



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

March 7, 2023
Board Meeting 23-07

SPECIAL MEETING

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

The Board of Directors conducted this meeting in accordance with California Government Code section 54953(e) and Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Resolution 21-33.

DRAFT MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

President Kishimoto called the special meeting of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to order at 9:31 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Jed Cyr, Craig Gleason, Karen Holman, Zoe Kersteen-Tucker, Yoriko Kishimoto, Margaret McNiven, and Curt Riffle

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: General Manager Ana Ruiz, General Counsel Hilary Stevenson, Assistant General Manager Brian Malone, Assistant General Manager Susanna Chan, Chief Financial Officer/Director of Administrative Services Stefan Jaskulak, District Clerk/Assistant to the General Manager Maria Soria, Budget & Analysis Manager Rafaela Duran, Engineering and Construction Manager Jason Lin, Finance Manager Andrew Taylor, Human Resources Manager Candice Basnight, Information Services & Technology Manager Casey Hiatt, Land & Facilities Manager Brandon Stewart, Natural Resources Manager Kirk Lenington, Planning Manager Jane Mark, Public Affairs Manager Kori Skinner, Real Property Manager Mike Williams, Senior Real Property Agent Allen Ishibashi, Acting Visitor Services Chris Barresi, Management Analyst I Jordan McDaniel, Management Analyst I Lupe Hernandez

President Kishimoto announced the meeting is being held in person at the District's Administrative Office, and by teleconference pursuant to Government Code Section 54953(e). Members of the public can attend and participate in the meeting in person or via Zoom. Instructions for submitting public comments are available on the meeting agenda.

President Kishimoto shared her deepest sympathies to the family of the victim of the tragic event that occurred on March 5 at Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve and thanked District staff and first responders who responded to the situation.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion: Director Riffle moved, and Director MacNiven seconded the motion to adopt the agenda.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 7-0-0

BOARD BUSINESS

1. Fiscal Year 2023-24 through Fiscal Year 2025-26 Capital Improvement and Action Plan Review (R-22-37)

General Manager Ana Ruiz provided opening comments summarizing the agenda topics for the retreat that informs the Board’s review of the proposed priority projects for the upcoming fiscal year and review of the proposed new three-year capital improvement and action plan (CIAP).

Chief Financial Officer/Director of Administrative Services Stefan Jaskulak reviewed the budget planning cycle, described the preliminary fiscal year 2024 (FY24) budget, including the MAA preliminary budget by program for FY24-FY26, reviewed the annual Measure AA expenses trend, the annual Measure AA Budget and Actuals, recapped the December 6, 2022 Board retreat, including the approved updates to the Strategic Goals and Objectives, and progress made to date on Measure AA commitments.

Director Riffle inquired how the funding for potential land acquisitions are noted.

Mr. Jaskulak stated that funds are not included in the budget if the closing date is unknown or if the Board has not approved the acquisition. Once an acquisition is approved by the Board, a resolution is included that amends the budget and increases the appropriation of the funds for an acquisition.

President Kishimoto commented on the high inflation noting that since 2014, actual inflation-adjusted dollars have decreased and are getting smaller.

Mr. Jaskulak agreed and pointed out that the District is succeeding greatly in obtaining grants to augment funding and generate interest income from the bond proceeds as they wait to be spent.

Director Holman requested and received information on the anticipated revenue of the District’s new administrative building and inquired if that funding source should be captured in the budget.

Mr. Jaskulak indicated that it is captured in the General Fund revenue.

Director Gleason commented that over the past five years, operating expenses have remained consistent at 90% of target and capital expenses at 80% of target. He asked if any adjustments will be made or if this trend is expected to continue and if it is effective going forward.

Mr. Jaskulak stated that remaining in the 90% operating side range is fine and that staff does budget conservatively. Furthermore, staffing is budgeted as if there are no vacancies. In June, staff presents to the Board the projection of salary and benefits savings, and those savings are then placed into a 115 Trust that augments the unfunded liability with CalPERS pensions. On the capital expenses, the projects that staff brings forward are matched to the available staff capacity. At times, projects may be delayed for unforeseen circumstances or due to new vacancies.

Director Gleason suggested considering ways to adjust the budget to avoid a consistent shortfall.

Director Riffle mentioned there was an exercise that the Board conducted at the February 16, 2023 Board workshop to review the Basic Policy and rank their priorities of the various elements of the mission. The outcome of the ranking was as follows: (1) preserve and protect, (2) resource protection, and (3) public access, enjoyment, and education, with the overarching goal of striking a balance between the three. Director Riffle inquired if the Board agreed with his key takeaway from that discussion, and if not, now would be a great opportunity to be in alignment because that overlay is important as the Board reviews the CIAP.

Assistant General Manager Brian Malone discussed the development of the FY24-FY26 CIAP and reviewed the grant and partnership funding for FY24 of over \$5M.

Director Kersteen-Tucker requested and received information on how staff is tracking capacity gaps to complete work and inform the FOSM process to build staff capacity.

Director Holman commented that the Board had recently been given an update on the second-year Human-Mountain Lion Interaction Study and there was discussion on trail planning and fire breaks, because they may disrupt mountain lion patterns. She inquired if it is possible to anticipate that public access projects may need to be reconsidered, redesigned, or take longer.

General Manager Ruiz stated that the study is in year two of a five-year study timeframe and at this point it is too early to make findings or conclusions.

Mr. Malone stated there are four programs in the CIAP that he and Assistant General Manager Susanna Chan will be presenting, highlighting specific projects within the programs. In addition, there are projects listed under Areas of Interest that focus on agriculture, diversity, fire prevention that will also be highlighted. Mr. Malone introduced Assistant General Manager Chan to review the first two programs.

Ms. Chan reviewed 10 projects in the land acquisition and preservation program, which includes one new project and nine continuing projects. The budget request for FY24 is \$3.6M and includes purchase of the Eberhard property that is expected to close in FY24.

President Kishimoto requested a map of El Mirador Land Conservation and Quint Trail Easement.

Ms. Chan stated she would provide the map to the Board.

Public comments opened at 10:53 a.m.

Trent Poltronetti acknowledged the Board for their work, and the great job of navigating many conflicting goals and interests. Mr. Poltronetti shared his thoughts about Measure AA and commented the results appear to be lagging particularly in terms of trails and access. His observation has been that trails have primarily been constructed on gravel roads and personally believes that hiking and bike trails are more crucial. Furthermore, he inquired if the District has divested any properties that were not in line with their views or goals and lastly, encourages staff to work with county parks to work on regional coordination.

Public comment closed at 10:55 a.m.

Mr. Malone reviewed projects associated with the natural resource protection and restoration program that includes ten new projects and thirty continuing projects of which many are multi-year projects, including policy review and development, and reviewed various agricultural projects.

Director Gleason inquired if the Science Advisory Panel has a list of projects that the Board has already reviewed and prioritized.

Mr. Malone stated there is a list of projects that the Board discussed and prioritized, but staff does not just work from that list; when staff or the Board identify new issues, the list is presented to the Board for review.

Mr. Malone continued to review the wildlife program that includes the aquatic habitat assessment, mountain lion conservation research, Santa Cruz kangaroo rat habitat and population management project, Highway 17 wildlife crossing, and the Alma bridge road wildlife passage, and reviewed the restoration and remediation projects, and fire prevention projects.

Director Kersteen-Tucker suggested that the Board take a tour of the Cloverdale Ranch property.

Mr. Malone stated he would arrange a tour sometime in late spring or early summer once the land dries after all the rain.

Public comments opened at 12:00 p.m.

Daniel Olstein, Director of Land Stewardship with Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) expressed POST's appreciation for the District's strong partnership and regional leadership and collaboration with the Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network. He noted the coordination and collaboration work between the two entities to protect open space across the region, participate in regional trail planning, protect natural resources, expand public access, and ensure a sustainable future for agriculture.

Public comments closed at 12:33 p.m.

The Board recessed at 12:03 p.m. and reconvened at 12:33 p.m. with all Directors present.

Ms. Chan presented on the public access, education, and outreach program. The program has thirty-six projects, including nine new projects and twenty-seven continuing projects. Ms. Chan highlighted projects that support the regional trail efforts and projects that expand public access in the District preserves.

Director Riffle expressed his disappointment that in the current CIAP the work on the La Honda Creek central area is not progressing faster and stated this preserve has been in a planning phase for a long time.

Director Holman suggested using tinted permeable concrete in parking lots and inquired if funds were already built into the budget.

Ms. Chan stated that staff is looking into a more long-term maintenance for parking areas and are considering a more permanent surface to reduce long-term maintenance. The tradeoff is that it is more expensive for the upfront installation and staff is looking at feasible options.

General Manager Ruiz stated that when staff is ready to present parking area options, the permeable concrete will have certain upfront costs and downstream costs that the Board would need to consider as compared to other options.

Director Holman suggested also looking at the broad range of considerations on climate impacts such as creation, manufacture, and transport of concrete.

Director Holman commented that she believes that the Fremont Older house is considered a historic structure, but it is not mentioned in the CIAP and hopes that is taken into consideration. In addition to the roof, she suggested the house may also need repair work.

Planning Manager Jane Mark confirmed that the Fremont Older house is designated as a National Historic Resource and staff is working on securing a historic consultant to assist in preparing a DPR 523 historic documentation form for the house.

Ms. Chan continued with her presentation with projects that expand public access at District preserves and highlighted projects in the La Honda Creek and Bear Creek Redwoods preserves.

Director Riffle expressed his concern about the south parking area at La Honda and stated that commitments were made to the public on the use of the Event Center and feels that those commitments may be straying away. He requested that the Board have an opportunity to discuss the Event Center before staff spends a lot of time looking at parking areas.

Director Kersteen-Tucker agreed with Director Riffle and stated that there are a number of policy issues pertaining to this area and the Board should have the opportunity to weigh-in.

Director Gleason inquired about the La Honda Creek trail system and when the Board could weigh-in on items such as user experience, trail surfaces, and trail widths.

Mr. Malone stated that the current development of trails connecting the upper and lower area is based on the Master Plan trails alignments that the Board has already approved.

Ms. Chan continued with her presentation and reviewed the public access, education and outreach projects that include the Rancho San Antonio Preserve and Purisima Preserve multimodal access studies and implementation actions. Ms. Chan also reviewed a map that provides a summary of the miles of trails that have been complete since 2014 when Measure AA

was approved, along with trails that are under construction for FY24-26 and trails that are in planning, scoping, or permitting for FY24-26.

President Kishimoto suggested that the trails maps should be incorporated into the Measure AA information on the District's website.

General Manager Ruiz confirmed that the maps will be added.

Public comments opened at 1:03 p.m.

Ms. Soria reported there are no public comments.

Public comments closed at 1:03 p.m.

President Kishimoto inquired whether the Board was interested in holding a Board workshop on trails due to the amount of public interest.

Director Gleason commented he would be interested in a workshop and expressed his concern that there has been a lot of communication on Measure AA that would add 200 miles of trails to the trail system. He believes there is a shortfall relative to where the District needs to be in order to complete the trail miles. His other concern is about the user experience and suggested that when there are roads in the system, it works against the usability of the system and the user experience.

Mr. Malone reviewed the FY24 assets and organizational support projects, an additional nine projects have been added and twenty-three projects are continuing. Mr. Malone highlighted projects under this program.

Director Riffle commented that in the past there was a one-page chart that listed all the projects broken down by the goals and objectives.

Mr. Malone stated that the chart was not prepared this time but will be available during the budget process.

President Kishimoto summarized the topics that were suggested by the board that include a tour of Cloverdale Ranch, and a Board discussion on the Event Center, and again inquired if the Board was interested in having a general workshop on trails.

Mr. Malone stated that the District has a robust trail planning process and could bring it forth to the Board to review its trails standards.

President Kishimoto proposed that staff summarize the trail planning and design process and review the guiding principles that inform this work.

Mr. Malone confirmed whether a majority of the Board was interested in receiving such an update.

Director Kersteen-Tucker stated she did not want to micromanage staff on how to build trails and that staff are experts. However, she remains interested in trails and in receiving trail updates, which are provided throughout the year, and feels very well appraised on trails.

Director MacNiven agreed that the Board should not micromanage staff on how to build trails.

President Kishimoto stated that she is interested in reviewing existing guidelines and seeing if there is a need for any changes. In addition, the Board will also have a discussion on the Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve multi-use trail and will be making a policy decision for this trail during the year.

Director Cyr commented that a review of what staff considers when making trail design/construction choices would be helpful for the Board if it is relatively brief and kept at a higher level.

Director Riffle commented that the Board has seen several public comments using the same script about delivering 200 miles of trails and believes it is an unfair metric given that the District is only a third of the way through Measure AA and suggested a better metric is what staff is using. There are 25 Measure AA project portfolios, and the District is doing its best to implement all of these projects, some of which involve trails and others that involve buying land and adding new parking areas.

Mr. Malone stated that staff annually reviews the actual language that was provided to the voters to track the ongoing accomplishments and project milestones, many of which involve trails.

Director Riffle commented on the proposed trail workshop stating it can serve as added education. At this point, he does not see a problem with the level of trail work accomplished so far. Furthermore, he asked if this was the best use of staff's time. In addition, he acknowledged that some of the Directors have agreed to hold the workshop if it can be done with low staff investment from an educational point of view.

Mr. Malone stated that the workshop can be structured as an informational session on the Trail Use Policies and Standards. However, if there is a desire to change the policies, this would constitute a much larger staff effort to prepare new draft policy language and require extensive public outreach and review. This level of effort would require a reevaluation of the CIAP to see what project(s) may need to be deferred to accommodate this type of effort.

Public comments opened at 1:37 p.m.

Ms. Soria reported there are no public comments.

Public comments closed at 1:37p.m.

Motion: Director Cyr moved, and Director Riffle seconded the motion to affirm the proposed Fiscal Year 2023-24 through Fiscal Year 2025-26 Capital Improvement and Action Plan.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 7-0-0

President Kishimoto commended staff for a great presentation.

Mr. Malone stated he wanted to confirm three items he heard from the Board beyond the adoption of the CIAP, which it to schedule a tour of the Cloverdale Ranch property, return to the Board in

the next fiscal year with a presentation on the Trail Use Policies that guides the trail planning process, and lastly to return to the Board to review the options for parking in the Lower La Honda Event Center property and across the highway.

President Kishimoto confirmed the three items.

ADJOURNMENT

President Kishimoto adjourned the special meeting of the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District at 2:08 p.m.

Maria Soria, MMC
District Clerk