



Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Financial and Operational Sustainability Model
(FOSM) Refresh

REPORT
January 2024





December 22, 2023

Ms. Ana Ruiz
General Manager
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
5050 El Camino Real Los Altos, CA 94022

Dear Ms. Ruiz:

Baker Tilly is pleased to provide this final report of the Financial and Operational Sustainability Model (FOSM) Refresh study. This report is the culmination of work completed over the past ten months and reflects extensive learning, research and analysis, application of best practices, and importantly, collaboration with the District to ensure the recommendations contained herein support the District's mission and vision for the future.

We appreciate your collaboration and the collaboration of other individuals in the District throughout this engagement. Each person's candor, energy, and ideas for improvement were helpful as we carried out this important work.

Once the report has been adopted, we will provide a draft implementation action plan that will serve as an important tool for establishing clear timelines and setting priorities within the organization. The recommendations in this report will take time to implement, but with careful planning and the engagement of your team, we are confident that the results will benefit the organization in the long term.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andy Belknap".

Andy Belknap
Managing Director

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Purpose of the update and status of FOSM implementation.....	1
Major recommendations	2
Structure of the report	5
Methodology and Engagement Themes	6
Engagement Themes.....	6
Peer Learning.....	8
Major Shifts Impacting the Organization	9
Financial Analysis and Staffing Trends	14
Ensuring a Sustainable Organization	20
Leadership and Organization Culture	20
Planning and Project Delivery.....	21
Visitor and Field Services.....	34
<i>Land and Facilities</i>	34
Visitor Services	39
Natural Resources	43
Internal/Administrative Support	45
Organization Structure and Staffing Model	53
Staffing Model and Projections	53
Implementation and Next Steps	56
Attachment A – List of Recommendations	59

Tables

Table 1. Recommended Near-term Staffing Additions.....	3
Table 2. Acres of Owned Land.....	8
Table 3. Peer Agency Project Management Practices	23
Table 4. Peer Agency Permitting Oversight	28

Figures

Figure 1. Annual Program Volunteer Hours 2020 to 2022	42
---	----

Executive Summary

Purpose of the update and status of FOSM implementation

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (hereafter referred to as “Midpen” or “District”) initiated its original Financial and Operational Sustainability Model (FOSM) study in 2015 with the implementation of recommendations beginning in 2016 and 2017. Implementation of those original recommendations has continued as the District has developed ever since. In general terms, the first FOSM emphasized the need for the District to develop the organizational specialization and unit expertise that are the hallmarks of larger public agencies. As a result, the District has developed specialized support functions such as Information Systems and Technology (IST) and Human Resources and organized operational functions into units with the expertise and focus to deliver key services. This is an ongoing evolution as the district continues to grow. The recommendations of this FOSM update are intended to build upon the District’s progress and establish an ever-more capable organization through increased specialization to take advantage of economies of scale and the expertise demanded of larger and more complex organizations.

Since some members of the consultant team that worked on the first FOSM also had the opportunity to work on this second organizational assessment, they had the rare opportunity to revisit an organization at another stage in its maturation process. What they observed was impressive. In less than a decade, the District has evolved from the equivalent of a custom shop where virtually everything was done as a “one of” exercise, to a reasonably developed medium-sized organization with a good degree of specialized functionality, solid systems, and higher productivity.

While the people within the organization are still faced with high workloads and service demands, they are much better equipped to handle the work than was previously the case. The organization has made a lot of progress in a short period of time. It may not be easy to see from the inside, but it is apparent to those of us who worked with the District in 2015. The organization in 2015 did not have the capacity or internal support systems needed to meet the workload demands of 2023.

This FOSM update, like the first one, is designed to provide a roadmap for the continued organizational growth and maturity of the District. Simply put, the District will need to do in the future what it has done over the last eight years. It will need to invest in support systems and people and further specialize as an organization working in a highly technical and always-changing field. To do so, we have identified the need for additional positions both in the near term and over the next ten years. Overall, we expect the District will grow by close to 100 full-time equivalent positions over the next ten years.

Major recommendations

This report contains 49 recommendations. These recommendations build on the work of the original FOSM, address additional operational and staffing challenges, and enable the continued success of the organization. In addition, this FOSM update provides a refreshed staffing model that projects further staffing needs and evaluates the District's financial capacity to cover them.

The District will need to add positions in the near term (over the next two years) to address existing and emerging needs. Many of these positions are in the Visitor and Field Services business line, but there are also some needed in Planning and Project Delivery and Administrative Services.

Climate change and other forces that are discussed in the Major Shifts Impacting the Organization section of this report are having some significant impacts on the demands of staff that need to be addressed. These factors were not anticipated in the first FOSM and signal the importance of adaptability and some flexibility in the timing and ways in which the organization grows.

The long-term staffing projections built into the staffing model serve as a guide that anticipates future growth and enables intentional and financially feasible staffing increases over time. It is important to note that the projections for anticipated staffing are based on current plans and known drivers. As observed over the past five years, external drivers and unanticipated changes – like a global pandemic – can emerge, and the District will need to respond accordingly. With such external changes comes both opportunity and challenges. This FOSM Refresh builds on the progress achieved since the implementation of the original work, acknowledges the need for internal flexibility, and will help position the organization to tackle both opportunities and challenges that may lie on the horizon. As with any long-term plan, there is value in a periodic review and potential update to address unforeseen changes that may warrant a shift in either timing or action items.

In addition to the long-term staffing forecast that is fundamental to this FOSM Refresh, Baker Tilly evaluated the current capacity, systems, and structure to determine if near-term adjustments are needed to meet current demands. As discussed throughout this report, there are a number of key areas that, if addressed, will further strengthen the organization’s ability to deliver projects, programs and services that advance the mission of the Midpen. These include:

- Addressing the climate impacts on land stewardship
- Increasing capacity and further streamlining the project delivery process
- Centralizing operational functions for improved organizational alignment
- Ensuring internal support capacity keeps pace with operational growth
- Maintaining focus on mission-specific programs, projects, and other activities to prevent over-extension of limited resources.

As indicated above, there are a number of near-term staffing recommendations presented in this report. These new positions reflect the rapid pace of growth and the external drivers experienced by the organization over the past decade and are further discussed in the body of the report. By adding these recommended positions, the District will establish a new foundation that better reflects current reality and creates a more sustainable organization.

The near-term position recommendations are shown in the table below. The timing and order of priority for adding these positions will require the input and engagement of district management.

Table 1. Recommended Near-term Staffing Additions

Service Line	Department/Program	Position Recommendation	FTE change
Visitor and Field Services	Visitor Services – Volunteer Program	Volunteer Program Lead	1
	Visitor Services – Ranger Program	Lead Ranger	1
	Visitor Services – Ranger Program	Rangers	2
	Land Stewardship – Conservation and Grazing Program	Property Management Specialist I	1
	Land Stewardship – Resource and Wildfire Resilience	Open Space Technician/Lead Open Space Technician/ Equipment Mechanic Operator*	6
	Central Services (NEW)	Central Services Department Manager	1
	Central Services (NEW)	Contracts Specialist	1
	Central Services (NEW)	Facilities Maintenance Specialist	1
	Central Services (NEW)	Administrative Assistant	1
	Central Services (NEW)	Fleet Manager	1

	Natural Resources	Permit Specialist	1
VISITOR AND FIELD SERVICES TOTAL			17
Administrative Services	Finance/Budget	Budget and Analysis Supervisor	1
	Finance/Budget	Accounting Technician (currently split with HR)	.5
	Information Systems and Technology	Management Analyst I/II	1
	Information Systems and Technology	Applications Program Administrator	1
	Procurement	Senior Procurement Technician	1
	Human Resources	Human Resources Technician (currently split with Accounting)	.5
	Human Resources	Human Resources Analyst I/II	1
ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES TOTAL			6
Planning and Project Delivery	Planning	Planner III	2
	Planning/Engineering and Construction**	Administrative Assistant	1
	Engineering and Construction	Sr. Capital Project Manager	1
	Engineering and Construction	Capital Project Manager II	1
PLANNING AND PROJECT DELIVERY TOTAL			5
TOTAL STAFFING INCREASES			28

*Specific staffing changes should reflect future planning needs.

**One Administrative Assistant position is currently split between these two departments. The staffing adjustment reflects the need for additional capacity, especially in planning, to handle tasks currently completed by project managers and department management.

The immediate and long-term staffing recommendations are probably the most significant and major recommendations contained in this report. In this regard the development of a new Central Services Department will be responsible for many of the new staffing additions, especially in the near term. The recommendation to create a new department reflects the continued growth of Midpen by creating appropriate organizational sub-components that support the overall mission of the organization as it matures. This structure is consistent with those in similarly-sized peer organizations and establishes a department that will better meet the future needs of the organization.

The District’s finances are robust. We have included a detailed discussion of the fiscal condition of the District in the report. The position recommendations for the near- and long-term are financially supported by the fiscal outlook of the district and have been reviewed by the District Controller and Chief Financial Officer. The District has an excellent 30 year fiscal planning tool and while its cash reserves will be drawn down over the planning period they will remain well above recommended levels for local governments.

A potentially significant policy recommendation included in the report, which will require more study, is the extent to which project entitlement conditioning from San Mateo and Santa Clara County is always necessary and appropriate for District projects. As an independent special district,

Midpen is a co-equal branch of local government and is arguably entitled to do more under its own auspices than it has historically done.

Structure of the report

This report starts with a methodology section that includes an overview of the themes we observed through our engagement activities and what we learned from peer organization evaluations.

It then provides an analysis of the major environmental factors impacting the District and financial and staffing trends that will be important to the District. This provides an important foundation for the organizational analysis that is the heart of the report.

The organizational analysis is organized around components of District operations, leadership and the organizational culture, planning and project delivery, the various operational units and support functions. Next, we provide a staffing model and staffing projections, followed by a section on future opportunities and next steps.

The full set of recommendations contained in this report are provided in Attachment A.

Methodology and Engagement Themes

This refresh to the 2015 FOSM report is the result of a series of activities, including engagement with Midpen staff and review of current plans, to develop an understanding of the current operating environment, changes that have occurred since the FOSM, and the future direction of the organization. The recommendations contained in this report are the result of the activities listed below.

- Reviewed documents and data provided by Midpen to understand workload shifts, departmental priorities, and service drivers.
- Experienced a curated site visit to District offices and preserves to understand the diverse operating environments of Midpen.
- Conducted 30 interviews that included members of the Board of Directors and staff from each of the district departments and major services areas.
- Held eight focus groups with employees representing all service areas of the organization.
- Reviewed Measure AA Project Portfolios and major service plans.
- Reviewed the controller's Funding Model and associated financial reports, including annual budget and action plans, the 30-year cash flow projection model, and Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports (ACFRs) from prior year.
- Conducted interviews with peer organizations similar to Midpen to learn about specific practices, especially as relates to project delivery.

Engagement Themes

Staff engagement activities revealed a number of overarching themes as summarized below. These themes informed the analysis and recommendations contained in this report.

Overall, major organizational changes resulting from the original Financial and Operations Sustainability Model (FOSM) are seen as positive. Specific improvements that were summarized include:

- Separation of a single Operations Department into two departments reporting to a shared Assistant General Manager (Land and Facilities and Visitor Services).
- Formation of a capital projects/construction team in Land and Facilities to deliver field projects.
- Improvements to the project delivery process, including establishing a department to bring engineering and construction management expertise in-house to deliver projects.
- Investments in internal support departments, including information systems and technology, to support organizational and employee effectiveness.
- Creation of a grants team to increase funding capacity by leveraging Measure AA funding.

In addition, a number of major themes emerged that, if addressed, will further Midpen's success. These include:

- Acknowledge and address the major environmental shifts that have accelerated organizational growth and result in increased staffing demands in the field and, by extension, the rest of the organization. (These are further identified in the report section titled, "Major Shifts Impacting the Organization").
- Stay focused on the core of the mission of the organization to continue to deliver on the promise of the Vision Plan and Measure AA.
- Expand the field team dedicated to addressing wildfire resilience and prevention that increases overall capacity for land management and serves to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- Be intentional about the implementation of the coastal services plan to ensure appropriate staffing and support over time.
- Address project delivery delays resulting from permitting delays and other internal constraints.
- Streamline and increase support for operating departments regarding administrative activities, including budget development and monitoring, and purchasing and contract management requirements.
- Ensure internal support departments keep pace with the growth of the organization and provide the tools and support needed for continued success.
- Reduce the time senior leadership spends on operational activities by increasing the decision-making authority of department managers.
- Ensure the capacity and availability of tools necessary for increases in community and tribal engagement activities.
- Anticipate and plan for retirements by supporting professional growth, enhancing career ladders, and facilitating knowledge transfer.

Peer Learning

Baker Tilly interviewed six peer agencies to obtain insight into organization structure, processes, and practices of similar organizations. Table 2 shows each of the peer agencies and their approximate size in acres. The set of peer agencies used for this review are the same as those utilized for the original FOSM.

Table 2. Acres of Owned Land

Agency	Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District	Boulder County Parks and Open Space	East Bay Regional Park District	Jefferson County Open Space and Parks	Marin County Parks	Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department
Approximate Acres	72,200	100,000	125,000	56,000	17,500	52,000

Source: As posted on each agency's website.

Each of these peers focus on managing and preserving parks and open spaces. They collaborate with various agencies for land acquisition and preservation and prioritize public access, environmental conservation, and community engagement. However, due to their size and diverse landscapes, each organization tailors its approach to meet the specific needs and demands of its unique geographic area.

The results of the peer learning have been incorporated into the sections of this report addressing the topics covered in this research, which include:

- Permitting practices
- Project management oversight
- Property management

Major Shifts Impacting the Organization

It is important to appreciate that the environment that Midpen operates within has evolved and changed in profound ways in the years since the first FOSM was prepared. First and perhaps most fundamentally, climate change has become a daily fact of our existence which is shaping the lands managed by Midpen in many new ways. Drought and associated wildfires are more pervasive. The weather is generally more variable and extreme. All of this changes the landscape in ways that are hard to predict, and which make management significantly more challenging.

We observed several areas in which climate changes have forced organizational changes on Midpen and where organizational adjustments will be needed going into the future. These include:

- **Wildfire Risk.** The need to engineer for greater wildfire resiliency and prevention as part of preserve development and operation. This will require specialized staffing in everything from planning and engineering to operations.
- **Maintenance Demand.** Greater maintenance demands as storms become more damaging and more frequent leading to the need to rebuild trails and other amenities. This will lead to higher maintenance staffing and utilization than Midpen has experienced in its history to date.
- **Integrated Pest Management.** Invasive pest management has been recognized as a crucial natural resource protection tool for limiting the impact of invasive weed and animals. Since the initiation of a formal IPM program in 2014 through the IPM Guidance Manual the District has made progress primarily through contracts and volunteer work, while resources for staff to work on IPM work has been pulled away to basic maintenance tasks. With greater climate variation the introduction of new pest challenges is to be expected and increased challenges maintaining progress on reducing pest species. Having in-house crews to perform on going IPM and restoration will ensure that

investments made in large scale vegetation management projects result in longer term habitat improvement.

- **Drought and Extreme Precipitation.** Both will likely be present in Midpen's future although models show drought may be slightly more of a challenge. Beyond changing the landscape, it will bring challenges to designing and managing preserves from managing wildfire risk to visitor traffic.

Another factor which profoundly impacted Midpen was the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2022. This changed virtually every aspect of human interaction from work to socializing and recreation. Many of the impacts will not dissipate quickly, if at all. Visits to Midpen preserves accelerated as they were safe places to recreate. Visitation has returned to near normal levels but continues to increase over time as new areas are opened and as the population has discovered the joys of the open space. Midpen will have to adapt to annual increases in visitation for the foreseeable future.

Another factor impacting the organizational environment facing Midpen is the greater diversity of land holdings it must manage. In the earlier years of its existence, the District concentrated on developing preserves that mainly consisted of open space preserves in mountainous or hilly areas above urbanized areas.

More recent master planning efforts have directed District land acquisition efforts into other types of holdings such as agricultural lands and coastal areas. These types of land holdings are fundamentally different and require more active management than the types of preserves that have formed the historical backbone of the Midpen holdings. For example, agriculture lands, mainly used for animal grazing must be managed and leased to grazing operators that inject new complexities into both agricultural operations and any new public access. Operating in the coastal areas introduces new complexities derived from greater regulatory oversight from the California Coastal Commission and heightened environmental scrutiny and land use restrictions, that can impact public access and other uses.

All else being equal more staff time and policy complexity is going to be involved in the management and operation of these types of lands, which will have staffing and operational impacts on the District.

Finally, another environmental factor which has impacted the District is the need for greater transparency and engagement with the community when planning projects and programs. Midpen is not just another land

buyer. It must make every transaction a success for itself, the seller, and the community.

Since the last FOSM the growth of social media and the addition of online access to public meetings has drastically lowered the old barriers to participation and increased the desire of the public to participate in the discussion of local issues that impact their lives. The District has recognized this and has expanded its public affairs footprint, but it will have to continue doing so knowing that today you can never “over-communicate.” While public affairs produces notices to the public, planning staff provides the project information to public affairs and leads the public engagement in terms of planning and facilitating meetings. Since 2018, the Board has recommended the creation of a Public Access Group for more complex projects. This increased public engagement has the greatest impact on planners as they spend more time presenting information and responding to inquiries from the public. As projects become more complex and if there is increased local neighbor resistance to projects supported by the general public, more of the planners’ time needs to be allocated to public engagement.

These interrelated factors, climate change, the pandemic and its reset on visitation levels, a greater diversity in land holdings, and the increased demand for public input will all push Midpen to do more in every aspect of its operations. This will inevitably require more organizational resources and more staff than in the past. While we are often thought to think that technology increases the productivity of staff and thus reduces the need for staff, ... the reverse is also true. In some respects, as technology allows us to do more, as in the case of communications around local planning for new projects, or coastal planning requirements, stakeholders and the public rightfully demand that the work get done and Midpen will have to be prepared to field the resources to do so.

Since Midpen needs to preserve its credibility to remain a trusted partner it has no choice but to make every transaction a “win-win” transaction. This is quite unlike the typical real estate transactions where both the seller and buyer will probably never engage with each other or the general community again.

Midpen’s mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education. On the Coast, Midpen has an expanded mission to acquire and preserve agricultural land of regional significance, preserve rural character and encourage viable agricultural uses of land resources.

The purpose of the Coastal Management Plan (CMP) is to identify recommended actions to be undertaken by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) General Manager's Office, phased over five years beginning in FY 2023, to build on-going and sustainable organizational capacity to support expanding programs and responsibilities required to care for coastal preserves. The CMP was approved in April 2022 and the recommendations were incorporated into the FY 2023 and FY 2024 approved budgets. The CMP implements district policy laid out in the Coastal Services Plan that documents high level policy guidance for coastside protection.

The CMP includes land acquisition that increased the coastal acreage by 33% with the acquisition of Cloverdale Ranch, resulting in an immediate increase in open space and agricultural land responsibilities, resource management, patrol, and new opportunities to develop public access. Active areas including 10 to-15 miles of additional trails and two new parking lots will increase traffic in the coastal areas.

As a result, the CMP recommends the following actions:

- Create a separate Visitor Services Coastal Field Unit
- Develop a new Coastal Office
- Provide staff housing on Cloverdale Ranch
- Update the FOSM
- Increase staffing in four departments by 12.0 FTE over the five fiscal years

The expansion of coastal preserves presents several challenges for Midpen resource management programs have increased due to the addition of acreage that expands the geographic scope of District wide resource programs and the management of natural resources due to the unique habitats and special status species found on the coast including several endangered species.

Visitor Services responsibilities will drastically increase with the addition of trail miles and parking lots increasing access to the areas.

Planning, permitting, and approval processes in coastal lands are complicated by San Mateo County's strict zoning ordinances and the need for Coastal Development permits when projects fall within the state's coastal development zone.

The District is fast approaching the acreage threshold to warrant a full-service coastal field office and maintenance shop.

Agricultural land management projects and responsibilities will increase substantially with the pending purchase and current management of the

Johnston Ranch Uplands property and the recently completed purchase of Cloverdale Ranch. Together, these two properties have added three separate grazing units totaling approximately 3,100 acres, expanding the conservation grazing program by approximately 25%.

The Land and Facilities Manager has been actively engaged in supporting the complex and important work of agricultural land management, grazing and associated leases. Recently, the organization added a conservation and grazing manager position to help address this increased need.

The CMP identifies the need for additional rangers, maintenance personnel, and natural resources staff to address growing patrol and site security needs, facility and vegetation management, agricultural program management, and natural resource management of coastal lands. An important part of this work will be to build a solid working partnership with the agricultural community that exists within the coastal area and the aforementioned coastal field office for the District will represent an important part of building such a partnership. The assumptions and resulting projections built into the CMP for future staffing are reasonable and have been incorporated into the long-term staffing model. They meet the expanded scope of the coastal mission. Specific recommendations for near-term increases are presented in the related sections of this report.

Recommendation 1. Implement the recommendations of the Coastal Management Plan to support the growth of the coastal areas. Positions projected for future budgets are built into the long-term staffing model.

Financial Analysis and Staffing Trends

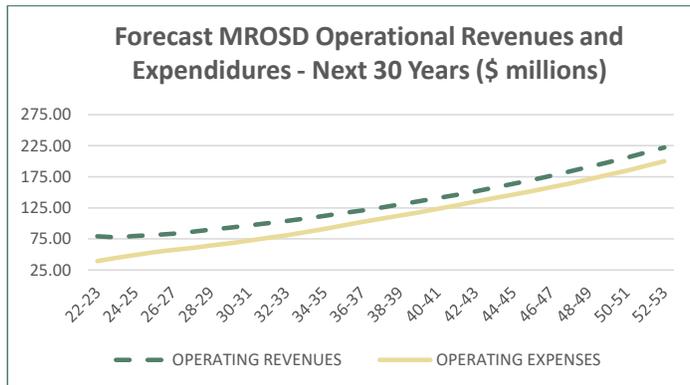
Midpen was formed in 1972 and since this pre-dated the approval of Proposition 13 in 1978, the District was able to levy a property tax on property within the District. With the approval of Proposition 13, the District's property tax rate was made a part of the permanent 1% property tax levy within the District boundaries in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. Today District property taxes make up approximately 0.07% of the total property tax collected in San Mateo County and 0.06% of the total property tax collected in Santa Clara County.

District revenues are heavily concentrated in property tax, as such revenues make up approximately 90% of total general-purpose revenues (not including Measure AA tax proceeds). This is far more property tax dependent than is typical for a city, county or special district. Cities and counties typically receive from 14 to 22 percent of their revenues from property taxes. Enterprise special districts (such as water or sewer districts) typically receive only about 2 percent of such revenues. Non-enterprise districts such as Midpen (and other districts providing such services as library and fire) receive on average 65 percent of their revenues from property taxes. Even among non-enterprise special districts Midpen is highly dependent on property tax revenues. Fortunately, property tax revenues are among the most stable of tax proceed types.

The growth of property tax revenues in California is a function of property turnover and property appreciation. In terms of property value appreciation both San Mateo and Santa Clara have been extremely strong areas for a long period of time. There has only been one economic recession impacting property valuations in the area since 1991. The combination of the District's reliance on property tax revenues and this high growth rate has made for generally robust revenue growth for the District.

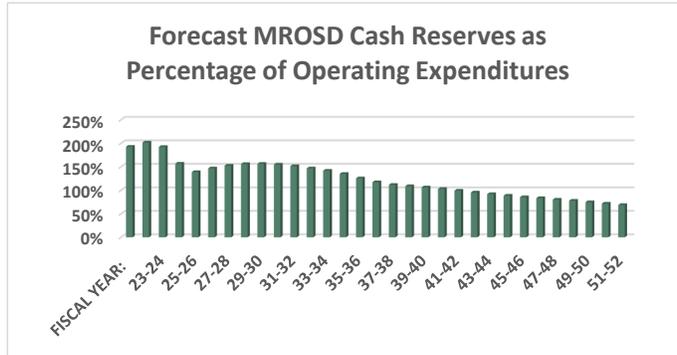
The District Controller maintains a fiscal forecast in which he uses a relatively conservative assumption of 4% annual growth in property tax revenues. The latest revenue and expenditure projections, which include assumptions covering the staffing increases called for in this report, both

in the near term and over the next several years, are shown in the figure below.



While the “operating margin” does narrow over time, the District is not facing significant fiscal hazards in the future based on the best projections currently available. It should be noted that because of the District’s dependence on property related revenues any significant erosion in Bay Area real estate values would have a substantial negative impact on the District’s financial operations. This negative impact would be much greater than for a typical local government which is less reliant on property tax revenues than is the District.

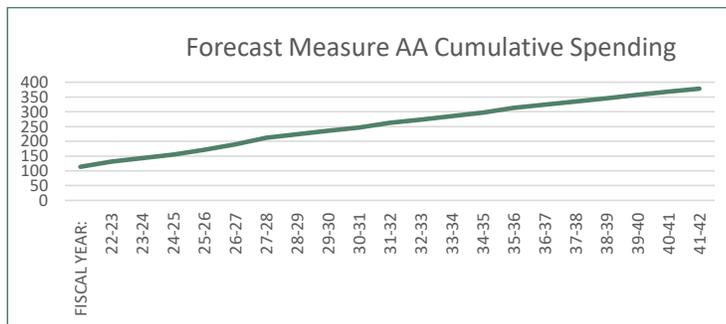
While recent history has not shown this to be a problem for the District, it is probably a reason for the District to maintain prudent reserve cash balances, which it has a history of doing. The Government Financial Officer Association (GFOA) recommends that local governments maintain a reserve at least equal to 18% of annual operating expenditures. Midpen holds far more than this minimum, currently nearly twice the annual operating expenditures in reserve. Projections indicate that this amount will go down over the next 30 years, but it will remain well above the GFOA minimum. The projected cash reserve level is shown in the figure below.



The other major revenue source for the District is the Measure AA general obligation tax bond measure designed to fund approximately \$300 million in open space investments over a 30 year period. The bond measure was approved by 2/3 of the voters in 2014. To date the District has issued approximately \$95 million in bonds and plans to issue another \$25 million tranche in the current fiscal year. Spending on Measure AA projects currently totals over \$88 million.

Since the District is roughly 8.5 years into the 30-year timeframe for the \$300 million (in 2014 dollars) spend plan for Measure AA it is on schedule or somewhat ahead of schedule in terms of getting the enumerated projects completed.

The figure below shows anticipated Measure AA spending over the time horizon for the Plan.



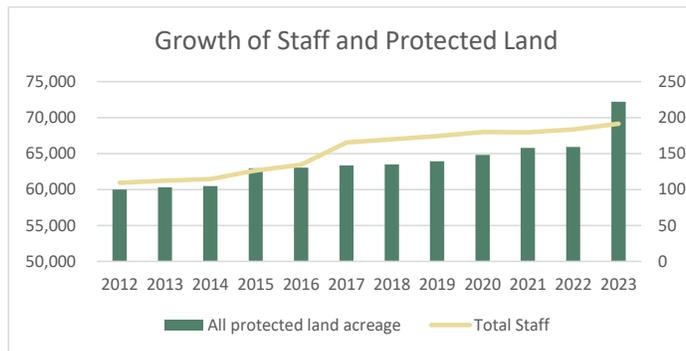
Bonds will be retired for many years after this Plan is completed in about 2044 but the tax rate will be continuously declining as bonds are paid off.

Measure AA is, however, a hugely ambitious program and its completion will need to remain the top priority for the District for the work to be

completed as planned. Many of the recommendations in this report are aimed at supporting the Measure AA program given its centrality and importance to the District and voters within the District.

Staffing Trends

The figure below shows total District staffing growth over the last twelve years.



Staffing grew the most right after the last FOSM when a number of staffing gaps were identified. Overall staffing during this time period grew at the rate of approximately 5.5% per year. The District added approximately 7.5 FTE every year during this period and grew from approximately 109 to 191 FTE.

This is a high rate of personnel growth for a public agency. And the District has been challenged to build the systems and infrastructure necessary to serve this level of FTE, a challenge exacerbated by its regional footprint and decentralized operations.

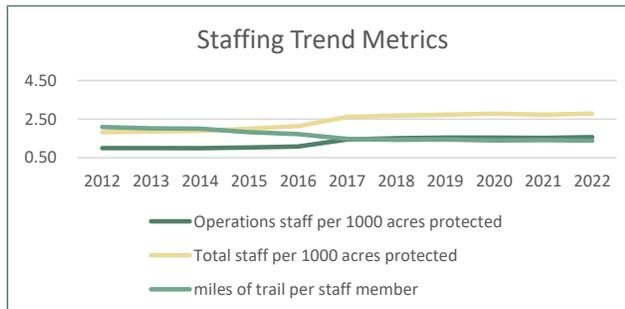
Staffing has increased much faster than the number of protected acres, which has grown at about 1.7% annually, or about 1,100 acres per year, but this has been quite variable, as one would expect given the nature of land transactions. In any event most of the staffing additions were to make up for existing gaps in District resourcing identified in the initial FOSM effort.

In the original FOSM it was determined that the District lacked many administrative and management infrastructure positions that were necessary for organizational sustainability. During the update process this observation is still true but to a lesser extent. Looking forward, while there continues to be some need to grow the administrative and support functions, most growth will occur in visitor services, preserve development and maintenance areas.

Baker Tilly has completed staffing projections for the District for approximately ten years based on past trends and our best estimates of what will be needed to service new growth based on the relationships observed between existing staffing and several metrics that the District tracks including:

- Public trail mileage
- Visitation
- Open acreage

Visitation statistics were only available for 2020-2022, and from 2010 which did not allow for good trend analysis against staffing. We were able to correlate staffing levels against the increase in both acreage open to the public and trail mileage. We found that staffing levels have generally moved in a positive direction relative to the metrics tracked. The District has typically been able to add staff faster than open acreage is added and faster than trail mileage is opened. This shows that it is addressing some of the understaffing issues that have hampered performance in the past.



Specifically, between 2012 and 2022 the number of operational staff per 1,000 acres of protected land grew from approximately 1.0 to 1.57, while the number of total staff for the same metric grew from 1.82 to 2.78, both good and needed increases in capacity. The original FOSM found significant under investment in administrative systems which is one reason for growth in positions assigned in these areas. As is detailed in the staffing projections presented later in this report, going forward most growth in staffing will be in field operations. Meanwhile the miles of trails maintained per staff member declined from 2.09 to 1.38 showing that there is now more staff for each mile of maintained trail.

These trends all indicate that the critical staffing issues that have impacted Midpen have abated to some extent since the first FOSM effort.

While it would be desirable to be able to project staffing needs over a longer period of time say 20 to 30 years, our level of confidence in the reliability of such estimates is quite low, given the likelihood of changes in how work is accomplished and technology. Therefore we kept the recommendations to a ten year horizon.

Ensuring a Sustainable Organization

Leadership and Organization Culture

The mission of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District is rooted in acquiring and safeguarding a regional greenbelt of open space land for perpetuity, with a focus on preserving and restoring the natural environment. This mission encompasses opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education. And now, along the coast, the mission extends to the acquisition and preservation of agriculturally significant land, aiming to protect the rural character of the area while promoting sustainable agricultural uses of land resources.

There is a pressing need to consistently uphold the mission at all levels of the organization. The proactive "can do" culture of the district, while commendable, may lead to an occasional embrace of new projects that divert attention from the primary mission focus. Conversely, there has been a tendency to adhere strictly to the FOSM from an administrative standpoint, potentially limiting flexibility and innovation. Competing desires to do more while holding true to the specific roadmap laid out in the FOSM has led to internal pressures and constraints this Refresh seeks to address.

The capable professional staff, committed board, and an organizational culture that is driven by the mission described above are the keys to the organization's success. This success was rewarded by the passage of Measure AA by voters in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties and has been sustained through intentional investment. Sustaining long-term success demands continued clarity of vision and goals set by the Board, empowered management to implement board direction, and an organization that has the capacity, systems, and culture to effectively deliver long-term results.

Annual planning by the Board that aligns to the organization's vision and delivers projects funded by Measure AA is essential to setting priorities and objectives for the organization for the year. A majority of Midpen's goals are multi-year and affirming them annually helps to maintain focus. Ensuring a board retreat that is engaging, incorporates staff input

regarding capacity, and results in consensus and buy-in is essential. A challenge for any governing body is to maintain focus and minimize mid-year changes in direction. Midpen has adopted a number of long-term plans, many of which are referenced in this report, that help in this regard. Even so, the inclination of board members to engage in operational dimensions of the organization can delay action and influence a culture of perfectionism and fear of mistake that slows things down.

Midpen is fortunate to attract and benefit from a highly professional and qualified staff. As the organization grows a greater reliance on management and increased decision-making authority to advance the annual work program will be necessary. Through our interviews, we repeatedly heard about time delays stemming from extensive review of documents by senior leadership. Sensitive reports and Board items may benefit from such consideration, however, not all documents are equal when considering additional review and revision. Thorough review by multiple parties can sometimes result in conflicting edits, unnecessary time delays, and a perception by staff that their work is inadequate. This has been an element of Midpen culture for a long time and it reflects a desire for excellence.

To sustain progress as the organization grows additional authority and ownership by department managers will be needed. Increased departmental authority will also free up the General Manager and her executive team to focus on the big picture and represent the district as a regional player. While not required at this juncture, the District may find value in reimagining the management classifications and structure over time. The increasing scope and scale of departments may warrant the use of director titles for positions currently classified as managers. This may have the added benefit of signaling the experience and expertise of department heads to further empower them to lead their operations.

Like the organization's culture, the structure of Midpen must continue to evolve. Significant changes were implemented subsequent to the passage of Measure AA on the recommendations of the FOSM. The FOSM created an internal administrative infrastructure designed to support the growing organization. It also expanded key operational areas with the creation of new departments. This FOSM refresh builds on the growth and success of the district by contemplating new iterations in how work gets done.

Planning and Project Delivery

Many changes have occurred in project planning and delivery since the original FOSM in 2015. Recommendation #3 of the FOSM called for a

“more refined, comprehensive project delivery approach” which has been created. Prior to the FOSM, management and oversight of projects occurred in the planning department using a “cradle-to-grave” approach. Implementation of the FOSM resulted in the creation of an engineering and construction department that brought additional expertise in-house. In addition, a field projects team was created to support the delivery of projects. With the need for effective project management handoffs across departments, process flow charts were created and have helped to clarify roles and indicate which group is in a primary or secondary role at each step. There are two project delivery flow charts: one for projects that involve public access with property acquisition and one for land and facilities construction projects. A Project Initiation & Handoff checklist template captures the initial project planning details, essential documents and key project participants who need to be kept informed as the project progresses.

In addition, Midpen utilizes a shared project management tool called Project Central to monitor Vision Plan and Measure AA priority active projects. Project Central serves as a repository for projects and is viewed as a collaboration tool where all project team participants can see the project scope, budget, and schedule. The status of projects is updated every two weeks by the project lead for review in monthly meetings with executive staff (the General Manager and Assistant General Managers).

The benefit of Project Central is that it provides an overview of all active projects in one place and helps project managers share and manage files, and report status. A design feature of Project Central is that it links projects to funding. Each project is numbered based on the funding sources which can change over the length of the project. The numbering of a project may also change if the scope is modified based on public input or a change in Board direction. Such changes can lead to some confusion in identifying and monitoring projects. Maintaining Project Central takes time and can be viewed as an extra task for staff who also provide updates during project coordination meetings, weekly department meetings, 1-1 meetings with supervisors, bi-weekly reports, and requests for information from other staff.

In particular, for Engineering and Construction Project Central does not adequately assist project managers in tracking the budget, schedule, and scope as would a typical project construction management tool. The addition of such a tool would improve project delivery.

In staff interviews some concerns were expressed regarding whether handoffs occur at the right time and whether communication from one project lead to the next project lead is adequate. Initial project scoping

and project team planning is most successful when all disciplines are brought together early and clear roles are defined. Although there has been increased input from each department and monthly review, the team members are specialists in their area of expertise and there is not a single project manager assigned to oversee the entire project.

The Baker Tilly team reviewed other models of project management practices. As detailed in the table below, three of the selected peer agencies employ a dedicated project management team (East Bay Regional Parks, Boulder County Parks and Open Space and Jefferson County Open Space and Parks), and two incorporate project management into existing departments (Marin County Parks and Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department). Each agency ensures that projects are overseen by qualified individuals with the expertise needed to navigate specific project requirements. Additionally, the tools used for project management vary. Boulder County Parks and Open Space uses Microsoft Projects, while the others vary in their approaches to project management, with some having management software in place.

Table 3. Peer Agency Project Management Practices

Project Management Teams	
Boulder County Parks and Open Space	Dedicated project management team for each project that includes several specialists including a subject matter expert and a wildlife expert. The team is led by a project management professional or an engineer. The project management team resides in planning. They use Microsoft Projects as a tool.
East Bay Regional Park District	There is a project management unit and a restoration projects unit within the Acquisition, Stewardship and Development Division. The project management unit provides schematic plans and project management services for the execution of capital projects while the restoration projects unit delivers major restoration projects that improve ecosystem functions while integrating compatible public access.
Jefferson County Open Space and Parks	There is a projects team made up of professional project managers (holding PMP certifications). There are construction-related project managers and three additional project managers that are responsible for the project management and delivery of anything else taken on by the organization.
Marin County Parks	Project management varies depending on the project type. Project teams are inter-agency made up of staff from regional parks, open spaces, administration, planning, public works and legal.
Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department	There are project managers within the planning/development and stewardship teams to deliver projects.

Source: As reported by each agency.

In the interest of furthering the success of the project delivery process at Midpen, the Baker Tilly team evaluated the option of creating a project management office or team to provide oversight such as is found in some

peer jurisdictions and in other municipalities with significant capital projects. While we believe there is a need and support for continuous improvement and training as it relates to project delivery, we concluded that this structure was not a match for Midpen based on the types and complexity of projects and the culture of the organization. It would be a departure from the process that has been in use by project delivery team members since the formation of the engineering and construction department.

In many ways the current process is achieving intended outcomes; it is our assessment that building on the existing approach with a commitment to continuous improvement and training will further strengthen the process without the need for an added layer of management. Streamlining the process and the tools that are utilized for sharing information and generating updates may be achieved through a holistic evaluation of current practices.

Given the variety and complexity of active projects the district must continue its commitment to clearly defined roles, information sharing, cross-departmental engagement, and continuous improvement to leverage the benefits of the expertise of different departments. This can be achieved by investing in external resources to provide guidance and resources to ensure continuous improvement, coordination, effective project management skills, and timely project delivery. Currently there is a wide variance in the staff's ability to manage projects. Determining current gaps in District standards and procedures and then documenting what is required will improve workflow and ensure greater accountability. This project management support function could be housed with the Assistant General Manager's office where coordination of projects is housed.

Recommendation 2. Invest in continuous improvement, coordination, and training opportunities to achieve project management best practices.

Recommendation 3. Evaluate options and acquire a project management tool to support Engineering and Construction in the workflow and delivery of projects.

Evaluate the functionality of options to determine suitability for the range of District projects.

Pipeline bottlenecks

Most significantly, the length of time to deliver projects has increased. The typical project is no longer simply the addition of a small parking lot. Projects are now more complicated with regulatory permitting, seasonal

work windows, historic structure rehabilitation, and preservation. By the nature of these projects, the time to complete them is longer. There is also additional follow-up required. At the first FOSM, projects took three years to complete (idea in year one, permitting in year two, construction in year three). Projects now take five to ten years to complete, typically seven years on average. In discussions with staff, Baker Tilly heard that the increased length of time to complete projects is due to several factors, including:

- Increased public engagement
- Staffing levels
- Review delays
- Regulatory and permitting requirements
- Modifications to project scope
- Additional new initiatives
- Decentralization of administrative duties

Increased public engagement

The public engagement process has lengthened the project delivery timeline but is necessary to allow for a more transparent process on complex projects. Since the Red Barn public meeting in 2018 when members of the La Honda community were upset at the consideration of a public access project near their community at the Red Barn, the Board directed staff to develop a new engagement approach with the public for complex and controversial projects. The Public Access Working Group implemented at La Honda Creek was very successful at getting community buy-in but was staff and time intensive. The initial public engagement can occur during the acquisition phase. Planning has also had a significant role in public engagement. Staff estimates that public engagement during the early programming stages of a project could require up to 50% of the planner's time. Not all projects require an individual public access working group, but early on the scoping of a project, there should be a determination made if there will be heightened public interest in a project so appropriate time for outreach can be allocated.

Recommendation 4. Establish criteria to determine when a project requires a public access working group and develop schedules as well as protocols for projects that require less public engagement.

Recommendation 5. Identify at the earliest possible opportunity the level of community engagement required by the type of project and allocate adequate staff hours and include timing in the schedule.

Staffing

The lack of staff due to vacancies, turnovers, and shortages in key areas such as Planner IIIs and Capital Project Manager (CPM) IIs has slowed delivery of projects. In Planning, there have been nine years of staff vacancies (about one vacancy per year) which has impacted on the existing staff's workload. Each senior planner and CPM acts as a project manager, supervises two to four staff members, and reviews the work of the planners.

In Planning, senior planners acting as both project managers and supervisors of other planners limit their ability to provide training to planning staff. In peer organizations, such as the East Bay Regional Park District, Santa Clara County Parks, and San Mateo County Parks, this position is classified as a principal level staff and converting the senior planners to this classification would put them on par with other agencies and the traditional planning hierarchy of positions. However, there are currently no other principal level classifications at Midpen. The evaluation of career ladders throughout the organization will be appropriate as the organization grows. (see recommendations in the human resources section of this report).

Both Planner IIs and Planner IIIs report to a senior planner. Planner IIIs are instrumental to project outcomes and are assigned to many projects. Requirements imposed by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) have placed additional demands on planners, such as required historic review of District facilities now older than 50 years, and tribal engagement. There is an immediate need for more Planner IIIs to fill the project manager role.

The Engineering and Construction department has also experienced periods of insufficient capacity to receive projects resulting in projects being deferred due to lack of staff. The addition of staff in the near term will address current demands and keep projects on track. In addition, a review of long-term staffing needs is essential to avoid future delays in project delivery. Staff turnover results in institutional knowledge lost on long-term projects.

To attract talent and retain existing staff it is important to provide growth opportunities. We recommend that in addition to the positions needed in the near term, the district conduct an evaluation of options to maintain a career ladder for both planners and capital project managers (see

recommendation regarding career ladders in the Human Resources section of this report).

Recommendation 6. Recruit for two additional Planner III positions in Planning

Recommendation 7. Increase overall project delivery capacity by adding another Capital Project Manager II position.

Recommendation 8. Ensure that project record-keeping is current to provide legacy of long-term projects.

Review delays

Timely legal review of board reports, contracts, agreements, and CEQA documents is critical to moving a project along. There is a lack of autonomy for the Planning and Engineering and Construction departments to make decisions and too many decisions require the General Manager and/or Board review and approval which adds to the length of the project. There have been delays in receiving the General Manager's input and decisions on key project milestones and deliverables that could have been reviewed or decided at a lower level. These delays impact project timelines. The Board report review process is lengthy; it takes 6 weeks to reach a Board meeting date if action is required on a project.

Signing authority remains low (\$50,000) for the scale of contracts administered and requires Board approval which can also extend the project timeline. In addition, any contract change orders (CCO) must be reviewed by the General Manager's office/Board. This results in a delay of 6 weeks or more.

Recommendation 9. Evaluate the level of authority required for review of board reports, contracts, agreements, and CEQA documents to ascertain if lower-level review is appropriate and will reduce review time.

Recommendation 10. Modify limits to contract change order authority to expedite necessary modifications.

Regulatory and permitting requirements

Many planned projects require extensive regulatory agency and permitting coordination which have long lead times and can be challenging to obtain. Each project team manages the permit process for their project. There is no central point of contact between the district and regulatory agencies and counties. It can take as long as 8-months to

obtain necessary approvals. Peer agency coordination is challenging for on-schedule delivery of projects. County line staff can create barriers to the progress of projects and some agencies treat District staff as developers rather than as representatives of an agency committed to preservation and protection of the natural environment. Engineering & Construction must sometimes “negotiate” with a regulatory agency to resolve an issue or condition. It does not make sense for departments other than Natural Resources to negotiate with regulatory agencies.

Through our peer learning process, we gained valuable insights into the diverse approaches employed by different agencies in managing permits for parks and open spaces. Table 4 details the permitting practices for each of the peer agencies. The East Bay Regional Park District utilizes a comprehensive permitting process, integrating legal reviews, blanket permits, and meticulous review of land use project permits. Conversely, agencies like Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, Marin County Parks, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, and Jefferson County Open Space utilize permit committees and designated staff roles for permit approval. This variation demonstrates that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effectively managing public spaces.

One notable trend that emerged was the strategic use of specialized roles, such as Administration Coordinators and Senior Park Rangers, underscoring the value of having dedicated experts overseeing the permitting process. Additionally, the incorporation of blanket permits, as seen in the East Bay Regional Park District, Jefferson County Open Space and Marin County Parks, provides a streamlined solution for specific scenarios.

Table 4. Peer Agency Permitting Oversight

	Midpen	Boulder County Parks and Open Space	East Bay Regional Park District	Jefferson County Open Space and Parks	Marin County Parks	Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department
Staff Responsible for Securing Permits	Planning, Engineering and Construction, and Natural Resources	Planning Department	Stewardship Division	Administration Coordinator in the Visitor Services and Natural Resource Department ¹	N/A	N/A

Source: As reported by each agency.

¹Permits that require special use are reviewed by the Visitor Relations Coordinator.

Under its enabling legislation the District is empowered to:

“...plan, adopt, lay out, plant, develop, and otherwise improve, extend, control, operate, and maintain a system of public parks, playgrounds, golf courses, beaches, trails, natural areas, ecological and open space preserves, parkways, scenic drives, boulevards, and other facilities for public recreation, for the use and enjoyment of all the inhabitants of the district, and it may select, designate, and acquire land, or rights in land, within or without the district, to be used and appropriated for such purposes. It may cause such trails, parkways, scenic drives, and boulevards to be opened, altered, widened, extended, graded or regraded, paved or repaved, planted or replanted, repaired, and otherwise improved, may conduct programs and classes in outdoor science education and conservation education, and may do all other things necessary or convenient to carry out the purposes of this article.”

All the tools of municipal local government (city and county) are delegated to the District in order to accomplish this work. The one exception as it relates to the District is that Midpen does not have the right to use eminent domain to acquire property within the San Mateo County Coastal Annexation Area pursuant to the terms of a resolution adopted on June 6, 2003.

Supporting this broad authority is the fact that Midpen is governed by a locally elected Board which is pursuant to the enabling legislation carefully drawn from wards which are designed such that all areas of the regional district have representation. In establishing regional park, park and open space districts in the early 1970s the California State legislature thought very seriously about how to balance local control while providing the authority to preserve open spaces in California and they developed a **new kind of local government** to take on this challenge. In some cases, these agencies evolved as sub-jurisdictions of counties and in some cases, they evolved as separate local governments. In the case of Midpen it was the latter.

In interesting wrinkle in terms of how Midpen operates is that it nominally develops projects independently using its own staff and resources, but then seeks permits for these projects both from relevant **regulatory** agencies (such as State Fish and Wildlife) which are typically charged with enforcing State and Federal environmental laws, and from the underlying general purpose local government, usually the County of San Mateo or Santa Clara, which enforce **zoning and land-use regulations**, commonly known as entitlements. The general-purpose governments often treat Midpen projects as discretionary, entitlement

type, projects and add conditions that Midpen must comply with, very much like Midpen was any other private property owner.

While this may be appropriate, particularly when a general-purpose government is acting in a true regulatory role, such as a flood control district, it may not be appropriate in all cases, particularly when it is acting more in the vein of a routine entitlement permit authority, Midpen is not a private property owner. It is a co-equal local government, with co-equal powers albeit in a narrow range, similar to a water or sewer district.

Given that we have observed that other open space districts have evolved more flexible permitting arrangements with underlying general-purpose governments, Baker Tilly suggests a dialogue be started with the two counties about more flexible permitting arrangements concerning District projects. It may be that Midpen projects do not need to be routinely submitted to the county governments for entitlement permitting outside of what is required for truly regulatory purposes.

Recommendation 11. Continue to pursue blanket permits where possible.

Recommendation 12. Seek a legal opinion and Board direction regarding self-regulating authority for project entitlements.

Recommendation 13. Centralize the regulatory permitting function. Utilize the in-house knowledge and expertise of natural resources to streamline the procurement and management of regulatory permits.

Project scope modifications

Due to the length of time involved on projects, there are changes to the scope which in turn cause additional delays. Project timelines are sometimes so long that the project history is lost. Scope modification occurs due to 1) public input, 2) permitting from outside regulatory agencies, and 3) the limited window of time when work can be done in environmentally sensitive areas.

Because projects now take longer to complete, design changes occur over the life of the project when consultants may no longer be engaged on the project. This further results in time delays in re-engaging consultants to modify the design. In-house design teams could respond to these changes more quickly and keep a project on track. Use of a Senior Capital Project Manager to lead in-house design would expand promotional opportunities and reduce time and cost of using consultants for design

work, particularly in instances where scope changes and there is a need for alternative changes quickly. We believe that bringing design work in-house will eliminate the delays but would require an additional Senior Capital Project Manager in Engineering and Construction to absorb the work now performed. The use of an eligible consultant pool that Engineering and Construction can tap until the in-house resource is established and for added capacity as needed in the future will further address this gap.

Projects in the past were typically “construct and walk away”. The responsibilities have grown to include more involvement past construction through operation and past occupancy. One example is tenant improvements within the central office. Projects with CEQA mitigation measures require ongoing monitoring, upkeep, and success criteria (typically plant survival). The staff resources needed over 5 to 10 years or more to monitor and maintain mitigation projects should be factored into project design and implementation.

Recommendation 14. Develop an in-house design team to address design changes, build institutional knowledge, and provide career growth opportunities more quickly. Create an eligible consultant pool to engage as needed until the new team can be established.

Recommendation 15. Add a Senior Capital Project Manager to provide support for an in-house design team.

Recommendation 16. Solidify the project scope early in the planning process by including all departments in earliest discussions and verify at regular check-ins.

Recommendation 17. Incorporate scheduling of staff time beyond completion of construction.

Additional new initiatives

Since adoption of the FOSM, several new initiatives require staff attention and time including expansion of coastal land, wildland fire resiliency, ADA accessibility requirements, and active transportation planning and coordination. Staff have also been involved in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and there is heightened interest in and awareness of the need for tribal cultural conservation and relations. Currently, each department is defining its own role/responsibilities with Tribal Relations and how they work with Native /American/indigenous communities. The review and coordination of historic resources has also

grown as many structures have aged beyond 50 years old which is the CEQA threshold for historic significance determination.

Recommendation 18. Evaluate the impacts of new initiatives through a district-wide lens to carefully decide what new initiatives to take on and provide necessary resources to assist with efforts.

Recommendation 19. Provide staff training to increase knowledge for new initiative areas (i.e., wildfire resiliency, ADA accessibility requirements, active transportation planning, diversity, equity and inclusion, tribal relations, and historic resource requirements).

Utilize in-house expertise when feasible.

Decentralization of administrative tasks

The district has decentralized certain activities (such as contracts/purchasing; budget; resource loading) which has impacted departments that lack the skills or resources to effectively perform these tasks and pulls them away from their other duties and expertise. In Planning, Natural Resources, and Engineering and Construction staff spend too much time on administrative tasks, such as quarterly budget updates, procurement, invoicing, etc., which takes away from supervisory duties and project management assignments.

Planning and Engineering and Construction share one administrative staff position which is not adequate for the needs of those departments. Some administrative tasks that need attention are the organization and clean-up of all Board approved Use and Management Plans (PUMP) for each of the 26 preserves and management of electronic records. In addition, the expansion of community engagement activities associated with major planning projects requires careful planning and organization that can be supported by an administrative position.

Recommendation 20. Evaluate administrative duties for the planning, natural resources, and engineering and construction departments to identify tasks that can be reassigned from project managers; hire additional support to meet the need.

Resource loading project challenges

Staff are overwhelmed by the number of large complex projects happening simultaneously and the assessment of staff capacity to current/projected workloads is unrealistic using the resource loading assessment. Resource loading is a 3-year look ahead that is not an

accurate assessment of staff capacity to current and projected workloads. Departments find they are constantly under resourced because it is not possible to estimate so far ahead and then there often is a need to pivot. Some departments have transitioned from a “construct and walk away” responsibility to being involved in the project through operations past occupancy. One example of this is tenant improvements required within the central office. There is a need for a project close-out review and audit projects after completion to understand what could have gone better, lessons learned, and gain a better understanding of resources required.

Recommendation 21. Evaluate the resource loading tool for Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP) projects and modify as needed to capture all staff work.
In addition to projects, include scheduling of staff time beyond completion of construction as needed.

Recommendation 22. Conduct project close-out reviews to document time spent on each phase to present more accurate representation of length of time required by project type and establish a database of information to inform future resource loading.

Role of Natural Resources in Project Delivery

The Natural Resources department has a key role in fulfilling the district’s mission to protect and restore the natural environment. The Natural Resources (NR) department resides with Visitor and Field Services given the long-term focus of NR work (including on-going monitoring of land management requirements); however, the role and contribution of Natural Resources begins at acquisition and is notable to the planning and delivery of District projects.

Over the years, the types of projects have changed based on the need to provide more public access. On some projects, Natural Resources is the lead due to the nature of the project. On other projects Natural Resources’ role is advisory to the lead department. In some cases, the input of Natural Resources has occurred late in the process and caused delays, many times as a result of regulations that are imposed on Midpen by other regulatory agencies. When this happens, there is little ability to change the scope to avoid expensive mitigation and regulatory requirements, which can be as onerous for the agency. It is essential for Natural Resources to provide early input on projects and participate in scoping meetings. Because of their role in procuring regulatory permits, Natural Resources has been viewed as a regulator rather than a partner for CIAP projects.

As discussed above, Natural Resources performs an essential role in the permitting and on-going monitoring of district projects. Natural Resources staff are highly skilled and view projects through a scientific lens. They have working relationships with the regulatory agencies that approve permit applications to advance district projects and have a deep understanding of the sensitivities and requirements for land preservation and restoration. As a result of steady turnover at state and federal regulatory agencies, Natural Resources is often the most knowledgeable and best source for determining mitigation measures and advancing the permitting process. It is for this reason that recommendation 13, to establish a position to procure and manage regulatory permits, is best housed within Natural Resources.

Natural Resources works closely with the Land and Facilities Department who have skills in managing the land and have the staff and equipment to carry out the necessary work of restoration projects. Additionally, as discussed below, land maintenance has and will continue to grow with the implementation of the wildland fire resiliency program and vegetation management (including rangeland conservation efforts) each of which requires careful consultation and partnership with natural resources.

Visitor and Field Services

Visitor and Field Services is a service line led by an Assistant General Manager and comprised of three departments: Land and Facilities, Visitor Services, and Natural Resources. Each of these departments delivers critical field support and operations that ensure stewardship, maintenance, safety and access to district preserves across the district.

Land and Facilities

The Land and Facilities department maintains the trail system and associated infrastructure, manages leases and properties, delivers field projects, maintains facilities, works with natural resources to manage invasive species, and manages vehicles and equipment for maintenance staff districtwide. The size and scale of the operation continues to increase as the acreage and trail miles of Midpen expand. In addition, the sensitivity and complexity associated with the diverse portfolio of holdings across the two counties has stretched the department. The coastal management plan, wildland fire resiliency plan, and integrated pest management plan each provide a roadmap for increasing service levels and addressing district needs. Implementation of these plans will take time and require the investment of additional resources. The staffing assumptions for each have been incorporated into the long-range staffing

plan discussed later in this report; however, there are specific needs that should be addressed in the near term.

Resource Management and Wildland Fire Resiliency Programs

As was noted above, one new environmental factor impacting the District's land holdings is the increased danger of wildfire, largely brought on by climate change, previous forest rangeland management practices, and the manifestation of periodic drought periods. Increased wildland fire prevention, preparation and response are recognized as part of Midpen's ongoing land stewardship. To address this need, the district established a Wildland Fire Resiliency Program in 2021 that will reduce wildland fire severity and risk in the region by managing vegetation in the preserves with a focus on ecological health and wildland fire resiliency.

The program will allow Midpen to proactively increase ecologically sensitive vegetation management up to approximately six-fold over ten years. The program is made up of:

- Vegetation management plan: focused on ecosystem resiliency and facilitation of fire response and evacuation
- Scientific monitoring plan: to inform continual adaptation of the program
- Pre-fire plans with resource advisor maps: to assist fire agencies in their response
- Prescribed fire plan: to reintroduce prescribed fire to Midpen's land management toolbox. This element was recently approved by the Board and has been certified under the California Environmental Quality Act

Integrated pest management (IPM) strategies are essential to the success of this program and as such the team works in partnership with the natural resources department. In addition to work under the wildland fire resiliency program, the growth of IPM and plan updates are further discussed in the Natural Resources section of this report. While the Natural Resources department is effective in monitoring, strategizing, and planning IPM work, they do not have staffing for maintaining work performed under large contracts. Field work labor to conduct natural resource maintenance work is more effectively managed within the Land and Facilities department.

Eventually this program is going to require that the District maintain literally hundreds of miles of fuel breaks, fire roads and evacuation routes; work with dozens of local fire agencies and CalFire to annually prioritize resources and projects; and develop prioritized flammable

invasive plants for removal plans through the Integrated Pest Management Program. So far, this work has relied heavily on grants (over \$2.5 million since 2017), but it will need to develop ongoing revenue sources.

In recent budgets, the Board recognized the importance of this program and authorized four positions. These include two Field Resource Specialist positions and two Lead Open Space Technician positions. These positions provide the structure for two crews to address resource management, wildfire prevention and resiliency, through sensitive vegetation management. As was the case prior to the formation of the capital projects team, assigning existing maintenance staff to the resources management team reduces the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees who are actively managing the existing trail networks and attending to maintenance work orders. This results in deferred maintenance and a maintenance backlog that continues to grow despite recent increases in maintenance staffing levels. To prevent the reassignment of existing staff and the potential impacts on routine maintenance, Midpen should add the staff required to form two resource management and wildland fire resiliency crews.

Recommendation 23. Establish two crews assigned to the Resource Management and Wildfire Resiliency Program.

Conservation Grazing Program

Conservation grazing is one of many land management tools Midpen uses to achieve conservation goals. The conservation grazing program began in 2007, and now encompasses approximately 10,000 acres leased to small-scale ranchers across San Mateo County. The partnerships are a critical tool helping Midpen manage large-scale coastal grasslands and the rich biodiversity they support.

Just as with the pressures of climate change and the impacts on land management described above, the increasing size and scale of agricultural holdings and the District's commitment the policies established in the Coastal Service Plan, demand additional time and resources. The department manager currently invests considerable time in the care and support of agricultural and grazing tenants. Recently, the district added a position to support this work. The new Conservation Grazing Manager (Resource Management III) adds capacity to the property management team in land and facilities. The position will work closely with the Natural Resources department and serve as a single point of contact for conservation grazing and agricultural operations to improve customer service and expand support to agriculture tenants and

partners on the coast. In addition to property management activities, the resource management expertise of the position will provide a high level of lease oversight to assist tenants with incorporating resource protection measures as part of their grazing practices.

The addition of the conservation grazing manager increases capacity and expertise related to rangeland leases and should have a positive effect on the time spent by the department manager; however, given the multi-faceted set of goals associated with conservation grazing program and the heavy workload of the other property management staff, an additional property management specialist to support the administrative activities associated with this work is warranted.

Recommendation 24. Add one property management specialist I.

Growth of Land and Facilities Scope and Scale

Baker Tilly conducted thirty interviews and eight focus groups. One theme consistently emerged. The scope and diversity of the operations managed within the land and facilities department has increased significantly. As the organization continues to grow there is value in centralizing certain support functions to optimize efficiency and streamline service delivery. The primary purpose of the land and facilities department is to manage and ensure stewardship of Midpen lands. A number of programs currently housed in the department deliver ancillary services. The creation of a new department that brings together programs and services with a shared purpose of supporting field operations will ease the span of control and workload of the land and facilities manager while creating a department that can focus on the shared goal of internal support for field operations. Baker Tilly recommends the formation of a Central Service Department, led by a department manager reporting to the Assistant General Manager for Visitor and Field Services, to include the following programs and services:

- Facilities Maintenance
- Property Management
- Fleet Services
- Contract Management Services

A more focused Land Management Department will be better positioned to ensure the maintenance and stewardship needs of the district as it continues to expand and address the environmental impacts of climate change, balance and mitigate the requirements of rangeland management, and support visitor access.

Recommendation 25. Establish a new Central Service Department, led by a department manager, with support from an administrative assistant, to oversee facilities maintenance, property management, fleet services, and contract management services.

Recommendation 26. Rename the current Land and Facilities Department as the Land Stewardship Department.

Currently, the facilities maintenance team is comprised of a supervisor and one facilities maintenance specialist. The team maintains the field offices at foothills and skyline, residential houses and outposts owned by Midpen, and the Administrative Offices in Los Altos. The team utilizes contractors for added capacity. Since the opening of the Administrative Offices in Spring 2022, the facilities team reports spending significant time addressing routine maintenance needs there. The Administrative Office provides office space for district employees as well as tenants. As a result of these increased demands for maintenance works, facilities staff must rely more on contract support and have less time to address the maintenance needs of field offices and other facilities. In addition, the distance between facilities and limited access to district vehicles makes facilities maintenance challenged.

Recommendation 27. Increase the staffing capacity for facilities maintenance to align with increases in work order requests managed for district facilities. Over time, consider implementing a regional staffing model that reduces time spent traveling between locations and increases time spent executing work orders.

As discussed above, the property management function at Midpen is currently stretched thin. However, the addition of a property management specialist for the conservation grazing program will increase the capacity of the residential and commercial property management team to manage the broad array of district lease types (e.g., residential, office space, concessionaires, easements, staff housing). The property management team works closely with the facilities maintenance team for the resolution of tenant maintenance issues and as well as facility improvements as needed.

The Administrative Office building currently houses tenants on the first floor. While this is likely to change over time as the district staffing increases, the building management requirements for this location extend beyond maintenance and lease management. Midpen must staff a front

reception desk, accept deliveries for all tenants, distribute mail, and assist with general set up (i.e., internet). These additional tasks fall to administrative and IST staff and take time away from other work. The district should assess the time and staffing required to manage tasks associated with general building management and assign dedicated staff accordingly. Pulling staff from other programs or service areas is disruptive to those operations and may be better suited to a general building management role.

Recommendation 28. Evaluate the time required for general AO building management requirements (i.e., reception, mail and deliveries, internet set up) and staff accordingly.

The vehicles and heavy equipment that is owned and operated by Midpen employees currently lacks a dedicated fleet manager. Currently a management analyst in the Land and Facilities department has responsibility for fleet maintenance contracts, which is only one piece of the scope of work typically managed by a fleet manager. From acquisition to fuel usage and sustainability measures, to maintenance programs and use policy and compliance, an effective fleet manager will develop systems and evaluate practices to optimize fleet uses for the organization. As the district grows it should no longer rely on a decentralized fleet services model. It is inefficient and may be costing the district.

Recommendation 29. Hire a fleet manager that can manage the use and maintenance program for vehicles and heavy equipment.

Finally, the central services department should include a contract management function that can support visitor and field services with contract management support and serve as a liaison between the field and the procurement team within Administrative Services.

Recommendation 30. Create a new contract management function within the new central services department to support field contracts and serve as a liaison with procurement staff.

Visitor Services

The Visitor Services department was created as a major recommendation of the FOSM in order to increase focus on user experiences in the preserves. Its main programs are the ranger patrol and enforcement functions and the volunteer and interpretive and educational programs.

The challenges that Visitor Services are facing can best be summarized as follows:

1. A variety of exogenous service demands come from interest groups such as trail users, youth groups and others interested in using District facilities often in new and innovative ways. This has greatly increased as a result of the end of the Covid shutdown as local residents are increasingly interested in outdoor experiences.
2. Managing unanticipated visitor activity generated by Public Affairs.
3. Creating growth opportunities for staff who are often in relatively “flat” organizational structures.
4. A difficult labor market and the unique set of skills and requirements of ranger positions creates staffing challenges stemming from the attraction and retention of ranger staff.
5. Balancing the role of rangers between public safety (law enforcement) and educators to work directly with customers and participants.

Several of the challenges listed above have a direct effect on ranger staffing. A sustained increase in visitor rates is a positive outcome of the pandemic occurring as community members sought safe ways to recreate and developed a heightened awareness of the resources available throughout the district. Finally, coastal assets requiring patrol and the challenges associated with filling positions and retaining staff have also impacted the pressure on ranger staff.

The department has been implementing various strategies to mitigate these staffing challenges. This includes offering housing options to attract employees who may not be able to afford the local cost of living; establishing an unassigned pool of rangers to increase the flexibility of scheduling; and a new labor agreement that increased compensation. These strategies are helpful; however, the baseline ranger teams remain understaffed for the scale of operations performed.

Recommendation 31. Increase Ranger staffing by three (one lead and two rangers) to address current gaps.

Assign staff based on workload and coverage demands.

An issue for Midpen (and for many open space and parks districts) is finding the right balance for the posture of ranger positions vis-a-vis their role as public safety / law enforcement and provision of visitor services information and education. It is a balancing act and often can vary by location and even by the time of day or period within a week (busy or not busy within a preserve). Without the right balance and associated staffing

this challenge can put strain on staff, lead to retention issues, and lead to credibility issues in the community.

One way that similar organizations have addressed this balancing act is to initiate a dialogue within the organization to explore and understand the ranger role. Baker Tilly would recommend that Midpen invest in a process to do this. Once this differentiation has been completed, the district can establish response and scheduling standards as a way to determine the placement and number of staff.

Recommendation 32. Identify and develop goals and objectives for the roles the Rangers perform related to public safety versus visitor services support reflecting on regional variations. Develop guidelines to help Rangers understand their role and thrive in it.

Another source of the mounting Visitor Services workload are more requests for various types of outdoor education projects related to school groups and youth groups, including Scout troops. Many of these groups are seeking to contribute some type of project improvement to Midpen property as a visitor amenity. While appreciated, such projects can be more complicated than they may appear, and coordination is needed to make such well-intentioned activities successful. It would be beneficial if Midpen created a position that would be the point of contact for all groups who are looking to complete projects, and be the staff person who works with each group through completion of the project.

Volunteers

The nature of Midpen's work (outdoor work in scenic areas enjoyable to many individuals) and the demographics of its service area (a relatively high number of retired or semi-retired individuals with high discretionary income) makes for an ideal environment for volunteer contributions. And Midpen has a high demand for services in this area. Volunteers provide a tremendous resource for building awareness and champions of Midpen's mission and conservation goals. These are often loyal stewards of the district and bring great value.

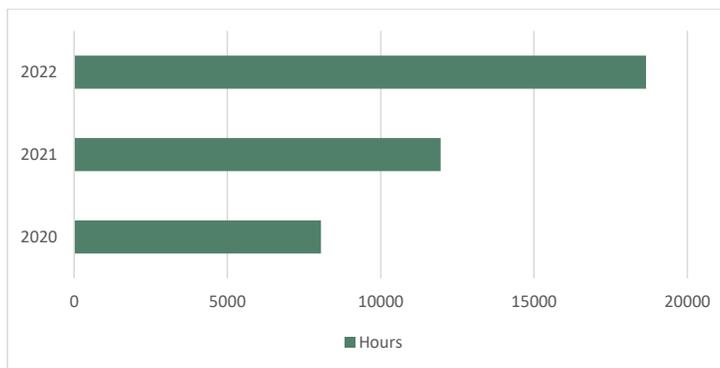
The District invested in a Volunteer and Docent Study in 2016 and adopted it in 2018. The study outlines plans for program expansion and contains a number of recommendations that should be implemented.

A best practice for managing and developing volunteer programs and for valuing them within the organization is to measure and quantify the contribution that they make to the organization to the community. Baker

Tilly was advised that such information is tracked and reported annually from a volunteer management system.

Based on data that was provided, it appears that volunteer activity is increasing. Over a two-year period from 2020 to 2022, the number of volunteer hours more than doubled as shown in Figure 1. However, the baseline for the data that was provided is 2020 and likely reflects a dip in volunteer activity due to COVID-19 requirements. The volunteer program manager reports that volunteer activity has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 1. Annual Program Volunteer Hours 2020 to 2022



In addition to volunteer activity, the number of guided activities continues to grow by approximately 20% a year. In the outdoor education docent program, the number of students, field trips, and docent hours have all grown by more than 100% from 2022 through 2023.

Investment in staff will benefit the program’s impact and is consistent with future growth plans and Board direction. Currently, the program relies on one volunteer coordinator position and has proposed the addition of a volunteer program lead.

Recommendation 33. Add a volunteer program lead to address increases in volunteer activity and plans for expansion.

This position will increase capacity to assist with trail construction and maintenance volunteer projects. Additional staffing increases are also anticipated in the staffing model as visitor services expands to the Coastside.

Volunteer opportunities and information on the district website is highly interactive and very good. For increased visibility it could be elevated to a more prominent and easy-to-find location. The volunteer page includes information on a variety of volunteer program opportunities. These include:

- Advanced Resource Management Steward
- Community Group Steward
- Community Outreach Volunteer
- Docent Naturalist
- Land Steward
- Nature Center Docent
- Office Volunteer
- Outdoor Education Docent
- Special Project Volunteer
- Volunteer Trail Patrol

Each option can be selected to learn more about the program and sign up to volunteer. The website identifies upcoming opportunities and has a Frequently Asked Questions section with links that include additional information on the programs that are available. The website also has links to partners and information for how groups can participate. To better attract volunteers, the opportunity page should be front and center on the homepage with links to the volunteer pages.

Training and the use of volunteer management tools is essential to the success of the volunteer program as it grows. The district will need to ensure the staff support needed to deliver necessary training to volunteers. In addition, it was noted that the District has a volunteer management software program, but it is a commercial product “off the shelf” program that does not work well for staff or for the volunteers.

Recommendation 34. Develop a Volunteer Training Program and a software system to support it. This can use elements of a commercial software product but should be tailored to meet district needs and to help with tracking and valuing volunteer contributions (discussed below).

Natural Resources

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program

The IPM is an integral part of the District’s natural resource management program. The Wildland Fire Resiliency Program has added additional vegetation management workload. The IPM Program deals with pest management as a primary objective including vegetative and fauna pest species (both a growing issue with climate change). In addition, the

program deals with pest control in District facilities. Implementation of this program is a partnership between natural resources, which has responsibility for the plan and is the scientific advisor for implementation, and the land management department whose staff complete the ongoing and specialized maintenance requirements of the program. This work, both IPM and wildland fire resilience, is integrated into the resource management and wildland fire resiliency crews discussed in the land and facilities section of this report.

The original IPM Plan was approved in 2014 and the last update was completed in 2019. The Final EIR completed with the update noted that the next update to the IPM is due in 2025. Open space and parks districts recognize that IPM work is necessary to protect the value of their open spaces and protect them from fire and burdensome maintenance costs.

The IPM workload is increasing. From 2015 to 2019 work hours have increased by 20% (17% by staff, 32% by volunteers, 51% by contractors). Baker Tilly was not able to access work hour information since 2019, but interviews indicated that work demand has continued to increase. As discussed above the addition of two crews to support the resource management and wildland fire resiliency program will help address the increases in workload. In addition, a primary tool used to implement the IPM program is through contracted cattle and other livestock grazing where the District contracts with ranchers to conduct livestock grazing. Currently approximately 10,000 acres are managed in this way, which is fairly low intensity and consistent with historical usage in much of the District territory. The addition of the conservation grazing manager, like the resource management and wildland fire resilience crews, will be important in the success of the IPM program.

Since a program update is due in 2025 work should begin now on that effort.

Recommendation 35. Start work now on the budget and work plan necessary for the 2025 IPM update.

The District cooperates regionally with other conservation agencies and organizations, and because the IPM expertise the District has developed is widely respected (2018 IPM Achievement Award from the California Environmental Protection Agency Department of Pesticide Regulation), it is often asked to consult with others. It has even been asked to take on mitigation projects on behalf of others both in terms of implementation and long-term monitoring. As a result, there may be some attraction – as well as some financial benefit – to the idea of establishing a consulting program for other conservation agencies, organizations and property

owners to provide IPM services or developing a training program that can be provided to regional agencies. Midpen prides itself on being a leader and this opportunity reflects the organization's expertise and reputation in this area. However, it is our assessment that taking on these additional programmatic areas should be viewed as a future opportunity. In the near-term the organization runs the risk of expanding scope and shifting focus from the delivery of existing priorities.

As mentioned previously in this report, Midpen has the opportunity to emphasize the in-house expertise and reputation of the natural resources team for self-regulating authority over district lands. While the decision to move in that direction requires careful consideration, legal review, and Board direction, it is prudent to maintain a focus on district stewardship as the option is evaluated.

Internal/Administrative Support

Finance, Budget and Analysis

Finance and Budget existed as separate units within the Administrative Services service line until they were merged as part of the FY 2023-24 budget to provide a more streamlined operation. The new department has a finance supervisor to lead the finance team (formerly the finance manager) and the new budget and finance manager, who had previously only supervised the budget staff directly.

With the restructuring the department lost some capacity in budget analysis work and therefore has contracted with a former employee who is knowledgeable about the District's budget systems and process to provide additional capacity. In addition to supporting the budget and analysis team, the new manager is focused on merging the two operations into a cohesive department.

Staffing levels, supplemented by contracted support as noted above, have been appropriate for the current operation. However, this review identified a need to increase support provided to some departments by streamlining activities and providing greater assistance with budget- and finance-related duties as needed. Not all departments have dedicated administrative staff to support the requests of the budget and finance operations and the requirements often demand time pulled from other operational duties. It can be inefficient when staff who do not routinely perform budget or finance-related tasks, are needed to step in.

Recommendation 36. Add a budget and analysis supervisor position to lead the budget and analysis team to increase capacity to support departments, reduce the

span of control of the department manager, and further streamline the budget process.

Recommendation 37. Convert the half-time accounting technician, currently shared with human resources, to a full-time position to better support the accounting needs of departments and build capacity to support the grants program.

With the merger of the two offices occurring within the past few months, the staffing and service levels of the office should be reevaluated on an ongoing basis to determine if there are adequate levels of management analysts to provide the necessary support for the departments. The continued use of contract services to supplement staffing capacity and support special projects can have a benefit in the short term without adding additional permanent staff. The long-term staffing models allow for additional staff to be added in future years if there is a need to further expand support to the departments.

Grants Management

The grants program has been very successful in bringing in external grants. At the time of interviews, the program was managing twenty active grants. The grant program is highly dependent on building relationships with key partners and looking to broaden partnerships with other agencies. This effort requires significant outreach to capitalize on opportunities. The more internal work of grants management involves review of reimbursement requests.

The Grants Program is supported by the Grants Program Manager, a Management Analyst II, and a Senior Grants Procurement Technician that was recently converted from a half-time position to full time.

Procurement and Contracts

Procurement is led by a Procurement Program Manager, a Senior Procurement Technician, and an Administrative Assistant who supports procurement half-time along with other Administrative Office duties which include staffing the front reception desk. In interviews, we heard that departments were pulled away from their primary focus to address procurement and contract issues in which individuals were less skilled. The addition of a second Senior Procurement Technician would increase much-needed support for the departments. The recommended contract management function in the new Central Services Department will bring a user perspective and further support to the administration of contracts

in the field. Over time, the district may wish to evaluate the benefits of moving the procurement program to Central Services.

Recommendation 38. Add a Senior Procurement Technician to expand departmental support provided by the Procurement Program.

Human Resources (HR)

HR is adequately staffed for the current size of the district. However, the current challenges facing all employers in recruiting and retaining employees are projected to continue. According to Forbes magazine, public sector jobs, especially in state and local governments, are still below their levels from before the pandemic. This means filling positions will continue to be difficult and expanding the district workforce from the FOSM refresh, will require additional HR capacity, either contractual or permanent, to keep up with the increased workload and to ensure the district is continuing to hire and retain quality employees. In addition, investment in automated workforce planning tools that track staffing trends, support recruitment efforts, and manage staff professional development needs will greatly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of human resources to support departments and employee with staffing needs. Such an investment also supports the department's desire to operate in a paperless manner and align with the environmental stewardship goals of the district.

The Human Resources department is led by a Human Resources Manager and supported by six full-time and one half-time (shared with finance) positions to deliver the full range of HR programs. Midpen is a growing organization, and with that comes increasing pressure on HR to support employees and managers, including with recruitments, training and professional development, labor relations and other support services. The long-term staffing model accounts for this growth over time; however, in the near-term, for the department to support the delivery of the staffing recommendations contained in this report, we recommend increasing capacity now.

Recommendation 39. Add an HR analyst to support the increase in the recruitment of positions resulting from the FOSM refresh and assist with expanding succession planning activities.

Recommendation 40. Convert the half-time HR technician, currently shared with finance, to a full-time position to assist with the increasing recruitment

support, training, and other HR needs of departments and employees.

A critical area that requires attention is the expansion of succession planning activities across the organization. HR staff have initiated the process by pinpointing key personnel eligible for retirement within the next five years and have identified several areas of concern. Midpen also participates in the countywide training consortium which offers extensive training opportunities for district employees, and the talent exchange program which offers unique professional growth opportunities to develop identified skills through experiential placements in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. In addition to these activities, the organization would benefit by offering targeted development opportunities to potential successors of positions that are likely to become vacant due to retirements. HR can support departments with succession planning efforts by helping to create individualized career plans, developing mentorship programs and tailored training initiatives, and supporting other career development opportunities that nurture talent within the organization.

Recommendation 41. Expand succession planning efforts to include helping departments and employees with creating individualized career plans, developing mentorship programs and tailored training initiatives, and supporting other career development opportunities.

A review of the current classification and pay structure indicates that Midpen utilizes a number of classification series that include flexibly staffed positions, such as Planner I/II, Data Analyst I/II and others, that lead to more senior level positions such as a Planner III, Capital Projects Manager III, and Resources Management Specialist III which is followed by the supervisory or lead role of a senior. This type of classification structure has many benefits and is common among local government agencies. It demonstrates progression in experience, duties, and responsibilities and offers clear career ladders for many professionals. In addition, the use of flexibly staffed positions (i.e., I/II) at the entry level of a professional series allows for promotions without the need to go through additional personnel processes and can work as an incentive for employees to stay within the organization. It also provides an opportunity to hire more qualified candidates at a higher level, when they are available. When establishing new classifications, the district should consider whether flexibly staffing those classifications would benefit the retention of employees and increase career ladder opportunities while minimizing single classification positions.

As the district grows and workload and staffing levels continue to expand, human resources should evaluate the option of creating a principal level position as an extension of the professional career ladders that are currently in place. As discussed in the project delivery section of this report, the senior level classification serves a critical role in the management of complex programs and projects in addition to supervising lower-level staff. The addition of a principal level position would expand supervisory capacity and reflect the high-level work needed by larger departments. Adding a principal level position to these classification series offers promotional opportunities that are consistent with peers, will encourage retention of the district's valued employees, and, in some cases, better reflect the level of work being performed.

Recommendation 42. Expand career ladders to provide staff growth and advancement opportunities that encourage attraction and retention of qualified employees and reflect the workload demands of the district. This includes at both the top and bottom ends of series classifications where levels may be missing or needed (i.e., planning, capital projects managers, natural resources, open space technicians) and the use of flexibly staffed classifications that enable promotions for qualified staff without need for additional personnel processes.

Additionally, establishing a talent pipeline or internship program with local technical schools and apprenticeship programs will help in cultivating a pool of skilled workers who are knowledgeable about the opportunities for future employment at Midpen. Finally, instituting clear career ladders where they do not currently exist, including the use of flexibly staffed positions (i.e., open space technician I/II), will ensure that employees see a clear path for advancement within the organization.

Recommendation 43. Utilize internships or apprenticeship programs with local schools and colleges to develop a pool of skilled workers.

Training and employee development is an essential part of any succession plan. As noted above, the district participates in the San Mateo County Regional Training and Development Consortium. The consortium provides training on Business Writing, a Public Sector Lead Worker academy, Preventing Sexual Harassment for Supervisors and Managers (online), Effective Public Speaking, Introduction to Supervision, Customer Service, Time Management, Career Development and much more. By continuing to take advantage of the Consortium and

supporting employee participation, the district can provide on-going skills training and career development.

Recommendation 44. Continue to participate in the San Mateo County Regional Training and Development Consortium for training and career development.

Additionally, it was noted the district's job descriptions do not list the current salary for the position. Listing the salary with the job description will make it easier for current and prospective employees to determine the pay for a position they might qualify for and are interested in pursuing. Presently the district has salaries in a separate location which requires prospective and current employees to search in two different places. And while the district lists annual salaries when recruiting for a position, having them on the job description will make it easier for prospective candidates – including internal prospects - to find the salary. These candidates, if interested, can then sign up on the CalOpps website to be notified when the position becomes available. This is a small but simple way to improve transparency regarding opportunities.

Recommendation 45. Add salary to job descriptions that are posted online.

It is important to recognize HR as a strategic partner and resource for all departments within the district. As organizations grow, HR services become more important and attracting and retaining experienced HR staff becomes more challenging. Like all public service agencies, Midpen is a people-driven organization. Incorporating the perspective of HR when contemplating organizational change or strategy contributes to long-term continued success.

Information Technology Services

The District has prioritized implementing an IT governance structure to promote effective planning, priority setting and accountability of district technology resources with business priorities. Growth in the technology arena has attempted to keep pace with the operational growth of the organization but IST is not always able to keep up with operational demands. The hybrid work environment, the large increase in mobile device use by field staff, and need to maintain and support the over twenty enterprise systems implemented over the past seven years are just a few examples impacting IST's workload.

Recommendation 46. Add an Applications Programs Manager to support the applications and database needs related to application enterprise systems.

The addition of the Senior Technologist for FY 2023-24 to implement cybersecurity projects and other complex technical projects will help with ensuring the technology infrastructure is reliable and secure and assist to reduce the backlog of existing projects. IST staff have identified a need to complete a full cybersecurity assessment to identify all cybersecurity risks facing the agency and due to lack of capacity the project continues to slip. IST has no administrative support and is currently the responsibility of the IST Manager. Purchasing and contract management are time-consuming. In addition, IST is responsible for supporting building sublets by arranging ISP services. A management analyst position would immediately help the IST Manager to offload administrative tasks and could also provide additional project management support needed in the division.

Recommendation 47. Add a Management Analyst position; work with the IST Manager to define roles and responsibilities to support the IST division.

The IST project list is extensive and covers three program areas (IT Program, Application (Enterprise) Program, GIS Program) to support organization-wide projects. GIS governance, resources and additional position requests should be included in the GIS Master Plan, currently under development. As the district continues to grow, impact on the demand for IST is a concern; with the expansion of support in the field offices and growth of technology tools (doubling the number of technology devices to support) IT programs will need the capacity to support all the different business operational needs, no matter the location of staff.

In addition, as the demand for IST resources has grown, the type of systems and technology has also changed. The complexity of the work performed today does not always match current skill sets or job specifications.

Recommendation 48. Evaluate IST job descriptions to determine if the specified skills match the current job requirements for the recruitment and hiring of qualified staff.

Recommendation 49. Ensure the GIS Master Plan includes evaluation of additional resources needed to support the operational demands.

Public Affairs

The Public Affairs department is comprised of six staff and a manager, including four public affairs specialists, a government affairs specialist, and an administrative assistant.

This unit performs a number of key roles in supporting District projects and operations including facilitating and managing public engagement, providing ongoing public information and developing and managing the Districts legislative program. The team is appropriately staffed and delivers quality communication to the public utilizing a variety of channels. The team serves in a support capacity to the planning department for community engagement activities associated with major projects.

The department manager reports to the General Manager. This reporting relationship offers some future opportunity in the realm of external affairs and the potential for further building partnerships with key stakeholders to advance the mission of Midpen. While no change is currently recommended, over time the potential for establishing a broader role for the public affairs team may be envisioned. The work of the government affairs specialist, the grants manager and the public affairs manager offer some opportunity for synergy and heightened coordination, especially as the District contemplates the value of greater autonomy and the related need for strong relationships regionally.

Public dialogue around District projects was frequently cited in interviews as a reason that project cycle times have increased, but it was also noted that public expectations around the need for inclusion and communications have increased necessitating a greater investment in these discussions. Nevertheless the District should consider how it can manage the public input process to emphasize the need for both a thorough vetting of projects with an expectation of timeliness and closure by explaining that time does cost money.

a

Commented [HN1]: This is raw and needs additional input and time.

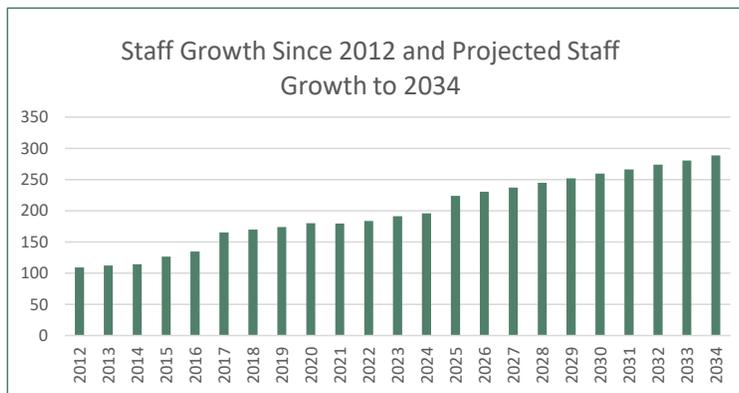
Organization Structure and Staffing Model

Staffing Model and Projections

In projecting needed staff increases for Midpen, Baker Tilly took a two-step approach to the task. We first assessed what positions are needed to address the workload demands of the current organization. It turned out that due primarily to the environmental factors impacting the organization, discussed above, such as climate change and related impacts to the protected open spaces, the pandemic-related shifts in outdoor visitation, and the greater diversity in land holdings the District has an immediate need for additional staff which is somewhat higher than anticipated.

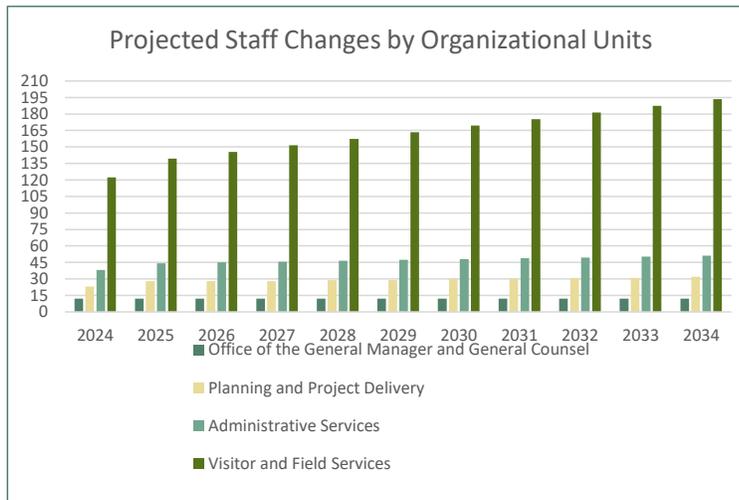
We have reviewed these needs on a position-by-position basis in an earlier section of this report, but our estimate is that Midpen will need to add approximately 28 new positions by the end of FY 2024-25 to address existing needs. Following this adjustment, we project the District will need to grow at approximately 3% annually in terms of full-time FTE between FY2026 and FY2034.

The figure below shows historical FTE growth at Midpen and what is projected over the next ten years.



It is anticipated the Midpen will have roughly tripled in size between FY2012 and FY2034. While this is not particularly fast growth for a Silicon Valley “start-up” it is very fast growth for a local government!

The figure below shows anticipated growth in the major Midpen organizational units over the FY2024-2034 period.



Most growth will occur in Visitor and Field Services, where we anticipate the addition of approximately 71 FTE. The area with the next highest growth will be in Administrative Services, which will add 12.75 FTE, followed by Planning and Project Delivery, which is expected to add 9.0 FTE. We have not included staffing additions in the Office of General Manager and General Counsel as a part of the near-term staffing adjustments; however, overtime shifts or adjustments in these areas may be warranted and can be addressed through projected increases for internal support activities. Overall, we expect the District to add 92.75 FTE between FY2024 and FY2034.

The model is designed to increase staff based on assumptions built into the staffing model, and it is designed to be flexible and should be implemented over time based on the District’s actual workloads. Historically, Midpen has averaged a 1.8% increase in acreage annually which would result in adding approximately 1,300 acres per year. In this model this level of increase translates into an increase of 6 FTE in Visitor and Field Services staffing annually. However, staffing should be added based on the timing and workload demands associated with increases. If there is no acreage added in a given fiscal year, the model would be

adjusted to account for no change. If there are 3,600 acres added in another fiscal year, the result would be that the District should plan on an additional 12 FTE to account for the increase in workload. These positions would be deployed in the areas that expand acreage and based on the needs of the departments.

The Planning and Project Delivery staffing increase is based on adding one FTE for every \$2 million of increased capital dollars budgeted for the fiscal year. As capital budgets increase, so does the role of the planning, engineering and construction, and natural resources roles of the organization.

Administrative Services staffing increases include a .75 FTE annual increase to handle the increased workload of supporting the Midpen operations. This assumption is based on the fact that there are economies of scale in administrative services so staffing should not need to increase on a one-to-one basis as other functions grow, but this factor can be adjusted based on experience by Midpen. The increase in FTE would be utilized in the administrative functions of the operation based on current needs and workloads. This gives the organization flexibility to address needs on an annual basis.

Based on the assumptions used for the staffing model, the total staffing is projected to increase by 92.75 FTE over the next ten years. This number will increase or decrease based on the actual acreage and budget changes but is a good indicator of growth necessary to keep up with Midpen's continual growth and expansion, using actual historical trend information.

Implementation and Next Steps

The Board and District staff are committed, engaged, and enthusiastic about the work and mission of the organization which has contributed to the success it has enjoyed. The District has experienced significant periods of growth and change over the years, most notably with the implementation of the FOSM recommendations, and can continue to thrive while implementing the changes outlined in this report. The next chapter is a further evolution of the progress achieved over the past decade.

To assist the lift of original FOSM implementation the consulting firm Management Partners (merged with Baker Tilly in October 2022) provided a framework for change management that warrants revisiting. Change is hard and it takes time. It also requires careful planning, patience, and the support of leadership.

There are five components to successful change management:

- Planning
- Defined governance
- Committed leadership
- Informed stakeholders, and
- Aligned workforce

Planning

The recommendations contained in this report are the starting point. Planning for implementation requires consideration of resources, defined milestones and outcomes, prioritization, and ownership. To be effective and achieve support and buy-in, the full team should be engaged and systems should be put in place to track and monitor timely progress. Baker Tilly will provide an implementation framework that will aid the district in the implementation of the recommendations we have provided.

Defined Governance

The importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities to successful change management cannot be overstated. This was a key recommendation of the original FOSM and continued focus is needed.

Defined governance ensures that the distinct and significant roles of both the policy-makers (Board) and executive leadership (General Manager and Assistant General Managers) are accepted and honored. The Board, leadership team, and staff each own different parts of the governance continuum. The Board provides policy level review and decision-making. This should include revising existing policies and procedures regarding Board relationships with staff. Staff are charged with implementing the vision and administering the District work plan through Board-established work plan priorities and direction.

When adequate role definition, policies, and systems are in place, trust and accountability within and outside the organization result. Committing to the distinct roles will enable policy makers to focus on policy and strategic direction instead of operations and administration.

Committed Leadership

District leadership must ensure staff has the tools, training, and resources to complete the work and achieve the defined outcomes associated with these changes.

As work becomes more complex, effective communication and efficient meeting management will be critical to success. Likewise, delegating problem solving and decision making to employees that are aligned at all levels of the organization improves workflow processing and keeps projects moving by avoiding the need to vet each decision through the executive team.

Informed Stakeholders

Creating and communicating a vision for how recommendations will be implemented, accompanied by a sense of urgency, enables staff to connect incremental tasks to a broader purpose. Frequent and regular communication (i.e., employee newsletter, shared calendars, joint administration and field staff events) help staff understand what is being asked of them and set a context for future directives, planning and associated action plans.

Clear and frequent communication from management about how organizational changes will affect the workforce is seen as inconsistent and underdeveloped by many employees. Having District operations based in different buildings and different areas can make communication challenging without an intentional, organized effort.

Aligned Workforce

Workforce considerations and staffing alignment are critical components of an agency's success. The original FOSM resulted in notable changes in

this area. The FOSM refresh and the recommendations contained in this report continue to ensure appropriate alignment as the organization continues to grow. Future refinement should be anticipated.

Conclusion

Capitalizing on the opportunities that lie ahead for Midpen requires intentional investment, flexibility within the staffing model, and a sustained focus on continuous improvement. In addition, a commitment to clear priorities, open and regular communication, and direction as well as patience and persistence is required by leaders in the organization. Change is hard. However, the ambiguity that is inherent in the midst of change can be diminished through disciplined practices that include planning (timing, training, tools, problem solving), defined governance, committed leadership, aligning the workforce, and regular communication with stakeholders.

District employees reported that the mission of the agency keeps them inspired and engaged in preservation, restoration, and expanding public access opportunities. Most agencies spend decades investing in resources to establish and build employee commitment to their mission. Although significant, the recommendations contained in this report can serve to refresh the commitment to the mission to fuel the work ahead. As the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District continues its evolution and marches toward the future, it is creating as its legacy an indelible impact on the region for generations to come.

Attachment A – List of Recommendations

- Recommendation 1. Implement the recommendations of the Coastal Management Plan to support the growth of the coastal areas.
- Recommendation 2. Invest in continuous improvement, coordination, and training opportunities to achieve project management best practices.
- Recommendation 3. Evaluate options and acquire a project management tool to support Engineering and Construction in the workflow and delivery of projects.
- Recommendation 4. Establish criteria to determine when a project requires a public access working group and develop schedules as well as protocols for projects that require less public engagement.
- Recommendation 5. Identify at the earliest possible opportunity the level of community engagement required by the type of project and allocate adequate staff hours and include timing in the schedule.
- Recommendation 6. Recruit for two additional Planner III positions in Planning
- Recommendation 7. Increase overall project delivery capacity by adding another Capital Project Manager II position.
- Recommendation 8. Ensure that project record-keeping is current to provide legacy of long-term projects.
- Recommendation 9. Evaluate the level of authority required for review of board reports, contracts, agreements, and CEQA documents to ascertain if lower-level review is appropriate and will reduce review time.
- Recommendation 10. Modify limits to contract change order authority to expedite necessary modifications.
- Recommendation 11. Continue to pursue blanket permits where possible.
- Recommendation 12. Seek a legal opinion and Board direction regarding self-regulating authority for project entitlements.
- Recommendation 13. Centralize the regulatory permitting function. Utilize the in-house knowledge and expertise of natural resources to streamline the procurement and management of regulatory permits.
- Recommendation 14. Develop an in-house design team to address design changes, build institutional knowledge, and provide career growth opportunities more quickly.
- Recommendation 15. Add a Senior Capital Project Manager to provide support for an in-house design team.
- Recommendation 16. Solidify the project scope early in the planning process by including all departments in earliest discussions and verify at regular check-ins.
- Recommendation 17. Incorporate scheduling of staff time beyond completion of construction.

- Recommendation 18. Evaluate the impacts of new initiatives through a district-wide lens to carefully decide what new initiatives to take on and provide necessary resources to assist with efforts.
- Recommendation 19. Provide staff training to increase knowledge for new initiative areas (i.e., wildfire resiliency, ADA accessibility requirements, active transportation planning, diversity, equity and inclusion, tribal relations, and historic resource requirements).
- Recommendation 20. Evaluate administrative duties for the planning, natural resources, and engineering and construction departments to identify tasks that can be reassigned from project managers; hire additional support to meet the need.
- Recommendation 21. Evaluate the resource loading tool for Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP) projects and modify as needed to capture all staff work.
- Recommendation 22. Conduct project close-out reviews to document time spent on each phase to present more accurate representation of length of time required by project type and establish a database of information to inform future resource loading.
- Recommendation 23. Establish two crews assigned to the Resource Management and Wildfire Resiliency Program.
- Recommendation 24. Add one property management specialist I.
- Recommendation 25. Establish a new Central Service Department, led by a department manager, with support from an administrative assistant, to oversee facilities maintenance, property management, fleet services, and contract management services.
- Recommendation 26. Rename the current Land and Facilities Department as the Land Stewardship Department.
- Recommendation 27. Increase the staffing capacity for facilities maintenance to align with increases in work order requests managed for district facilities.
- Recommendation 28. Evaluate the time required for general AO building management requirements (i.e., reception, mail and deliveries, internet set up) and staff accordingly.
- Recommendation 29. Hire a fleet manager that can manage the use and maintenance program for vehicles and heavy equipment.
- Recommendation 30. Create a new contract management function within the new central services department to support field contracts and serve as a liaison with procurement staff.
- Recommendation 31. Increase Ranger staffing by three (one lead and two rangers) to address current gaps.
- Recommendation 32. Identify and develop goals and objectives for the roles the Rangers perform related to public safety versus visitor services support reflecting on regional variations.
- Recommendation 33. Add a volunteer program lead to address increases in volunteer activity and plans for expansion.
- Recommendation 34. Develop a Volunteer Training Program and a software system to support it.

- Recommendation 35. Staff should start work now on the budget and work plan necessary for the 2025 IPM update.
- Recommendation 36. Add a budget and analysis supervisor position to lead the budget and analysis team to increase capacity to support departments, reduce the span of control of the department manager, and further streamline the budget process.
- Recommendation 37. Convert the half-time accounting technician, currently shared with human resources, to a full-time position to better support the accounting needs of departments and build capacity to support the grants program.
- Recommendation 38. Add a Senior Procurement Technician to expand departmental support provided by the Procurement Program.
- Recommendation 39. Add an HR analyst to support the increase in the recruitment of positions resulting from the FOSM refresh and assist with expanding succession planning activities.
- Recommendation 40. Convert the half-time HR technician, currently shared with finance, to a full-time position to assist with the increasing recruitment support, training, and other HR needs of departments and employees.
- Recommendation 41. Expand succession planning efforts to include helping departments and employees with creating individualized career plans, developing mentorship programs and tailored training initiatives, and supporting other career development opportunities.
- Recommendation 42. Expand career ladders to provide staff growth and advancement opportunities that encourage attraction and retention of qualified employees and reflect the workload demands of the district.
- Recommendation 43. Utilize internships or apprenticeship programs with local schools and colleges to develop a pool of skilled workers.
- Recommendation 44. Continue to participate in the San Mateo County Regional Training and Development Consortium for training and career development.
- Recommendation 45. Add salary to job descriptions that are posted online.
- Recommendation 46. Add an Applications Programs Manager to support the applications and database needs related to application enterprise systems.
- Recommendation 47. Add a Management Analyst position; work with the IST Manager to define roles and responsibilities to support the IST division.
- Recommendation 48. Evaluate IST job descriptions to determine if the specified skills match the current job requirements for the recruitment and hiring of qualified staff.
- Recommendation 49. Ensure the GIS Master Plan includes evaluation of additional resources needed to support the operational demands.