



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-13-79  
Meeting 13-20  
August 28, 2013

## AGENDA ITEM 9

### AGENDA ITEM

Budget Guidelines for Board Conference Attendance

### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Approve revisions to Board Policy, "Budget Guidelines for Board Conference Attendance," adjusting the amount of funds budgeted annually for Board Members to attend conferences and trainings related to District business.

### SUMMARY

On March 22, 2000, the Board adopted the policy "Budget Guidelines for Board Conference Attendance" to establish funding levels and guidelines for Board Members' attendance at professional conferences and trainings related to District business. As part of the approval of the FY2005-06 budget recommendations, the Board adopted a minor amendment to the policy on March 23, 2005. The current funding levels are low compared to the conference and training funding levels provided for elected officials in local government in the region. To increase opportunities for Board Members to attend conferences and trainings in order to keep current on best practices related to District business, staff recommends increasing the amount of funds budgeted from \$1,200 per Board Member per four-year term, to \$1,000 per Board Member per fiscal year. In addition, staff recommends the following: the cost of "essential trainings" be funded separately from the above funding allotment, the \$3,000 per fiscal year continue to remain available for specific conferences for the Board President and/or other designated Board Member, and other clarifying language be added to the policy.

### DISCUSSION

Funding levels and guidelines for Board Member attendance at conferences and trainings have not been reviewed since 2005. Review of this policy is the first in a series of Board policy reviews that the General Manager's Office intends to conduct and bring forth to the Board, and designated Board Committees as necessary, to update administrative policies and practices.

The current policy (Attachment 1) provides \$1,200 per Board Member per four-year term, plus an additional \$3,000 per year for the Board President and/or other designated Board Member to attend specific conferences. However, registration for many conferences can cost at least \$500. Travel and lodging, if outside the region (yet within California), can cost more than \$800 for a three-day conference. This cost can be greater for out of state conferences, when out-of-state

travel is warranted. Therefore, one conference in four years could easily exceed a Board Member's budget for training, conference, and travel for their entire term.

The current policy's funding levels for training, conference, and travel for elected officials are low for the region. A survey of cities in Santa Clara County, with responses received from six cities, reveals funding levels ranging from an average of \$1,444 to \$7,857 per Council member per fiscal year. This average includes additional funding often allotted to the Mayor or for collective pooled usage. The average funding level under the District's current policy is \$729 per year, which is approximately half of the lowest of the surveyed cities. Under the recommended policy revisions, the annual funding level for the Board would average \$1,714. Although this funding level is on the lower end of best practices from neighboring cities, it is a significant increase over the current funding levels and would appropriately enhance Board Members' ability to attend important trainings and conferences on an annual basis in order to benefit the business and public outreach of the District.

The main recommended policy changes include:

- Increase the "General" category of funding from \$1,200 per Board Member per four-year term to \$1,000 per fiscal year per Board member.
- Continue the \$3,000 per fiscal year "Specific" category of funding available to the President and/or other designated Board Member, but broaden the definition of "specific" conference or training beyond the Special Park District Forum or the California Special District Association; although these two events remain as important and beneficial specific events, there may be other events that would be equally or more important to attend in any given year.
- Add an "Essential Training" category intended to fund trainings that are highly recommended for elected officials related to executing the official duties of an elected office. California Special District Association trainings may fall into this category, as may other statewide trainings.
- To ensure transparency to the public in usage of conference funding, include a requirement that attendance at conferences or trainings will be reported to the Board at an open public meeting in advance of attendance, and continue the requirement of a summary of the conference being reported out to the Board following attendance.
- Clarify that it is not the intention of the Policy to pro-rate funding levels, nor seek reimbursement, in the event of a newly elected Board Member or a new Member appointed to serve a portion of a term to fill a vacancy. For example, a newly elected Board Member seated in January would be eligible for \$1,000 in funding for a conference or training between January and the end of March, and then another \$1,000 beginning in April for the new fiscal year.
- Clarify that reimbursement guidelines pursuant to this policy will be in accordance with applicable State and federal laws and the detailed guidelines found in the District's Administrative Policy, "Travel, Lodging, and Meal Reimbursement."

The recommended policy revisions are shown in Attachment 2. The District's Administrative Policy on travel, lodging, and meal reimbursement is provided as Attachment 3.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

If the Board approves the recommended policy revisions, \$12,000 will be recommended in the FY 2013-14 budget for Board Member training, conference, and travel. Currently, funds are not

specifically budgeted for Board Member training, conference, and travel. Instead, reimbursements are made out of overall budget savings. The actual fiscal impact will vary from year to year depending on Board Member utilization of their allotted funding.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

The Board may wish to consider the following alternatives:

1. Approve a different (higher or lower than \$1,000 per fiscal year) amount of funding for the “general” category;
2. Do not include the “essential training” category and instead have such trainings come out of the “general” or “specific” categories;
3. Refer review of the recommended policy revisions to a Board Committee;
4. Do not make any changes to the policy at this time.

### **BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW**

This policy revision recommendation was not reviewed by Board Committee. The General Manager, in consultation with the Board President, determined full Board consideration would be appropriate as a course of action, as the policy revisions affect each Board Member.

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

### **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

This policy revision recommendation is not a project under CEQA.

### **NEXT STEPS**

If the policy recommendations are adopted by the Board, the new funding levels will become available immediately for conference and training expenses not yet incurred. In addition, each Board Member will continue to have available to them, for the remainder of this fiscal year, their balance of the existing policy’s \$1,200 per four-year term allotment. This provision is necessary to equitably handle the difference between Board Members who may have already utilized all or a portion of their \$1,200 allotment and those who have not. For the remainder of FY2013-14, budget savings will be utilized to augment the conference and training budget as necessary. Beginning in FY2014-15, the new funding levels will be budgeted.

Attachment(s)

1. Board Policy “Budget Guidelines for Board Conference Attendance”
2. Recommended revisions to Board Policy
3. Administrative Policy “Travel, Lodging, and Meal Reimbursement”

Responsible Department Head:  
Steve Abbors, General Manager

Prepared by:  
Kevin S. Woodhouse, Assistant General Manager

## **Budget Guidelines for Board Conference Attendance**

Approved by the Board March 22, 2000

Amended March 23, 2005

Objective: It is important that Board Members are afforded the opportunity to keep current on legislation, policies, practices and other matters pertinent to District business. Therefore, a modest amount of money should be budgeted each fiscal year for Board attendance at conferences and seminars directly related to open space preservation and management practices of other parks and open space agencies. Expenditure of District funds associated with such conferences and seminars shall not be directed to a political candidate, ballot measure, nor a contribution to any non-profit entity, but shall be used solely for actual and necessary conference expenses such as travel, lodging, food and registration fees.

1. Each fiscal year, a total of \$5,100 will be budgeted for Board Member attendance at conferences and seminars directly related to open space preservation and/or administration of parks and open space organizations, to be allocated as follows:
  - A. Specific: up to \$3,000 total to provide for 2 conferences at an estimated amount of \$1,500 each, as provided in Section 2 below.
  - B. General: up to \$1,200 per Board Member per four-year term, as provided in Section 3 below.
2. Attendance at a specific conference will be assigned as follows: one conference for the President, or other Board designee (ordinarily in descending order of the elected Board officers for the year), to attend the annual Special Park Districts Forum; and one California Special District Association training for a newly elected Board Member, or for a Board Member who has not attended that particular training and now desires to do so. In the event it is unnecessary for a newly-elected Board Member to attend board member training, such as the California Special District Association Conference, a second Board Member may be designated by the Board President to attend the Special Park Districts Forum Conference. This expense would be exclusive of that Board Member's budgeted allowance for conference attendance noted in Section 3 below.
3. Each Board Member may decide to attend appropriate general conferences or seminars related to District business up to his/her budgeted allowance of \$1,200 per four-year term without further Board approval. Attendance at such a conference or seminar will be reported to the Board in advance of attendance, and a summary report of the conference itself will be reported following attendance.

Each Board Member shall have the discretion to use his/her full budgeted allowance at any time during his/her term. All appointed or elected Board Members are eligible to expend the full \$1,200 conference allowance at any time when serving a four-year term. When serving a partial term, due to such factors as appointment to serve a portion of a term to fill a vacancy, the Board Member will receive a pro-rated allowance. In the event a Board Member must resign from the Board prior to the end of his/her four-year term due to illness or other cause, it is not the intention of this Policy to seek reimbursement of this conference allowance.

## Budget Guidelines for Board Conference Attendance

Approved by the Board March 22, 2000

Amended March 23, 2005 and August 28, 2013

Objective: It is important that Board Members are afforded the opportunity to keep current on legislation, policies, practices and other matters pertinent to Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) business. Therefore, ~~a modest amount of money funds~~ should be budgeted each fiscal year for Board attendance at conferences and ~~seminars trainings~~ directly related to ~~open space preservation and management practices of other parks and open space agencies~~ District business. Expenditure of District funds associated with such conferences and ~~seminars trainings~~ shall not be directed to a political candidate, ~~or~~ ballot measure, nor a contribution to any non-profit entity, but shall be used solely for actual and necessary conference expenses such as travel, lodging, food and registration fees.

~~1. A.~~ Each fiscal year, a total of \$5,100 funds will be budgeted for Board Member attendance at conferences and ~~seminars trainings~~ directly related to ~~open space preservation and/or administration of parks and open space organizations~~ District business, to be allocated as follows:

~~A. Specific: up to \$3,000 total to provide for 2 conferences at an estimated amount of \$1,500 each, as provided in Section 2 below.~~

~~B. General: up to \$1,200 per Board Member per four year term, as provided in Section 3 below.~~

- ~~1. 2.~~ Specific Funding: Up to \$3,000 total per fiscal year to provide for conferences ~~Attendance at a specific conference will be~~ assigned as follows: one conference for the President, or other Board designee (ordinarily in descending order of the elected Board officers for the year), to attend a conference related to District business, such as the annual Special Park Districts Forum; and one ~~California Special District Association~~ training for a newly elected Board Member, or for a Board Member who has not attended ~~that a~~ particular training and now desires to do so, such as a training by the California Special District Association. In the event it is unnecessary for a newly-elected Board Member to attend board member training, such as the California Special District Association Conference, a second Board Member may be designated by the Board President to attend a conference related to District business, such as the annual Special Park Districts Forum ~~the Special Park Districts Forum Conference~~. ~~This expense~~ Funding provided for in this section is intended to ~~would~~ be exclusive of that Board Member's budgeted allowance for conference attendance noted in Section ~~3-2~~ below.

- ~~2. 3.~~ General Funding: Up to \$1,000 per Board Member per fiscal year. Each Board Member may decide to attend appropriate general conferences or ~~seminars trainings~~ related to District business up to his/her budgeted allowance of ~~\$1,200-000~~ per four year term fiscal year without further Board approval. Attendance at such a conference or seminar will be reported to the Board at an open public meeting in

advance of attendance, and a summary report of the conference itself will be reported following attendance.

2.3. Essential Training Funding: Up to \$2,000 total per fiscal year for the entire Board to provide for essential trainings. From time to time there are trainings related to executing the official duties of an elected office are offered for local government elected officials by organizations, such as the California Special District Association, that are essential for officials to learn and remain current with best practices in executing official duties of elected office. Such trainings that are identified by individual Board Members, or by the General Manager, or General Counsel, in consultation with the Board President, as essential for individual or multiple Board Member(s) shall be funded independent of the Board Member's budgeted allowance noted as outlined in Sections 1 and 2 above. Attendance at such trainings will be reported to the Board at an open public meeting in advance of attendance, and a summary report of the training itself will be reported following attendance.

B. Each Board Member shall have the discretion to use his/her full budgeted allowance of \$1,000 at any time during his/her term the fiscal year. All appointed or elected Board Members are eligible to expend the full \$1,200,000 conference allowance at any time when serving a four-year term during the fiscal year. When eEven if serving a partial term year; due to such factors as appointment to serve a portion of a term to fill a vacancy, a; all appointed or elected Board Members are eligible to spend the full budgeted amount, the Board Member will receive a pro-rated allowance. However, unused funding from one fiscal year is not intended to be available to supplement another fiscal year's funding. In the event a Board Member must resign from the Board prior to the end of his/her four-year term due to illness or other cause, it is not the intention of this Policy to seek reimbursement of this conference allowance.

B.C. Funding budgeted in accordance with allotted to each respective Board member under this policy may be used for conference or training registration fees and travel expenses such as lodging, meal expenses, transportation, and other appropriate expenses for District business, which may be calculated in a manner that is consistent with as described in the District's Administrative Policy concerning Travel, Lodging, and Meal Reimbursement, and in accordance with applicable state and federal laws.



## MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

Policy	AP-05-02
Date	8/1/05
Supersedes	AP-83-6 AP-78-10, AP-77-2
Amendments	None

### ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY TRAVEL, LODGING & MEAL REIMBURSEMENT POLICY

#### I. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this policy is to identify and clarify those instances for which the District will reimburse employees for travel, lodging and meal expenses. This policy applies to all full and part-time District employees (including interns) authorized to incur expenses on official District business.

#### II. Policy and Procedure

The policy of the District is that costs for travel in conjunction with conducting District business shall kept at a minimum. Staff will select the most economical travel arrangements, whenever possible, considering direct costs as well as staff time. Employees will be reimbursed for actual and necessary expenses incurred by the employee while conducting District business. An employee is required to request and receive prior approval from his/her department manager for all expenses that may be reasonably anticipated in the course of travel. The District will not reimburse any expenses for family members or guests. The General Manager or designee is authorized to provide interpretations and take such action as may be necessary or appropriate to implement this policy.

##### A. Local Travel

Employee attendance at one day events not requiring commercial travel or lodging shall be approved by the Department Manager.

##### B. Non-local Travel

Attendance at District events that are non-local (requiring lodging and/or commercial travel) shall be approved by the General Manager. Once the travel is approved by the General Manager, the Travel Expense Pre-approval form shall be approved by the Assistant General Manager.

#### III. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

##### A. District Business

District business consists of those authorized activities performed by an employee of the District, acting within the scope of his/her employment, on behalf of the District. This includes attendance at a meeting, or a training/conference, which enhances the professional development and knowledge of District staff.

**B. Headquarters**

Headquarters shall be defined as the place where the employee spends the greatest portion of regular workdays or working time, or where he/she most frequently reports for work.

**C. Travel Expenses**

Travel expenses include lodging and meal expenses, transportation, and appropriate expenses for District business. The term “travel expenses” does not include those expenses related to the employee’s daily commuting expenses between their residence and work during his/her scheduled workweek.

1. Transportation expenses consist of charges for commercial carrier fares; private car mileage allowance; parking fees; fuel (unless private car mileage allowance given); bridge and road tolls; necessary bus, taxi, rental car and other charges essential to transport the employee to and from his/her residence or official headquarters to the location of the meeting, training, conference or other District business.
2. Business expenses consist of the charges related to travel such as business phone calls, unforeseeable equipment or supply purchases, and other expenses necessary for the completion of District business.
3. Expenditures for nonessential or personal items such as alcohol, newspapers, movies, or entertainment are not reimbursable.

**IV. Lodging**

The District will normally reimburse an employee for the actual lodging expenses for hotel accommodations arranged by the conference/training organizer, which should not exceed the published room rate, plus taxes and parking. In the case of lodging other than at the conference/training site, or while on other District business, the employee will be reimbursed for the lowest appropriate lodging available, taking into consideration the employee’s safety, distance to the conference/training/business site and the quality of available lodging.

In the event an employee would like to attend an approved but optional conference/training and the department’s conference or training budget is not sufficient to cover the cost of the accommodations for such conference/training, the employee may elect to pay for a portion of the accommodations cost in order to participate. Any such cost sharing arrangement must be agreed upon in advance as part of the “prior approval” process.

**V. Meals**

The specific reimbursement guideline for breakfast, lunch and dinner shall be set annually by the General Manager. The District will reimburse employees for actual meal expenses, including tax and tip, up to the amount approved by the General Manager each year. The specific meals that will be covered during travel must be agreed upon in advance with the department manager. Alcoholic drinks are not a reimbursable expense.



Please note the following limitations:

- Where the conference/training site or hotel includes meals in the cost of the registration, such meals shall not be included in the reimbursement allowance.
- When the trip has a duration of 24 hours or less, breakfast may be claimed if the travel requires the employee to leave their residence two (2) hours or more before the start of their normal shift; dinner may be claimed if the travel requires an employee to return to his/her residence 2 (2) hours or more after the end of their normal shift.
- In order to claim reimbursement for a business-related meal not connected with a conference or training, the meal must be for the purpose of meeting with an outside business related contact, such as a consultant or other agency representative, and must be approved in advance by the employee's department manager.

## VI. Travel

When employees are approved to use their own vehicle for travel, the reimbursement rate will be at the mileage rate established by the IRS.

### A. Vehicle Rental

When approved to rent a vehicle, an employee shall use a rental agency under State contract whenever possible, and shall purchase the vehicle liability and loss waiver coverage. Vehicle rentals should result in the lowest appropriate cost to the District.

### B. Non-Local Travel

For non-local travel, reimbursement will be made for the method of transportation that is most economical, considering both direct expense and the employee's available time. An employee may use a more expensive form of transportation but will be reimbursed at the least expensive form of transportation as determined by the District (i.e. first class air versus coach). Exceptions to this procedure may be allowed in the case where a disability accommodation has been requested and approved in advance by Human Resources.

In the event that an employee elects to conduct any personal business during a District business trip, the employee will be responsible for any expense incurred for such personal business.

### C. Local Travel

Staff is encouraged to use a District vehicle and District gas credit card for local travel. If an employee elects to take his/her personal vehicle, and has been approved to drive his/her personal vehicle under the VEHICLE AUTHORIZATION AND PROOF OF INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS POLICY, the employee will be reimbursed for mileage in accordance with that policy. When an employee travels from his/her home directly to a business related event, the reimbursement request shall include only those miles which exceed the number of miles the employee normally commutes to work.

**VII. Travel Advances**

A travel advance may be requested when it is not feasible to use the District's credit card or when the employee chooses not to use his/her own credit card. Travel advances must be requested a minimum of two (2) weeks prior to travel, and must be approved by the department manager. Advances for registration fees or lodging costs will be made at 100% of the published rate. Travel advances will generally not be given for anticipated meal expenses; however, when approved, advances for meal expenses will be at 75% of the allowance maximum for the approved meals.

**VIII. Recordkeeping**

Employees must keep accurate and complete records of actual expenses incurred, including receipts and other proof of payment. Employees will not be reimbursed for costs that are not properly documented. Employees shall submit all records of expenses within two (2) weeks of completion of the event or travel, unless an exception is approved by the Asst. General manager, and must be submitted in time for the costs to be expensed within the fiscal year that the expenses are incurred and budgeted.

**IX. Variations From the Guidelines**

Employees requesting variations from these guidelines must have them approved in advance by the General Manager or designee.

**X. Exceptions**

This policy shall not apply to mandatory extended training (longer than one week in duration), such as the Ranger's Law Enforcement Academy. Reimbursement rates for extended training will be developed by the individual department concerned and communicated to the employee in advance of the training.

In the event of any conflict between this Policy and the provisions of State or Federal law or a Memorandum of Agreement between the District and any recognized employee organization, those provisions will supercede this policy.

Approved:

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L. Craig Britton, General Manager

Dated: August 1, 2005