



**EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
AGENDA STAFF REPORT**

DATE	January 16, 2024
TITLE	Approval of 2024 Legislative Program
DIVISION	General Manager's Office
FROM	Erich Pfuehler, Chief of Government and Legislative Affairs Dr. Ana M. Alvarez, Deputy General Manager
APPROVED	Sabrina B. Landreth, General Manager

RECOMMENDATION

The General Manager recommends the Board of Directors adopt a resolution to support the 2024 Legislative Program as proposed.

BACKGROUND

The Board Legislative Committee (Committee) met on December 15, 2023 to deliberate the proposed 2024 Legislative Program mentioned previously in this report. The Committee voted unanimously to forward the recommendation the full Board of Directors approve the 2024 Legislative Program.

The East Bay Regional Park District (Park District) works on local, state and Federal levels to support the agency's projects, programs and communities. The work strives to align funding and policy advocacy with identified project and program needs and priorities. Guided by the East Bay Regional Park District's mission, elected Board of Directors and General Manager, the General Manager's Office's Government and Legislative Affairs team engages on and advocates for relevant local, state and Federal funding and policies. They maintain strategic relationships with elected offices and external agency partners through regular meetings, site visits and events. The team leads analytical research and survey projects in support of agency's advocacy goals.

Governed by the Board Legislative Committee, the Legislative Program includes multi-year goals and annual objectives. The goals identified enable the Park District to act nimbly in response to new opportunities as they arise at the local, state and Federal level. The Park District's identified advocacy goals are as follows:

- Climate - Friendly Transportation: To expand accessible active and public transportation to and within East Bay parks and trails.
- Community Health: To ensure equitable access to parks so all East Bay communities can enjoy the physical and psychological benefits of nature.
- Ecosystem Stewardship: To support ecosystem health through restoration, acquisition and habitat enhancement, and improved efficiencies in regulatory approvals.
- Green Jobs: To guide the development of career pathways for all in the parks, recreation, outdoor and environmental fields.
- Sea Level Rise Preparedness: To address sea level rise with nature-based infrastructure and initiate

mitigation strategies regarding climate change.

- Welcoming Visitor Use Facilities: To be sure all visitors are welcomed to the East Bay parks and trails by providing facilities which are safe, accessible, inclusive and sustainable.
- Wildfire Resilience: To minimize the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the East Bay by using proactive vegetation management which is ecologically sound.

In compliment, the proposed Legislative Program includes objectives at the local, state and Federal level in support of pro-active engagement with elected officials and agency leadership to advance priorities of the Park District's Board of Directors and General Manager.

ANALYSIS

The proposed 2024 legislative objectives were determined because project and program needs were identified in alignment with solutions and decision maker support. On September 26, 2023, the Board of Directors provided feedback on the Legislative Program at a Study Session. On October 24, 2023, staff input was gathered at the inaugural Government and Legislative Affairs Staff Workshop. Feedback gathered has been integrated into the finalized objectives, as outlined below. Aligned with the identified advocacy goals and rooted in an elected official's policy priority, external agency initiative, Board Member identified priority, General Manager priority or a continuation of a 2023 objective, the proposed 2024 Legislative Program objectives seek to advance Park District priorities at a local, state and Federal level. Of the proposed objectives, 33% are strategic engagement opportunities, 29% focus on advancing direct funding and expanding competitive grant program opportunities, and 38% are to guide legislation, policy and regulatory changes to advance the Park District's work.

Climate-Friendly Transportation

Local: Participate in regional discussions regarding a potential "mega-measure" for transportation and advocate for expanded active transportation and maintenance funding, as well as partnership grants with public transportation agencies to expand access to open space

- This proposed objective is in response to an external opportunity for additional active transportation trail funding. The Park District would benefit from securing additional funding for maintaining and completing regional trails across the East Bay in alignment with community interests. In a February 2023 survey, 79% of respondents agreed in the importance of maintaining existing regional trails, including the Bay Trail and Iron Horse Trail.
- The objective was expanded with Board and Staff Workshop participant feedback to include partnerships with public transit agencies aimed at improving access to open space.

State: Request direct state funding for Point Wilson – Bay Trail of \$7 million

- Building off the expressed interest of the East Bay delegation to support expanded access to parks, trails and open space, this proposed objective seeks to secure direct funding for the Point Wilson – Bay Trail capital project. This project would construct a .9-mile paved multi- use extension of the San Francisco Bay Trail from Pinole Point Business Park in Richmond – where corporate distribution centers, including for Amazon, Whole Foods and UPS, are located – to Point Wilson providing a connection to the Regional Intermodal Transportation Center (RITC) and Pinole Shores railroad overcrossing – two active transportation projects previously funded by TIGER II. The trail would connect to three modes of public transportation – rail, ferry and bus – at one convenient location along the waterfront in a growing community along the San Pablo Bay shoreline. The trail also connects to the Bio-Rad Laboratories campus – the top employer in the City of Hercules. This trail segment has regional transportation benefits because it would complete the San Francisco Bay Trail between the City of Oakland and the City of Hercules, approximately 18 miles, paralleling one of the most congested stretches of Interstate 80. Additionally, it will safely connect communities to the proposed Regional Intermodal Transportation Center.
- This objective was recognized as a high priority by the Board of Directors.

Federal: Host the Federal Highway Administration for a site-visit to exchange knowledge regarding the Park District's regional trails and Federal funding opportunities, including RAISE, with specific attention aimed at filling the gaps to expand regional trail access

- To cultivate strategic relationships and exchange information, this priority would advance a site visit for Federal partners to learn more about Park District active transportation projects. The Park District's unique model is often unfamiliar to Federal agencies. A site-visit would provide an opportunity to highlight not just priority active transportation projects, but the Park District itself.
- The Board of Directors requested attention be focused on filling the remaining trail gaps in the East Bay.

Community Health

Local: Host six Walk and Talk events with local, state and Federal elected officials in East Bay parks to expand access to parks and elevate the role they play in improving the community's mental, physical and psychological health

- Building off continued momentum, this priority focuses on supporting the Park District's delegation and community to enjoy East Bay parks and trails at a welcoming event. Thus far in 2023, the Park District has successfully hosted five Walk and Talks with over 200 members of the public in attendance.
- Board of Directors feedback encouraged language to focus specific attention on mental, physical and psychological health as part of the events.

State: In alignment with the state's Outdoors for All goals, advance legislation for a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) statutory exemption for existing roads and trails on land acquired by the Park District aimed at expanding public access to parks

- This objective would support the Park District in expanding open space for all community members across the region. In a February 2023 survey, 71% of respondents agreed with the importance of ensuring equitable access to parks and trails so all East Bay communities can enjoy the physical and psychological benefits of nature. By having the ability to open parks sooner, using existing roads, the East Bay public would benefit from expanded access to open space.
- Staff Workshop participants expressed support for this legislation.

Federal: Engage with the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Coalition to determine steps for expanding funding and eligibility for the grant program funds

- The Park District has a long history of advocating for and supporting the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which was established in 1964 through a bi-partisan effort to invest in outdoor recreation and natural resource protection. Land and Water Conservation Fund projects in the East Bay include increased public access at Bay Point Regional Shoreline, increased public access at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline, new park lands at Point Pinole Regional Shoreline, trail enhancement at Oyster Bay Regional Shoreline, improvement of the Skyline National Recreation Trail at Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park, campground improvements at Anthony Chabot Regional Park, safe water access for visitors at Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area, visitor center enhancements at Del Valle Regional Park, and visitor improvements at Temescal Regional Recreation Area. Unfortunately, projects that have received LWCF funds during an initial phase do not qualify for additional funding as the program is oversubscribed. The Park District is interested in advocating for an increase in funding for this program, as well as pursuing changes which would allow for expanded eligibility.

Ecosystem Stewardship

Local: Organize two volunteer days with elected offices to support hands-on experiences for elected officials

and the public aimed at learning about ecologically sensitive vegetation management through planting projects

- In response to expressed interest from the Office of Assembly Member Bauer-Kahan, this objective seeks to expand engagement with the Park District's delegation and public by providing a hands-on opportunity to learn more about the importance of planting native and fire/drought tolerant vegetation. This program would expand on the previous "Walk and Talk" format and explore new ways to connect with elected officials in parks.
- The Board of Directors shared support for the hands-on engagement and educational opportunity these site visits would provide.

State: In alignment with the state's Pathways to 30x30 goals, advance legislation to extend the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects (SERP) in Section 21080.56 of the Public Resources Code to remove the 2025 sunset, while also expanding language aimed at supporting opportunities for access and maintenance

- In September 2021, Governor Newsom Signed SB 155 which added Section 21080.56 to the California Public Resources Code. It provides a temporary statutory exemption for specific restoration projects. Unfortunately, this exemption is set to sunset in 2025. This legislative objective seeks to advance language aimed at continuing the statutory exemption which supports expanded access and maintenance projects. In a February 2023 survey, 65% of respondents agreed in the importance of supporting ecosystem health through restoration, acquisition, and habitat enhancement, and to improve efficiencies in regulatory approvals for stewardship projects.
- Staff Workshop participants emphasized the need to work quickly in response to the 30x30 goals. They shared legislation would be critical to the success of projects which meet the 30x30 goals.

Federal: Explore opportunities to improve the permit and grant processes of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster recovery program for FEMA resilience zones aimed at better supporting project advancement and limiting habitat impact

- In recent years, the Park District has worked closely with FEMA to advance disaster recovery projects. This includes 79 project sites with an estimated value of \$7.3 million following the 2017 Winter Storms and 313 sites totaling an estimated \$13 million following the 2023 Winter Storms. The Park District is appreciative of FEMA for the disaster recovery program. There is, however, great opportunity to improve the process for permitting, scoping and funding projects following emergencies. The 2024 legislative objective seeks to focus on streamlining permit and grant processes for conservation agencies, such as the Park District. In addition, the objective includes mitigating practices which treat public resource agencies the same as a private developer. Park District lands serve a role in flood protection, as wetland buffers, for water recharge and in protection of critically needed biodiversity. Importantly, these public places have faced unprecedented wildfires and floods over the past ten years. With well-organized resources and funding, critical work can restore native, fire/drought tolerant vegetation which can play a key role in wildfire mitigation and erosion control during storm surges. Board of Directors input expanded language to include FEMA resilience zones.

Green Jobs

Local: Elevate visibility and need for support of local partnerships focused on workforce development. This includes local college programs and work with Civicorps, and sharing these successful partnerships and opportunities with local, state and Federal elected officials as a foundation for future funding requests and workforce development programs

- This objective seeks to highlight the partnership between the Park District and Civicorps through strategic engagement, site visits and meetings. The Park District's partnership with Civicorps is a critical means to expand youth workforce development programs, while also supporting wildfire protection efforts and trail maintenance work. While participating in this program, youth have the

opportunity to gain experience and provide public service in working on small trail grading, retaining walls, culvert repair, riparian zone restoration, tree clearing, fuels reduction and split rail fencing installations.

- Board of Directors requested expanding language to include Peralta College program.

State: Advocate for \$2 million in the state budget for preliminary plans to develop a California Conservation Corps facility at Holly Court / Bollinger Canyon in Las Trampas Regional Preserve

- To create viable housing opportunities in the Bay Area and support crew members from local communities, the Park District is excited to partner with the CCC to locate two crews in the East Bay. In 2023, the Park District successfully engaged the full East Bay delegation on the importance of an East Bay Conservation Corps facility during the 2023 State Advocacy Conference and through follow-up discussions. This legislative objective will continue into 2024 through advocacy for \$2 million in the state budget to develop preliminary plans for a permanent Conservation Corps facility in the East Bay. Once developed by the CCC with state funding, a crew facility at Bollinger Canyon in San Ramon has the potential to host two crews and provide jobs for years to come. Currently, the site, which was formally a camp for a CAL FIRE fuel break crew, is aging and does not have the amenities necessary for group housing, including multiple shower facilities, a full kitchen or suitable sleeping quarters. Additionally, the project will include a community center, as well as a high school, to support personal and professional development by crew members. Specifically, this project will provide for infrastructure improvements at Bollinger Canyon in Las Trampas Wilderness Regional Preserve to host two California Conservation Corps crews safely and healthfully. The upgrades are currently in design and require funding for implementation. Upon completion, the facility will safely house crews and provide a strong foundation as a viable career ladder for participants.
- Staff Workshop participants emphasized the importance of providing housing support for crew members to mitigate barriers to employment.

Federal: Support legislation to expand National Service Programs, including climate corps, to include training and funding for restoration work and nature-based solutions with special district partnerships

- In a February 2023 survey, 56% of respondents agreed on the importance of guiding the development of career pathways for all in the parks, recreation, outdoor and environmental fields. This legislative priority seeks to active the Park District's Federal delegation in supporting youth work opportunities nationally and in the East Bay.

Sea Level Rise Preparedness

Local: Through collaborative work with local agencies, businesses, cities and counties, advocate at a state level for additional funding for the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority and State Coastal Conservancy grant programs, as well as additional funding through budget and bond opportunities with specific focus on natural infrastructure investments

- The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (SFBRA) has been a strong supporter of Park District projects including providing funding through competitive grants for Coyote Hills Regional Park, Hayward Regional Shoreline and others. Additionally, the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) has supported the Park District with funding for projects along the shoreline. To support continued successful grant applications, this objective seeks to increase state funding for the SFBRA and SCC through budget and bond opportunities.
- Board of Directors requested expanded language on collaboration with multiple organizations, including businesses, as well as language centering around nature-based solutions.

State: Request direct state funding for Tidewater expansion in Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline of \$5 million

- The Tidewater Project at Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline is an 8-acre park expansion. This new parkland will be adjacent to the exiting Tidewater Boating Center and is connected to the rest of the park by the San Francisco Bay Trail. Unfortunately, funding for this project site has been limited due to access challenges. The Park District remains committed to expanding green space and ecosystem benefits on this site, which is located in a disadvantaged community, as identified by the local, state and Federal criteria.
- Staff Workshop participant feedback identified this project as funding ready.

Federal: Engage on Federal bill packages and with agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, regarding nature-based infrastructure, climate preparedness and other relevant issue areas to ensure special districts and park districts are eligible

- As funding advances at the Federal level, this legislative objective seeks to address external opportunities in ensuring Park District eligibility for sea level rise preparedness funding. This objective aligns with community interests. In a February 2023 survey, 64% of respondents agreed in the importance of addressing sea level rise with nature-based infrastructure and to accelerate mitigation strategies regarding climate change.

Welcoming Visitor Use Facilities

Local: Coordinate a regional site visit at the Tidewater staging area of Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline to generate support for future park development and access

- To share information on the future park expansion at Tidewater, this objective seeks to organize a strategic engagement site visit for East Bay elected offices. In a February 2023 survey, 74% of respondents agreed in the importance of ensuring all visitors are welcomed to the East Bay parks and trails by providing facilities which are safe, accessible, inclusive and sustainable. As part of the Tidewater site visit, attendees will learn about the important active transportation connections, visitor use facilities and restoration elements of the future project. Upon completion of the site visit, participating offices will be asked for letters of support for the Tidewater funding request identified in the Sea Level Rise Preparedness section above.

State: Resubmit request for direct state funding of \$2 million for the Oyster Bay Access Project at Oyster Bay Regional Shoreline

- In 2023, the Park District successfully advanced a formal request with Assembly Member Ortega for the Oyster Bay Regional Shoreline access project and secured her commitment to continue engaging on this issue. Repurposing this former landfill is a unique opportunity to align with the Governor's 30x30 and Outdoors for All initiatives. Unfortunately, due to budget shortfalls, this request was not successful. As such, in 2024 the Park District seeks to prioritize continuing advancing this request in alignment with the Assembly Member's interest.

Federal: Advocate for language in Federal legislation directing the relevant entities to advance clean-up and transfer of future parkland at Judge John Sutter Regional Shoreline

- The East Bay Regional Park District has participated in a multi-decade discussion regarding the transfer of Army property on the Oakland shoreline for public benefit. Specifically, the Park District has been designated to acquire 14 acres of upland property from the Army through a public benefit conveyance as part of the newest regional shoreline – Judge John Sutter Regional Shoreline. In continuation of 2023 efforts, this 2024 legislative objective seeks to accelerate the successful transfer of the upland property to the Park District for expanded public access at Judge John Sutter Regional Shoreline.

Wildfire Resilience

Local: Through collaboration, work to improve the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP)

implementation process

- The CalVTP, developed by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, is critical to the state's multifaceted strategy aimed at addressing California's wildfire challenges. The CalVTP Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) provides a powerful tool to increase the pace and scale of vegetation treatments which reduce wildfire risk while conserving natural resources. As this program is implemented at the local level, this 2024 legislative objective seeks to ensure success and report back benefits, challenges and overall lessons learned to California Natural Resources Agency.

State: Advocate for expanded and on-going funding at meaningful levels for CAL FIRE Fire Prevention, State Coastal Conservancy and Wildlife Conservation Board grant programs which support wildfire mitigation and restoration work. This objective includes strategic engagement opportunities, such as a coordinated site-visit of the carbonator in Anthony Chabot Regional Park

- In a February 2023 survey, 79% of respondents agreed with the importance of minimizing the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the East Bay by using proactive vegetation management which is ecologically sound. In addition to funding for removal of vegetation, the Park District is interested in supporting increased funding levels for planting of native, fire/drought tolerant vegetation through state programs. With an ongoing source of state funding, large landowning agencies such as the Park District could collectively restore functional native habitat to thousands of acres of public land. Most restoration projects consist of an initial large cost outlay to establish the plant community. As the ecosystem becomes self-sustaining, maintenance costs decrease dramatically over a few years. With restoration funding, fuels reduction projects could not only create a fire-resilient landscape, but also bring back habitat for imperiled wildlife such as the pallid manzanita, monarch butterfly and Alameda whipsnake. In addition, these ecosystems provide climate resiliency benefits including sequestration and reduction of risk of a large-scale carbon release caused by fire.
- Board of Directors and Staff Workshop participants emphasized the need and importance of this work.

Federal: Expand opportunities for grassland wildfire mitigation through engaging with elected offices, providing opportunities to learn more about conservation grazing and seek the introduction of Federal legislation

- The East Bay Regional Park District operates and manages over 80,000 acres of grassland across Alameda and Contra Costa counties. These spaces are publicly owned areas with high value for protection of biodiversity, stormwater attenuation, recreation and habitat protection. To maintain grasslands and the species that rely on them, the Park District utilizes livestock grazing, goats, sheep and targeted manual removal of nonnative invasive plants, as well as adaptive management and monitoring. In continuation of 2023 efforts, this 2024 legislative objective would expand the Park District's Federal delegation's understanding of conservation grazing and advance supportive legislation if feasible.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

ATTACHMENTS

2024 Legislative Program



**EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT
RESOLUTION NO. 2024-01-
JANUARY 16, 2024**

APPROVAL OF 2024 LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

WHEREAS, the East Bay Regional Park District's (Park District) mission to preserve a rich heritage of natural and cultural resources and to provide open space, parks, safe trails, essential healthy activity and environmental education is more meaningful if the growing and diverse communities of Alameda and Contra Costa counties have the opportunity to enjoy the parks; and

WHEREAS, guided by the Park District's mission, elected Board of Directors and General Manager, the 2024 Legislative Program seeks to provide a transparent and accountable overview of the Park District's advocacy program; and

WHEREAS, the overarching principles of the Park District's 2024 Legislative Program include equitable service delivery, advancing climate resilience adaptation and mitigation, guiding work with an environmental ethic, supporting inclusive interpretation and educational opportunities, increasing conservation through land acquisition and ensuring the fiscal health of the Park District; and

WHEREAS, the Legislative Program outlines specific and achievable objectives at the local, state and Federal level to advance work in alignment with the advocacy goals of wildfire resilience, sea level rise preparedness, community health, ecosystem stewardship, green jobs, welcoming visitor use facilities and climate-friendly transportation.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Directors of the East Bay Regional Park District hereby support the 2024 Legislative Program as presented to the Board on January 16, 2024; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the General Manager is hereby authorized and directed, on behalf of the Park District and in its name, to execute and deliver such documents and to do such acts as may be deemed necessary or appropriate to accomplish the intentions of this resolution.

Moved by Director _____, and seconded by Director _____, and adopted January 16, 2024, by the following vote:

FOR:

AGAINST:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT: