

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 14, 2023

Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency Project

Project No. 23-038-001
Project Manager: Kellan Warner

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$2,141,205 to the City of Imperial Beach to conduct outreach and planning and to prepare designs, environmental compliance documents, and permit applications needed to retrofit a 1.2-mile segment of the Bayshore Bikeway into a multi-benefit community flood protection and ecosystem resilience corridor in Imperial Beach, San Diego County.

LOCATION: Bayshore Bikeway, Imperial Beach, San Diego County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Project Site Photos](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency Project Final Feasibility Study](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed two million, one hundred forty-one thousand, two hundred and five dollars (\$2,141,205) to the City of Imperial Beach (“the grantee”) to conduct outreach and planning and to prepare designs, environmental compliance documents, and permit applications needed to retrofit a 1.2-mile segment of the Bayshore Bikeway into a multi-benefit community flood protection and ecosystem resilience corridor in Imperial Beach, San Diego County.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$2,141,205 grant to the City of Imperial Beach to conduct outreach and planning and to prepare designs, environmental compliance documents, and permit applications for the Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency Project, which will retrofit a 1.2-mile segment of the Bayshore Bikeway into a living levee that provides multi-benefit community flood protection and ecosystem resilience in Imperial Beach, San Diego County (see Exhibit 1 Project Location and Site Map).

The Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency Project (the project or proposed project) is needed primarily to address flooding during extreme tides (Exhibit 2). The segment of the City of Imperial Beach (the City) that abuts south San Diego Bay, known as the Bayside neighborhood, is a disadvantaged community that already experiences coastal and stormwater flooding today. Bay waters episodically flood the residential area, including the Bayside Elementary School. Previous City-led coastal flooding vulnerability assessments identified that sea-level rise threatens to dramatically increase the frequency and severity of flooding in this area. Increased water levels in San Diego Bay will also threaten to drown marsh fringe habitat due to the steep slopes that exist along the local shoreline. The location of the Bayshore Bikeway, which is enjoyed by thousands of users each week for recreation and bike-commuting, has been identified as suitable for use as both a bikeway and a flood control structure. Retrofitting the bikeway to a living levee will protect vulnerable communities in the City against flooding, enhance coastal public access, and provide adequate space for wetland habitats to move upslope as sea-levels rise.

The project will also include a number of ancillary improvements to the Bayshore Bikeway and surrounding environment including: 1) public access, safety and usability improvements to the Bikeway; 2) improvements to stormwater infrastructure to reduce nuisance flooding in the Bayside community; 3) creation of a multi-purpose detention basin, that will also serve as a new park, to resolve stormwater flooding in the vicinity of the Bayside Elementary School; and

4) restoration of tidal circulation in wetland habitat by rerouting the Bikeway. The living levee will be designed to be resilient to 3.5 feet of sea level rise consistent with [the State of California Guiding Principles for Aligned State Action](#) and the Ocean Protection Council's best available science. The proposed design will build the levee at a height that will accommodate 3.5 feet of sea-level rise and have an additional 1.2 feet of freeboard, which means it will still protect communities from flooding and be functional as a bike path. The living levee integrates an adaptive design enabling future increases to the height of the levee to address potential flooding impacts that may exceed the initial mid-term solution of 3.5-feet of sea level rise.

The Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency Project Final Feasibility Study (Exhibit 3) assessed three potential coastal resiliency alternatives. Based on the study and the criteria that were analyzed, the living levee and multi-purpose detention basin alternative was identified as the most feasible alternative that would meet the goals of the project. Preliminary engineering design (30% design) of the living levee alternative was developed at the completion of the feasibility study. The feasibility phase of the project included substantial engagement with the Bayside community, the users of the Bayshore Bikeway, and the greater Imperial Beach community. The City held 41 meetings, workshops, and events to inform the public of the project and gain feedback about concerns and potential opportunities. This feedback was used to inform and further refine the project design. These workshops also addressed future community collaboration to ensure long-term implementation and maintenance goals.

During the design phase proposed for this grant, the project team will continue to conduct inclusive outreach to the community and local stakeholders to foster engagement and solicit community input, targeted towards the affected adjacent disadvantaged community. The project team will plan and facilitate a variety of events such as small group meetings, public workshops, and public events, supported by online outreach and social media, and will provide tools for gathering, visualizing, and evaluating geospatial information for this participatory planning effort in the predominant language(s) of the community. Outreach will include the continued use and update of the existing multi-lingual project website, online surveys, and webinars.

The project team will engage with the Tribal community and including their voices by partnering with Climate Science Alliance (CSA) Connecting Wildlands & Communities working group. CSA has a long-standing relationship with the local Tribes and specializes in issues surrounding climate change and resilience. Through this partnership, local Tribes will be continuously informed of the project status and be provided an existing relationship to give meaningful feedback. The project will also cover any necessary travel costs or accommodations that support tribal engagement in the project.

The work proposed for this grant includes community-led planning and engagement as described above, preparing landscape and engineering designs, conducting technical studies, preparing permit applications, and preparing documents for environmental compliance adequate for CEQA and NEPA. The designs to be prepared will include landscape designs for the living levee, bike path, access nodes, and the Bayside Elementary Park and Multi-Purpose Detention Basin.

Site Description: The project focuses on a 1.2-mile section of the Bayshore Bikeway, a heavily used recreational corridor that lies adjacent to the shoreline of San Diego Bay along the coastal communities of National City, Chula Vista, San Diego, Coronado, and Imperial Beach. The Bikeway along the project site lies at the intersection of the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge, which consists of wetland habitat, and the Bayside residential community, which is prone to flooding during extreme tides (Exhibit 2).

The project's development footprint encompasses land and water areas under different jurisdictional authorities. The agencies with water and land use authority include the City of Imperial Beach, City of San Diego, City of Coronado, San Diego Unified Port District, San Diego-Arizona Eastern Railway Company/Metropolitan Transit Board, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and South Bay Union School District. At this phase, all agencies have been in continuous engagement and are supportive of the proposed project. The coordinating agencies have confirmed, or are in the process of confirming, the necessary technical data necessary to process the necessary permits or development agreements as needed for the development and maintenance of the project area.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The City of Imperial Beach has a long history of successfully administering grant funds, including the following relevant and recent grants: Ocean Protection Council's Prop 68 Grant for the Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency Project (30% designs), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Coastal Resilience Fund Grant for Creating a Community Resilience Plan, and State Coastal Conservancy Grant for the Tijuana River Valley Sediment Management Work Plan and Monitoring Program. The project's consulting team has vast experience with similar coastal engineering projects such as the Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency Project, Phase 1: Feasibility and Conceptual Design; Cardiff State Beach Living Shoreline Project; Pillar Point Harbor West Trail Living Shoreline Project; Humboldt Bay Natural Shoreline Infrastructure Project; and White Slough Sea Level Rise Resiliency and Tidal Marsh Restoration. For this project, the City intends to implement a coordinating consultant model whereby the consultant in conjunction with City staff will provide oversight to ensure that the project schedule and milestones are completed.

Post-implementation management, maintenance, and monitoring of the project will be completed by the City of Imperial Beach Public Works staff, including the inspection of levees, tidal gates, path lighting, and impacts to existing or planted vegetation.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The proposed project, when implemented in the future, will implement sea level rise adaptation strategies to protect and enhance public coastal access, restore wetland habitat, and reduce or eliminate existing and projected flooding from King Tides and the projected 3.5 feet of sea level rise impacting large portions of the Bayside neighborhood. The scope of work for the recommended grant is feasible, the budget is reasonable, and the City of Imperial Beach is well qualified to manage the project.

3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.

The City is partnering with Climate Science Alliance (CSA) Connecting Wildlands & Communities working group as CSA has a long-standing relationship with the local Tribes and specializes in issues surrounding climate change and resilience. Through this partnership, local Tribes will be continuously informed of the project status and be provided an existing relationship to give meaningful feedback. The grant will also cover any necessary travel costs or comfort accommodations that support tribal engagement in the project.

4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

The project will be designed to be resilient to 3.5 feet of sea level rise, with ability to adapt to higher rates in the future, consistent with the State of California Guiding Principles for Aligned State Action and the Ocean Protection Councils best available science. The benefits to public access, habitat, bikeway safety, and reduced flood risks will be maintained and realized throughout the lifespan of the project.

The City of Imperial Beach is following a community resiliency plan that holistically considers climate change and adaptation pathways integrated into community investment and redevelopment. However, the Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency project is the first major sea level rise adaptation work that is specifically intended to protect low lying urban areas from sea level rise flooding. By planning a living levee and new storm water control structures, the City is effectively working to protect the Bayside neighborhood from future inundation.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

This project will provide resiliency for the disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities in the City from climate change induced sea level rise. By increasing the elevation of the low-lying segments of the Bikeway, restoring additional habitat, and better controlling stormwater flow, the flooding of these communities will be greatly reduced, thereby making them more resilient to projected changes in sea level elevation. This project also seeks to mitigate existing compound flooding within the Bayside Neighborhood by reconfiguring the City's primary storm drain outfall that discharges to San Diego Bay. The project will daylight the underground storm water conveyance system at Bayside Elementary school and create a new multi-purpose treatment basin that also serves as a new joint use park. Impermeable surfaces will be reduced, local hydrology improved, and water quality improved for San Diego Bay while simultaneously creating new park space for the community.

The project includes improvements to the Bikeway to increase the mobility for various users to, from, and along the corridor – as opposed to just cyclists. The addition of a multiuse trail and improved community connections will greatly enhance access, usage, and public safety to help address California’s growing population and demand for coastal trails and outdoor recreation.

6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

This phase of the project includes inclusive outreach to the community and local stakeholders to foster engagement and solicit community input, targeted towards the affected adjacent disadvantaged community. The project team will plan and facilitate a variety of events such as small group meetings and public workshops, supported by online outreach and social media, and will provide tools for gathering, visualizing, and evaluating geospatial information for this participatory planning effort in the predominant language(s) of the community. Outreach will include the continued use and update of the existing multi-lingual project website, online surveys, and webinars. The project team will also participate in public events (e.g., National Night Out, Bike the Bay) to facilitate engagement, gain feedback, and involve the diverse community of Imperial Beach in the design and planning process.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$2,141,205
Ocean Protection Council	\$1,158,500
Project Total	\$3,299,705

The above table identifies the total cost of the work to be funded with the recommended grant. Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to the Conservancy for the Climate Ready program for purposes of nature-based projects that address sea level rise (Budget Act of 2022, as amended by AB 178, Chapter 45, Statutes of 2022). The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Investment Plan and Communities Revitalization Act (Health and Safety Code (HSC) Sections 39710 – 39723) requires that GGRF funds be used to (1) facilitate the achievement of reductions of GHG emissions consistent with the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (HSC Sections 38500 *et seq*), and (2) to the extent feasible, achieve other co-benefits, such as maximizing economic, environmental and public health benefits and directing investment to disadvantaged communities (HSC 39712(b)). The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 sets forth (among other things) certain GGRF funding priorities (HSC Section 38590.1). The California Legislature has also appropriated GGRF funds to the Conservancy to protect communities and natural resources from sea level rise (The Budget Act of 2022, as amended by AB 179, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022).

The California Air Resources Board (“CARB”) has adopted guidelines that establish program goals that agencies must achieve with their GGRF funds. Consistent with the CARB 2018

Funding Guidelines, the proposed project will help the Conservancy meet its GGRF program goals because the project will:

- Benefit Priority Populations (disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, or low-income households)
- Maximize economic, environmental, and public health co-benefits to the State
- Leverage funds to provide multiple benefits and to maximize benefits

The proposed project will meet these objectives by creating a living levee system that will protect the adjacent disadvantaged community and provide transitional habitat for wetland migration. Transitional habitats ensure sea level rise resiliency, which is an environmental benefit to the State. The project will also create multiple benefits and contribute to public health by enhancing public access by creating more access nodes, widening the Bayshore Bikeway, and creating a separate walking path. The proposed project is also consistent with this funding source because it will protect communities and natural resources from sea level rise (The Budget Act of 2022, as amended by AB 179, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022).

The previous phase of this project, a stakeholder-driven feasibility study (Exhibit 3), was funded by a Prop 68 planning grant from the Ocean Protection Council (OPC). The current phase of the project was awarded a second OPC Prop 68 planning grant to continue the stakeholder-driven design process.

The project has already secured \$15.2 million dollars in funding for the construction phase via a Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant, which accounts for approximately 70 percent of the totally funds necessary to complete project implementation.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)). Section 31113(b) and (c) authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. The Conservancy must, to the extent allowed, prioritize projects that maximize public benefits and accomplish one of several purposes, including reducing flood risk and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat.

Consistent with these requirements, the proposed project will help develop sea level rise adaptation strategies utilizing the Bikeway shoreline infrastructure to reduce the threat of sea level rise for the community of Imperial Beach.

Section 31113 also requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure to help coastal communities adapt to climate change and projects that provide multiple public benefits, including, but not limited to, protection of communities, natural resources, and recreational opportunities. See Section 31113(d)(1). As discussed above, the proposed project will help develop future nature-based adaptation measures to protect public access and community infrastructure.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the recommended grant is for planning a project that will increase resiliency by adapting ecosystems to protect communities, public access infrastructure, and natural resources from sea level rise.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The recommended authorization to fund outreach, planning, design, environmental review, and preparation of permit applications is exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Sections 15262 and 15306 because these activities involve only data gathering, resource evaluation, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors. Consistent with Section 15306, the data collection and resource evaluation components of the project will not cause major or serious disturbance to the environment.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.