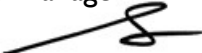


**EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT  
PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
AGENDA STAFF REPORT**

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<b>DATE</b>	February 26, 2024
<b>TITLE</b>	Informational Update on the Park District's Legislative Program
<b>DIVISION</b>	General Manager's Office
<b>FROM</b>	Erich Pfuehler, Chief of Government and Legislative Affairs Dr. Ana M. Alvarez, Deputy General Manager
<b>APPROVED</b>	Sabrina Landreth, General Manager 

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**RECOMMENDATION**

This is an informational item.

**BACKGROUND**

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 2024 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 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 which were approved by the Board of Directors on January 16, 2024. 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 discussions regarding a potential regional ballot 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.

**State:** Request direct state funding for Richmond San Francisco Bay Trail Gap Closure 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 are located, including for Amazon, Whole Foods and UPS – to Point Wilson providing a connection to the Hercules Regional Intermodal Transportation Center (RITC) Bay Trail and Pinole Shores railroad overcrossing – two active transportation projects previously partially funded by TIGER II. The trail would connect to three modes of public transportation – rail, ferry and bus – at one convenient location on 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.

**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 the Department of Transportation Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program, 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.

### 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. In 2023, the Park District has successfully hosted five Walk and Talks with over 200 members of the public in attendance.

**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.

**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 which 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.

**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 ongoing stewardship

- 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.

**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.

**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 continues in 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.

**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.

**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.

**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 Liz 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.

**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.

This presentation aligns with the Park Advisory Committee 2024 Objective #3 – Maintain Understanding of and Engagement on the Park District's Active Capital Projects and Programs with a specific focus on the Legislative Program and #4 – Maintain Understanding of the Park District's Funding Programs with a focus on direct funding requests and competitive grant program support.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item at this time.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

2024 Legislative Program