



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-26-55
Meeting 26-12
April 22, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 9

AGENDA ITEM

Public Affairs Annual Update

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

Receive a Public Affairs informational update on fiscal year and calendar year 2025 activities. No formal action is required.

SUMMARY

Public Affairs made significant strides in advancing the agency's communications and governmental affairs initiatives over the past year, growing its total reach of digital and print communication channels in Fiscal Year 2024-25 (FY25) to 5.5 million—a 2 million increase from FY24 largely driven by the development and implementation of the updated social media strategic plan. Additional key accomplishments in 2025 include the following:

- Opening of the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve Phase II Trails;
- Delivering a comprehensive Wildfire Resiliency Campaign;
- Increasing in-person events and the deployment of new interactive engagement tools through the expansion of the outreach team;
- Onboarding a new governmental affairs specialist to strengthen local and regional relationships; and
- Passing District-sponsored legislation on environmentally sensitive vegetation management to help balance wildfire risk reduction with biodiversity and ecological resilience.

Public Affairs also supported the over 130 Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP) projects and provided Public Affairs coverage to a variety of District programs and to all District preserves.

DISCUSSION

Public Affairs Report 2025

In 2025, Public Affairs progressed its strategic communications work across its various streams and successfully advanced policy advocacy efforts through the governmental affairs program.

Governmental Affairs

The 2025 Legislative Program had an impactful year with the passage of District-sponsored SB 653 (Cortese), creating a statutory definition for environmentally sensitive vegetation management (ESVM) that includes specific measures to enhance biodiversity, while reducing overall fuel loads in a manner that provides sustainable benefits. The passage of SB 653 sets the

table for discussions with funding organizations to utilize this definition when determining how to structure grant programs to consider prioritizing/allocating funding for ESVM work and/or when scoring grant proposals to determine grant awards.

Four out of five (80%) of the Legislative Program's Priority 1 bills were signed into law by the Governor. The District provided primary testimony for SB 653, as well as for AB 902 (Schultz), a bill to integrate habitat connectivity into regional transportation projects. Other successful Priority 1 bills provided new sources of conservation funding and addressed coastal resilience and modernization of the District's enabling code.

Strengthening relationships with the District's delegation and government partners remained a central focus, with the Governmental Affairs Program engaging 80% of partners at the federal, state, county, city and community council level in 2025. Docent-led community "Walk and Talks" were held with California State Senator Marc Berman at Cloverdale Ranch Open Space Preserve and two walks were held with Santa Clara Supervisor Margaret Abe-Koga; one at Monte Bello Open Space Preserve and the other at Picchetti Ranch Open Space Preserve. Government Affairs also hosted a Highway 17 Crossings Project tour for Assemblymember Gail Pellerin and a Purisima-to-the-Sea tour for Assemblymember Marc Berman and Congressman Sam Liccardo.

In late 2025, a new governmental affairs specialist was hired to further advance local and regional relationships. This position is a key component of ensuring long-term stability and effectiveness for the Governmental Affairs Program, as the District and its projects continue to grow, and the funding landscape evolves.

Marketing

The quarterly print newsletter, *Views*, continues to be a valued resource. With 12,000 subscribers in 2025, this quality publication has a dedicated audience. *Views* is supplemented by the monthly electronic newsletter *Plug Into Nature*, which has 28,000 subscribers. The latter underwent a strategic refresh in 2025, resulting in balanced content that reflects all branches of the District's mission. The visual style and structure of the electronic newsletter was also updated to better suit modern design standards and improve the reporting accuracy of several metrics, including the number of opens and clicks an issue receives.

Public Affairs also revised a number of existing brochures in 2025, including the General Overview brochure in Chinese and Spanish, and the Ranger Recruitment brochure, to ensure they reflect current information and messaging. New informational materials like the Seasonal Ranger Aide Recruitment and Snakes in Open Space brochures were also developed.

Beyond these items, Public Affairs undertook a major production effort redeveloping new trail map brochures for each of the District's 25 publicly open preserves. A number of years ago, Public Affairs attempted to transition away from printed preserve maps and only promote digital alternatives; however, during the pandemic when open space activity surged, it became evident the public still valued paper maps; thus, a temporary map handout was distributed. With the update, the new map brochures highlight unique trails and experiences available at each location, promote the Trail Explorer App, reflect the District's style and branding, and include the District's regional map and mission. These comprehensive map brochures are now available at the trailhead signboards of each preserve and at the Administrative Office.

In addition to brochures, the *Preserve Guide* continues to generate significant public interest, as it showcases the full range of District open space offerings, with the inclusion of history, flora and fauna and preserve highlights. Since its debut in 2024, the guide has reached a broad audience with approximately 15,000 copies distributed and over 1,000 webpage views, reinforcing the District's brand and reach.

Media Relations

Throughout 2025, staff sent 19 press releases/direct pitches to reporters, resulting in 60 stories ranging from online, print, television and radio pieces. Media outreach efforts resulted in at least one story per pitch, achieving a 100% placement rate, with many generating multiple stories across outlets.

Public Affairs also worked to cultivate relationships with various media outlets and specific reporters targeted across an array of hyperlocal, local and regional outlets. Staff also were attentive and responsive to media inquiries on stories not pitched, but that arose organically, including the mountain lion cubs rescued in Portola Valley, the fire in Monte Bello and hiking recommendations.

Outreach

Following Board approval last year, a full-time Public Affairs specialist who is focused on outreach was hired, strengthening community engagement and expanding in-person tablings to 52 key public events, reaching approximately 10,000 people in 2025. This significant increase from 2024 included 21% of events specifically focused on the Coastside and 13% focused on underserved communities. The trend in the number of people attending in-person events post-pandemic continued, with the average number of people contacted per event increasing from approximately 115 per event in 2024 to approximately 190 per event in 2025.

Outreach and tabling events frequently serve as the public's first point of contact with the District. Based on the outreach team's observations, more than half of individuals who engage at these events report that they had not previously heard of the District. The specialist also created new, compelling engagement tools that served as major draws, bringing people to the booth and prompting deeper engagement. These in-person events provide opportunities for face-to-face interaction with communities, raising awareness of the District and allowing for meaningful conversation and direct feedback.

Beyond expanding tabling events and tools, the addition of the new specialist allowed for the team to bolster its strategic outreach abilities, resulting in the development of two new, Board-supported initiatives:

- *Signature Event*: An event to engage new audiences, foster stronger community ties, align the District with peer agencies and help position the District as a regional leader in conservation and education. The conceptual plan for the event includes a rich blend of interactive, educational and community-centered experiences proven to be valuable in engaging the public. The Signature Event will be hosted by the District in 2027 and will focus on District priorities.
- *Outdoor Explorer*: A movable interpretive center and mobile gateway to nature, that will bring open space resources to underserved and remote communities. It will be a rolling ambassador for the District, offering a welcoming and informative experience at festivals, schools, community events and more.

Public Affairs also oversees the general email inbox, info@openspace.org, which serves as a direct communication channel for addressing public inquiries, feedback and concerns. In FY25, Public Affairs handled over 660 info@ inquiries with 87% responded to and resolved within two business days. Between August and November, the department experienced staffing changes prior to the administrative assistant role being filled in November, affecting time-to-close rates compared to FY24.

Partnerships









The Board of Directors set a goal of expanding educational programs to reach underserved communities, recognizing the importance of engaging youth, families, seniors and historically underserved groups. The Public Affairs Partnership Program provides opportunities to engage surrounding communities through educational and enriching outings and events provided by our community-based partners with support from the District.

The Partnership Program is designed for the organic building of relationships with local community organizations to bring their constituents onto District lands and is broken into three tiers of partnership.

- Pilot: establishes pilot partnerships every fiscal year with a stipend of \$2,500 per partnership intended for one pilot event each at District preserves, planned by the community partner with light guidance assistance from District staff. A majority of the pilots have used the stipend for transportation, equipment, food, marketing and chaperone costs. This phase is crucial for developing new relationships and strengthening our place in the surrounding community. By starting small, the program can identify which partnerships are most effective, have the potential for growth and serve new constituencies through other outreach methods.
- Tier 2: expands on relationships with successful pilots, through a second, deeper tier of collaboration based on a combination of interest and availability from the community partner with a budget between \$5,000 and \$20,000 per partnership. Tier 2 involves formal contracts and sets outreach goals and deliverables for the community partner, solidifying the District's place as a community collaborator and teammate for investing in the sustainability of partner organizations and their benefits to District communities.
- Tier 3: involves a multi-year commitment and increased funding support, establishing deeper collaborative relationships with community partners. This partnership includes expanded community outreach, mutual content creation, speaking engagement opportunities and establishes the District as key community partner.

Through the Partnership Program, the District collaborates with diverse partners, providing the extra boost needed to support their work in connecting people to the outdoors. The Partnership Program addresses barriers such as transportation, language, safety, knowledge about outdoor recreation, and other concerns to bring comfort and ease for individuals unfamiliar with outdoor recreation and enjoyment. Supported community partners foster dialogue and create opportunities to bridge gaps in understanding and ensure that a wider range of community members have the opportunity to enjoy their public open space lands.

Participating partners in 2025 included the following:

Partners		Tier	Annual Level	Events	Demographics Served
 Latino Outdoors 2015		3	\$44,000	8 community hikes 1 virtual program	Latino families, youth, seniors and particularly new preserve users
 Bay Area Older Adults 2019		2	\$15,000	6 community hikes	Seniors with financial, physical and educational barriers
 Saved by Nature 2023		2	\$16,000	6 community hikes	All Bay Area residents but especially communities who have been historically underfunded
 Branching Out Fall 2024		2	\$10,000	5 community hikes	LGBTQIA+
 Boys and Girls Club of the Coastsides Spring 2024		2	\$7,500	3 community hikes	Coastside youth and young adult
 Student Conservation Association Summer 2024		2	\$6,000	2 week-long field project	Youth and young adult conservation career seekers
 Vista Center Summer 2024		2	\$8,000	4 community hikes	Blind and visually impaired peoples
 Loma Mar Outpost Spring 2026		1	\$2,500	1 pilot presentation	Coastside families, youth, seniors

Social Media

Due to the ever evolving nature of social media as a communications channel, the District’s social media strategic plan was revised during the fall of FY25. After analyzing the different platforms, Public Affairs determined that platform-specific goals, strategies and success metrics—rather than a generic approach to all social media—would best strengthen the District’s overall social media impact.

To enable Public Affairs to reach new audiences, an Instagram-specific strategy was implemented with the objective of increasing Instagram reel production. In addition, staff focused on creating relevant content with a tone more suited to Instagram’s humorous and casual atmosphere, resulting in several viral posts over the course of the year that have substantially increased the reach.

On LinkedIn, Public Affairs pivoted to creating content specialized for the career-oriented platform that represents the District as an innovative leader and employer in the conservation field. Staff produced posts highlighting organizational accomplishments, key project milestones and career opportunities.

Implementation of these platform-specific strategies resulted in the following changes in 2025:

- Instagram reels: 42 created and posted
- Instagram impressions: 550% increase
- Instagram followers: 45% increase
- LinkedIn posts: 99 created and posted
- LinkedIn engagement: 8% increase (despite posting less frequently than in 2024)

Wildfire Resiliency Campaign

In 2025, Public Affairs launched a Wildfire Resiliency Communications Campaign to proactively showcase the District’s wildland fire-related environmental land stewardship, integrating ongoing editorial content with other initiatives across departments, generating new stories, pitches and posts. The focused effort elevated the District’s work and contributed to the

strong overall media performance of the department, which provided collateral for mailings, tablings and event interactions.

Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP) and Special Projects

In addition to its core work, Public Affairs also supported 100+ CIAP projects, as well as special projects, events, and focus areas such as the District's coastal mission. This portfolio encompasses a remarkably broad range of initiatives, and its expansive scope necessitates deep expertise in navigating complex issues and diverse community interests.

Within the CIAP umbrella, Public Affairs oversaw the communications highlighting the six miles of new trail opening at La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve in early November 2025. While a planned in-person ribbon-cutting event was unfortunately rained out, the trails were well received by the public as the result of earned media stories in regional and local outlets, including the San Francisco Chronicle, SFGate, Coastside News and the Almanac. Staff also communicated about the new trails through District channels, including Enews and Views stories and a month-long social media campaign. A scaled-down in-person event at the Preserve was held in February 2026, to commemorate the trail opening with neighbors with light refreshments, information-sharing and a docent-led hike.

Other major projects with considerable Public and Governmental Affairs involvement included the Good Neighbor Policy update, Highway 17 Crossings Project, GM Authority Legislation and the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Access projects. In addition, the department managed special events such as the Herb Grench remembrance event on April 25, 2025, the Lennie Roberts Trail Dedication on September 9, 2025 and the Jay Thorwaldson remembrance event on October 24, 2025. Public Affairs also coordinated the memorial bench installation for long time volunteers, Tommi and Strether Smith, with a dedication ceremony led by Visitor Services on April 16, 2025 accompanied by family and friends.

Beyond the planned project and event work, Public Affairs also handles communications for high-impact, unplanned events, which often demand quick mobilization and considerable staff time to ensure effective responses. To enable more timely and clear communication, the department engaged in proactive preparation of key topics like natural events to better and quickly respond under these circumstances.

Overall, Public Affairs played a critical role in addressing the District's multi-faceted needs in 2025. This comprehensive coverage is essential for the overall success and sustainability of the District.

Public Affairs Strategic Plan

In 2019, Public Affairs created a strategic communications plan to provide an organizational roadmap for District communications over the next three years. Building upon that solid foundation, a FY25-26 update was created to serve as a transitional bridge, ensuring continued alignment with District goals and objectives.

A comprehensive process to develop a refreshed strategic communications plan that could serve the District from FY27 through another three to five years is underway. The effort kicked off in 2026, with Civic Edge Consulting selected to lead the process.

FISCAL IMPACT

The annual update has no direct fiscal impact. The [Open Space Explorer](#) and [Signature Event](#) are FY27 activities that were brought before the Board on November 12, 2025 and February 11, 2026, respectively. The budget for these two activities is included in the upcoming FY27 Budget and Action Plan for Board review and approval.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

None, this report is brought to the full Board on an annual basis.

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

Staff will return in spring 2027 with a Public Affairs update summarizing annual activities.

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