 2023 budgets as a part of the annual Budget and Action Plan. The following table specifies the anticipated cost per fiscal year.

Fiscal Year	Cost
FY21 (3 months – through June 30)	\$41,502
FY22 (July 2021 through June 2022)	\$170,990
FY23 (9 months – July 2022 through March 2023)	\$132,090
Total	\$344,582

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

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

NEXT STEPS

With Board approval, this limited term position is expected to be quickly filled through an existing pool of qualified applicants, with an anticipated start date of April 1, 2021 for a term of 24 months, through end of March 2023.

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