

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 21, 2024

BERKELEY WATERFRONT IMPROVEMENTS

Project No. 23-006-01
Project Manager: Mark Kalnins

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$385,000 to augment a previously authorized Conservancy grant of \$3,383,733.49 (after previous augmentations) to the City of Berkeley for design, permitting and construction of Berkeley Waterfront improvements in Alameda County. The project augmentation includes development of further designs and plans, and preparation of environmental review documentation and permit applications for a new San Francisco Bay Trail section and two trail staging areas that will be resilient to sea level rise over the next fifty years.

LOCATION: Berkeley Waterfront, City of Berkeley (Alameda County)

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [April 6, 2023 Staff Recommendation for Berkeley Waterfront Improvements](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Detailed Project Location Map and Project Concept Level Site Plan](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Project Site Photographs](#)
 - Exhibit 5: [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 disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred eighty-five thousand dollars (\$385,000) to the City of Berkeley (“the grantee”) to augment a previously authorized Conservancy grant of \$3,383,733.49 (after previous augmentations) for design, permitting and construction of Berkeley Waterfront improvements

in Alameda County. The project augmentation includes development of further designs and plans, and preparation of environmental review documentation and permit applications for a new San Francisco Bay Trail section and two trail staging areas that will be resilient to sea level rise over the next fifty years. The term “project” refers to this project augmentation.

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to three hundred eighty-five thousand dollars (\$385,000) to the City of Berkeley (the City) to augment a grant of \$3,049,000 that was authorized by the Conservancy on April 6, 2023, to prepare final designs, obtain permits and construct Berkeley Waterfront improvements in Alameda County (Exhibit 1), including Cesar Chavez Park pathway repairs and South Cove West Parking Lot upgrades (Exhibit 2). On April 23, 2024, that grant was augmented to \$3,383,733.49, to adjust for higher construction costs. This project augmentation includes development of further designs and plans, and preparation of environmental review documentation and permit applications for a new San Francisco Bay Trail (Bay Trail) section and two trail staging areas to improve trail connectivity within the Berkeley Waterfront (Exhibit 3). The term “project” in this staff recommendation refers to this project augmentation.

The narrow asphalt segment of Marina Blvd. from University Ave to the Virginia Street Extension (the southern segment) was constructed almost four decades ago and has largely disintegrated beyond its useful life. The southern segment is 0.27 miles long and is too narrow to serve the volume and variety of users seeking access to Cesar Chavez Park (Exhibit 3). The southern segment also provides a vital public entrance to the Berkeley Meadow, but the entrance area was never formally developed, is poorly marked, is not optimized for safe and efficient public parking, and may not meet current ADA accessibility requirements. The northern segment is 0.11 miles long and runs along the western shoreline of North Basin from Virginia Street Extension to the entrance to Cesar Chavez Park. The shoreline along the

northern segment was constructed over 60 years ago and is experiencing significant erosion that will likely increase with projected sea level rise. During annual King Tide events, the intersection at the Virginia Street Extension frequently floods, blocking pedestrian and bicycle access from West Frontage Road to Marina Blvd., and from University Ave. to Cesar Chavez Park. The informal parking and staging area at this intersection also floods and becomes inaccessible for both the public as well as emergency vehicles. This intersection is the most at-risk location at the Berkeley Waterfront for increased flooding and inundation associated with projected sea level rise. Without an improvement, this intersection will allow rising seas to flood into Marina Blvd. and the Doubletree Hotel parking lot, causing significant damage to these facilities.

This project will develop further designs, plans, and cost estimates, and prepare environmental review documents and regulatory permit applications to install a new 0.38-mile Bay Trail segment and two state-of-the-art formal staging areas (Berkeley Meadow and Virginia Street Extension). The design of the project will be coordinated with East Bay Regional Park District's Berkeley North Basin Feasibility Study, for which the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority awarded a grant to develop shoreline adaptation concept plans through a robust public engagement and facilitation process. The City will coordinate with Bay Trail staff to designate the improved northern and southern segments as Bay Trail.

Site Description:

The project area, shown in Exhibit 1, runs through key elements of the Berkeley Waterfront, comprised of Berkeley Marina, Cesar Chavez Park, adjoining trail systems, and associated infrastructure, such as non-profit sailing clubs and commercial developments that ring the marina. The Berkeley Waterfront sees up to 300,000 visitors per year. This area provides impressive scenic coastal views and recreational activities and is considered one of the best shoreline access points in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The new Bay Trail section that is the subject of this project augmentation is located on the eastern side of Marina Blvd. adjacent to the Berkeley Meadow at McLaughlin Eastshore State Park (Exhibit 3). The southern limit is at the intersection of University Ave. and Marina Blvd., where a modern roundabout has been constructed to provide a safe crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists. The northernmost limit is at the entrance of Cesar Chavez Park. This project site provides a key connection that links pedestrians and bicyclists from the main spine of the Bay Trail at West Frontage Road to the Berkeley Meadow at Eastshore State Park, and to Cesar Chavez Park.

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

The City of Berkeley's Department of Parks and Recreation maintains and enhances the quality of life in Alameda County by providing parks and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. The City has an established program for managing the Berkeley Waterfront and has expended considerable funds and grants to study and improve infrastructure. The City has successfully managed several grants from the Conservancy and other state agencies in the past.

Working with the public, regulatory, and funding partners over the past 30 years, the City has completed several water-based capital projects using \$36 million in State-funded marina

improvement loans, including dock systems and shoreline revetment projects. Similarly, the City has completed several projects at the Berkeley Waterfront using Conservancy grants for planning, design, and implementation, including a 0.5-mile San Francisco Bay Trail extension in 2014, South Cove East Parking Lot renovations in 2018, 600-foot San Francisco Bay Trail extension to the sailing clubs in 2020, and installation of a new ADA-accessible gangway at the South Cove Sailing Basin in 2020. The City has a comprehensive financial system and experienced finance and auditing staff to manage the accounting and auditing of all capital projects. The City contracts with an independent auditor to perform an audit of all federally funded capital projects (a single audit) on a yearly basis. Lastly, the City of Berkeley has a plan for the long-term management, maintenance, and monitoring of the project elements.

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 would enhance access to and the overall user experience at the Berkeley Waterfront, especially the regionally important Cesar Chavez Park. Visited by approximately 130,000 people per year, this extremely popular park serves both local users and large groups that use the park during special events throughout the year (e.g., the Berkeley Kite Festival, Fourth of July celebrations, and other community-sponsored gatherings).

Access and experience will be improved by providing parking—not only for park users but also those wishing to connect to the nearby regional Bay Trail, or to access the South Cove Sailing Basin or the Berkeley Marina itself—and by improving ADA-accessibility.

The proposed project will therefore further the State’s “Outdoors For All” initiative, which seeks to equitably expand outdoor access to all Californians through focused investments in open space infrastructure, outdoor programming, and improvements to state systems.

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

The project will incorporate appropriate sustainability features such as the preferred shoreline improvement concept from the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority-funded East Bay Regional Park District’s Berkeley North Basin Feasibility Study (currently in development) to provide appropriate climate-related sea level rise shoreline protection to ensure long term sustainability for public access. The trail sub-base will be installed using the full-depth reclamation method whereby the existing soils are re-used and strengthened with a soil stabilizer. The newly constructed sub-base will greatly increase the life of the asphalt surfacing, thereby reducing the need for frequent asphalt replacement projects. The new trail will adhere to Bay Trail design guidelines and thus will have significantly improved aesthetics as compared

to the current uneven and unconsolidated gravel and dirt surface, which in turn will help instill an ethic of environmental stewardship among the visiting public. Finally, the free trail and free parking will facilitate access to nature and recreation at the Waterfront for diverse and historically marginalized communities in the Bay Area.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

In addition to the multiple benefits described in Item 3 above, this project will work closely with the East Bay Regional Park District to create a Stakeholder Advisory Group to ensure a well-coordinated design development and community engagement process that is essential for the renovation and climate adaptation of the highly valued public shoreline at the Berkeley North Basin of Eastshore State Park.

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

The pathway from University Ave to Cesar Chavez Park provides an essential connection between three extremely popular public recreation facilities (the Bay Trail, the Berkeley Meadow at Eastshore State Park, and Cesar Chavez Park), especially among seniors, that can see up to 130,000 visitors per year. The renovation of the trail has been on the City’s list of capital repair projects for over two decades. The project has been discussed numerous times at the City’s Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission meetings, and the City Council has authorized staff during numerous public meetings to pursue grant funding over the past twenty years, most recently on June 22, 2010 (Resolution No. 64,929-N.S.). The City has received excellent feedback from the public when the first three segments of the Bay Trail Extension were implemented from 2014 to 2019. Additionally, through a series community engagement process as part of the Waterfront Specific Plan project, the community expresses desire to enhance the existing narrow, deteriorated and frequently flooded pathway on eastside of Marina Blvd. The City continues to hear feedback that the public is anticipating the completion of the Marina Blvd. San Francisco Bay Trail improvements in the near future. As described above, the project will coordinate a Stakeholder Advisory Group to ensure a robust public engagement process.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$385,000
Coastal Conservancy (previous authorizations)	\$3,383,733.49
Project Total	\$3,768,733.49

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from an FY 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of “urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies” (The Budget Act of 2022, SB 154 as amended by Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). The sea level rise adaptation funds are available as described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the sea level rise adaptation funds, including projects for the purpose of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it is for climate resilience purposes pursuant to Section 31113 of the Public Resources Code (as discussed in the following section) and is within

the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program established pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

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 authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165 regarding San Francisco Bay Area projects.

Section 31162(a) authorizes grants within the nine-county Bay Area that achieve the goals of the Bay Area Conservancy program, including improving public access to the Bay through completion of local trails which are part of a regional trail. The proposed authorization is consistent with Section 31162(a) because the proposed project is located within the nine-county Bay Area, and it will help achieve the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program goal of improving public access to and around the Bay through completion of a local trail that connects to population centers and public facilities, which are part of a regional trail system (i.e., the San Francisco Bay Trail). The proposed authorization will also provide accessible parking and a safe, secure staging area for San Francisco Bay Trail users.

Section 31162(d) authorizes grants that promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes. Consistent with this section, this project will accomplish preliminary work for a trail and staging areas that provide urban recreational open space.

Section 31163(c) requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that are supported by adopted local plans, are multijurisdictional or regional, can be implemented in a timely way, and provide benefits that would be lost if the project is not quickly implemented. The proposed project is consistent with Section 31163(c), for the following reasons:

The proposed project will complete a portion of a trail system that provides safe and equitable recreation, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and recreational resources consistent with adopted local and regional plans, including the City of Berkeley 2002 General Plan, and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's San Francisco Bay Plan, wherein the entire Berkeley Waterfront has been designated as a key public access area to the Bay. The proposed project will facilitate continued public access amenities to a diverse public who reside in the City of Berkeley and communities abutting the waterfront area, as well as historically marginalized communities from throughout the Bay Area, especially seniors.

In addition, the proposed project can be implemented in a timely manner, with completion of the proposed improvements planned for 2027. The proposed project provides benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented, as there is current momentum built from the early planning and conceptual design work already undertaken by the City of Berkeley.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.4, Build Trails**, and **Goal 2.5, Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will plan, design, and apply for permits for a new Bay Trail section along Marina Blvd and two staging areas.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Authorizing the recommended grant project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15262, which exempts feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions from the requirement to prepare an Environmental Impact Report or negative declaration, and 15306, which exempts from CEQA basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not disturb environmental resources. The design and planning tasks to be funded are planning activities, preparation of designs, and review of environmental effects, none of which will impact any environmental resources and all of which will be undertaken for possible future actions that the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or funded.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of this project.