



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-22-76
Meeting 22-16
June 22, 2022

AGENDA ITEM 6

AGENDA ITEM

Award of a New Four-Year Partnership Agreement with Grassroots Ecology for Community Engagement and Native Plant Landscape Maintenance at Cooley Landing Park and Ravenswood Open Space Preserve

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *den*

1. Authorize the General Manager to enter into a new four-year agreement with Grassroots Ecology of Palo Alto, California to provide service-learning events and native landscape maintenance for an amount not to exceed \$255,250.
2. Authorize an allowance of up to \$26,250 to be spent on the procurement of additional native plants, if necessary to meet habitat goals, for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$281,500.

SUMMARY

Grassroots Ecology (Grassroots) is an environmental 501(c)(3) 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. East Palo Alto (City) operates Cooley Landing Park, which includes land owned by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District), under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Since 2015, Grassroots has served as an outdoor steward of native plant restoration areas at Cooley Landing Park and Ravenswood Open Space Preserve through a prior agreement with the District, providing land stewardship programs, activities, and landscape maintenance. The General Manager recommends awarding a new four-year partnership agreement to Grassroots to provide service-learning events and native landscape maintenance for an amount not to exceed \$255,250 and to authorize an allowance of \$26,250 to be spent on the procurement of additional native plants, if necessary to meet habitat goals, for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$281,500. There are sufficient funds in the Fiscal Year 2022-23 (FY23) adopted budget to cover the cost of the recommended action. Funds for FY24 and beyond will be requested in future fiscal year budgets as a part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

DISCUSSION

Grassroots is a local, nonprofit 501(c)(3) whose mission “is to engage and educate the public to restore local ecosystems” (Attachment 1). The organization’s staff has extensive experience in managing volunteer programs, as well as establishing relationships with local schools for the purposes of outreach, education, and volunteer recruitment. With over 80% of the participants being local youth, Grassroots works to involve underserved communities wherever possible,

thereby expanding diversity efforts consistent with the District’s Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy.

Service-Learning is an educational approach that combines learning objectives, through formal and informal interpretative talks by knowledgeable leaders, with community service. Service-Learning projects meet resource management goals while achieving the District’s mission to “provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education”. It provides a “down-to-earth” enriched learning experience while engaging community members in meaningful stewardship work to protect and restore the natural environment.

Through a District-wide partnership agreement, Grassroots has been providing Service-Learning opportunities at various Open Space Preserves since 2015 to increase volunteer stewardship opportunities (R-15-145). In 2016, the District entered into a subsequent agreement with Grassroots to plant native plants specifically at Cooley Landing Park as part of Measure AA Portfolio 2 *Bayfront Habitat Protection and Public access Partnerships*. In 2019, the District amended the agreement to add three years to complete native plantings at Cooley Landing Park and along the driveway in Ravenswood Open Space Preserve. Grassroots work included the installation of native plants to turn local artist Linda Gass’ temporary art exhibit of the historic shoreline into a permanent living exhibit. This prior work was part of a larger capital project to develop Cooley Landing Park.

The proposed new partnership agreement would allow Grassroots to continue landscape maintenance efforts through service-learning events at Cooley Landing Park. The partnership would span up to four years and include coordination with the District and City, local schools, interns (selected interns are prioritized from the local community and students from community colleges and other “non-traditional” backgrounds), and volunteers to complete 10 service-learning events per year. Performing this work with Grassroots couples outside native plant expertise with local community engagement and protects the investment the District and the City have made in improving and developing Cooley Landing into a public park that combines urban park infrastructure with the natural Baylands landscape. Through this partnership, the District would expand its limited capacity to engage diverse community members and new third-party partner organizations in meaningful stewardship activities that promote awareness and appreciation for land and natural resource conservation and support Baylands restoration and habitat enhancement objectives (refer to R-22-77 on this same Agenda for examples). As part of this agreement, the General Manager recommends authorizing an allowance of up to \$26,250 for the procurement of local native plants, if needed, to infill planting areas and/ or increase biodiversity on site.

FISCAL IMPACT

There are sufficient funds in the adopted FY23 budget to cover the cost of the recommendation. Funding for future years budgets will be requested as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process. Since most of the work will no longer be part of a capital project, the proposed agreement would be funded out of the Land and Facilities Department operating budget.

	BASE	ALLOWANCE	TOTAL
FY 2022-23	\$59,250	\$6,000	\$65,250
FY 2023-24	\$62,250	\$6,500	\$68,750
FY 2024-25	\$65,250	\$6,750	\$72,000
FY 2025-26	\$68,500	\$7,000	\$75,500

TOTAL	\$255,250	\$26,250	\$281,500
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The recommended action is an operational project and not funded by Measure AA.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

- July 27, 2011: The Board adopted a Comprehensive Use and Management Plan Amendment for Ravenswood Open Space Preserve (R-11-62).
- [October 14, 2015](#): The Board authorized a partnership agreement with Acterra (now Grassroots Ecology) to manage volunteer outdoor service project at two District Preserves for a one-year trial period (R-15-145).
- [September 28, 2016](#): The Board authorized an agreement with Grassroots Ecology for native planting and interpretive work at Cooley Landing (R-16-116).
- [July 24, 2019](#): The Board authorized an amendment to extend the scope of services at Cooley Landing (R-19-106, [meeting minutes](#)).
- [November 13, 2019](#): The Board authorized the contract for Grassroots Ecology to protect and restore natural resources through Service Learning (R-19-145, [meeting minutes](#)).

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

On July 27, 2011, the Board concurred as the elected body of a Responsible Agency with the findings made by the City of East Palo Alto on the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) that was prepared for the Cooley Landing Vision Plan and certified on February 15, 2011. The recommended actions that are part of this Agenda Item are consistent with the MND and MMRP.

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for the District's IPM Program, approved on December 10, 2014 (R-14-148), analyzed the weeding activities in the recommended agreement. On February 27, 2019, the Board approved an addendum to the Final EIR for the IPM Program (R-19-11). District staff have incorporated the associated mitigation measures and BMPs from the environmental review documents into the proposed project and the agreement documents.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval by the Board, the General Manager will enter into a four-year contract with Grassroots to conduct service-learning events focused on native plant maintenance at Cooley Landing Park for a total not to exceed amount of \$281,500. Work associated with this contract will be reported back to the Board as part of the annual IPM Report.

Attachment: Grassroots Ecology Strategic Plan

Responsible Department Head:

Brandon Stewart, Land and Facilities

Prepared by / Contact person:

Michael Gorman, Area Manager, Land and Facilities



2020-23 STRATEGIC PLAN

July 2020

Our strategic focus for the next three years is to create a lasting community of land stewards. As we have grown over the past decade, we have engaged thousands of people each year. Going forward, we will focus on increasing the quality and depth of those experiences.

2010 → 2017

RAPID PROGRAM GROWTH

4x people engaged
3x acres of land stewarded
2x revenue

2018 → 2020

INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Form new organization
Invest in business management, fundraising
Strengthen current programs

2021 → future

SUSTAINABLY SCALING OUR IMPACT

Deeper steward engagement
Increased social diversity
New geographies

Our Compass

Attachment 1

Mission Statement

To engage and educate the public to restore local ecosystems.

Vision Statement

We envision healthy lands and human communities that sustain one another and are resilient in a changing world.

Values

Stewardship

Hands-on Learning

Community

Inclusion

2020-2023 Strategic Focus

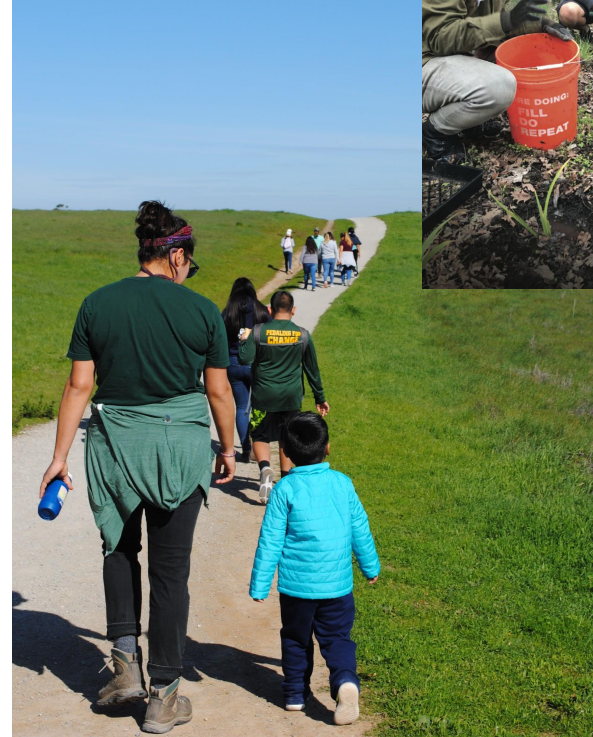
Steward Engagement



Our Compass

Grassroots Ecology's Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

All people have the right and responsibility to be stewards of their local lands, waters, and communities. We recognize that historical oppression and ongoing social injustice impact all aspects of our lives, including access to the outdoors and meaningful engagement with nature. Grassroots Ecology is committed to our role in addressing the barriers and inequities that exclude people from environmental activities.



Strategic Focus

A Steward is someone who learns about, cares for, protects, or advocates for nature.

The strategic focus of this plan is increasing the quality and depth of a person's steward engagement. We believe that our most significant long-term impact is to inspire people to become stewards of nature beyond their work with us and that building human capacity is the most effective way to create healthy local ecosystems.



Our goal is to increase opportunities for Invested Stewards in order to encourage people along the steward path.

Guided By Grassroots Ecology

Seeds



Participating Stewards

- Drop in volunteer workdays
- Field trips
- Classroom presentations
- Donors

Roots



Invested Stewards

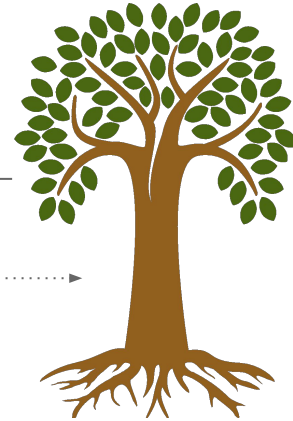
- Long term volunteers/
- Super Stewards
- Youth Stewards and College Interns
- California Naturalists
- Plant sales
- Repeat donors

Beyond Grassroots Ecology

New Sprouts

Influencing Stewards

- Educating others
- Self-organized stewardship
- Choosing an environmental career
- Voting
- Advocacy
- Donor advocates
- Nonprofit board members



Programs

Vision: We have strengthened the depth of engagement of our stewards, increased our reach in the community, and improved local ecosystem health.

Goal A: Implement strategies that double the number of “Invested” stewards.

Goal B: Engage new audiences for “Participating” steward opportunities.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Vision: We are engaging and sustaining a more socially diverse stewardship community.

Goal A: Create and implement a DEI Plan to increase the cultural relevancy of our programs and our organization, and to increase stewardship opportunities for those that might not otherwise have them.

Fund Development, Marketing, and Communications

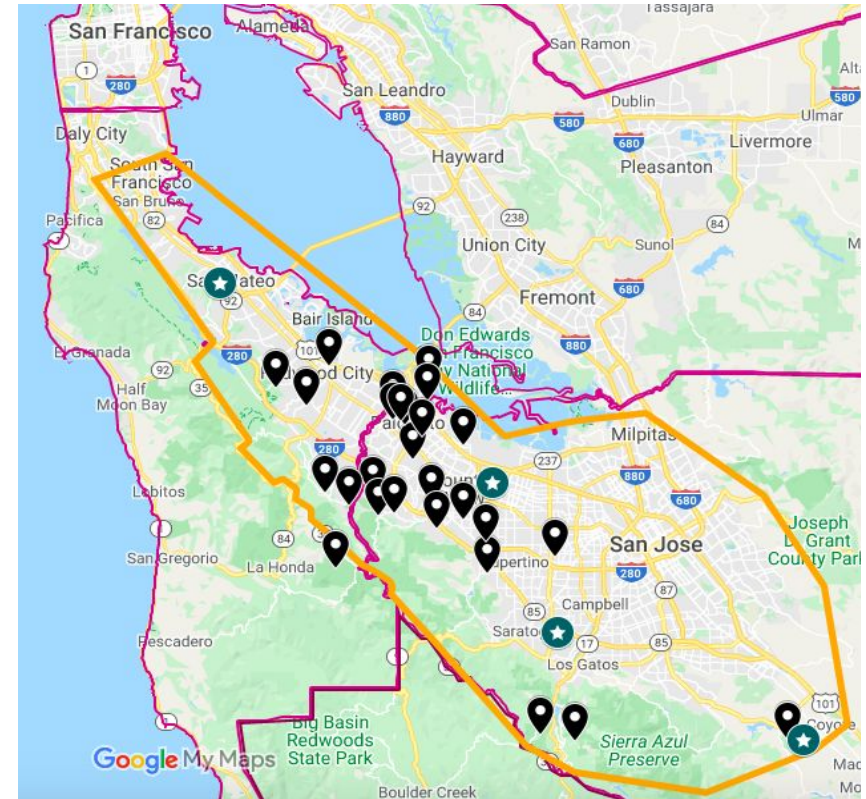
Vision: We have the funding and engagement levels needed to achieve our program goals.

Goal A: Increase unrestricted funding by 20%.

Goal B: Develop targeted marketing campaigns for DEI, Steward, volunteer-donor conversion, and launching new regions across target communities

Programs are currently concentrated in Southern San Mateo and Northern Santa Clara Counties.

- Mountain View/ Sunnyvale/Alviso
- Coyote Valley/South San Jose
- Los Gatos/Saratoga
- North San Mateo County



3-Year Implementation Plan A

Attachment 1

Goal	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1A. Implement strategies that double the number of “Invested” stewards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Pilot Naturalist Network elements -Pilot new Community Science components at current sites -Expand interns to high school students -Develop Super Stewards plan -More targeted marketing & comms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Launch Super Stewards program -Expand Community Science Program’s reach through new initiatives or new locations -Expand nursery volunteer opportunities -Pilot expansion in college intern programs (year-round, more students, new grads) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create advanced steward tracking and recognition (CRM) -Collect steward feedback -Establish alumni network
1B. Engage new audiences for “Participating” steward opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hold at least 2 volunteer/naturalist events that engage new audiences -Write at least two new partners into grant proposals -DEI-targeted marketing & comms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hold at least 4 events that engage new audiences -Expand to 1 new geographic area, incl strong community marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hold at least 8 events that engage new audiences -Expand to second new geographic area
2A. Create and implement a DEI Plan to increase cultural relevancy and stewardship opportunities for those that might not otherwise have them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create DEI Plan -Continue to invest in staff time for training -Create targeted outreach plan for new board and staff members -Improve outreach/marketing to target communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Implement at least 2 strategies from DEI plan -Increase investment in communities with less access to 30% of total budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Implement at least 4 strategies from DEI plan -increase investment in communities with less access to 35% of total budget -One new geographic area increases underserved access
3A. Increase unrestricted revenue by 20%.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Form board development committee -Create development plan for major donors, including targeted donor conversions from volunteers/parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create comprehensive development plan for fy22 -Increase foundation and corporate grant requests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create development plan for fy23 -Hold fundraising event -2 full-time resources dedicated to individuals, foundation and corporate giving
3B. Develop targeted marketing campaigns for DEI, Steward, volunteer-donor conversion, and launching new regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop marketing committee and plan -Develop campaigns to promote evolving programs, esp to DEI communities -Increase communication of program stories to support fundraising goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop outreach/marketing to attract more invested stewards -Increase diversity of outreach through partnerships with other orgs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Full-time resource dedicated to marketing and communications -Develop true “nurture campaigns” for communications targeted at each volunteer and donor group

3-Year Implementation Plan B

Attachment 1

Goal	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1A. Implement strategies that double the number of “Invested” stewards.	-Expand intern program to high school students -Develop Super Stewards plan	-Launch Super Stewards program -Expand nursery volunteer opportunities	-Expand Community Science Program's reach through new initiatives or new locations
1B. Engage new audiences for “Participating” steward opportunities	-Hold at least 2 workdays/ nature walks that bring in new groups of people	-Hold at least 4 events that bring in new groups of people -Write at least two new partners into grant proposals	-Hold at least 6 events that bring in new groups of people
2A. Create and implement a DEI Plan to increase cultural relevancy and stewardship opportunities for those that might not otherwise have them.	-Create DEI Plan	-Implement at least 2 strategies from DEI plan	-Implement at least 4 strategies from DEI plan
3A. Increase unrestricted revenue by 10%	-Form board development committee -Create development plan for fy21 with focus on major donors	-Requalify major donors and foundations -Create development plan for fy22	-Create development plan for fy23 -Increase foundation and corporate grant requests -1 full-time resource dedicated to individuals, foundation and corporate giving
3B. Develop targeted marketing campaigns for DEI, Steward, volunteer-donor conversion, and launching new regions	-Develop marketing committee and plan -Develop campaigns to promote evolving programs, esp to DEI communities -Increase communication of program stories to support fundraising goal	-Develop outreach/marketing to attract more invested stewards -Increase diversity of outreach through partnerships with other orgs	-Part-time resource dedicated to marketing and communications

Grassroots Ecology 2020-23 Strategic Plan Summary

Attachment 1

OUR COMPASS

Strategic Focus

Steward Engagement

Mission Statement

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Values

Stewardship, Hands-on Learning, Community, Inclusion

DEI Statement

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OUR ACTIONS

Programs

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