

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

February 19, 2026

PETALUMA RIVER PARK PLANNING AUGMENTATION

Project No. 22-084-01

Project Manager: Virgilio Cuasay

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,448,400 to the Petaluma River Park Foundation to augment the Conservancy grants of \$1,395,800, authorized on December 1, 2022, and of \$57,120, authorized on November 21, 2024, and augmented by \$148,880 on December 3, 2024, for the Petaluma River Park Planning Project, consisting of community engagement, park plan development, specific project designs, research and design of interpretive materials under the Coastal Stories Grant Program, and environmental review associated with development of Petaluma River Park in Petaluma, Sonoma County.

LOCATION: Petaluma River Park, Petaluma, Sonoma County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Figures and Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

Exhibit 4: [December 1, 2022 Petaluma River Park Planning Project Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 5: [November 21, 2024 Coastal Stories Grant Program Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 6: [Petaluma River Park Concept Plan](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a disbursement of an amount not to exceed one million four hundred forty-eight thousand four hundred dollars (\$1,448,400) to the Petaluma River Park Foundation (the “grantee”) to augment the Conservancy grants of

\$1,395,800, authorized on December 1, 2022, and of \$57,120, authorized on November 21, 2024, and augmented by \$148,880 on December 3, 2024, for the Petaluma River Park Planning Project, consisting of community engagement, park plan development, specific project designs, research and design of interpretive materials under the Coastal Stories Grant Program, and environmental review associated with development of Petaluma River Park in Petaluma (the “project”), Sonoma County, subject to the conditions of the December 1, 2022 and November 21, 2024 authorizations.

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. In addition, to the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy’s ‘Coastal Access Project Standards’.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, this Conservancy resolution is effective only if legislation is enacted that exempts program guidelines and selection criteria for the disbursement of funds from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (“Proposition 4”), Public Resources Code Sections 90000-95015, from the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act at Government Code sections 11340-11361.

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 the San Francisco Bay Area Program.
2. The proposed project remains consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Petaluma River Park Foundation is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize up to \$1,448,400 to augment the Conservancy grant of \$1,395,800, authorized on December 1, 2022, and of \$57,120, authorized on November 21, 2024, and augmented by \$148,880 on December 3, 2024, to the Petaluma River Park Foundation (PRPF) for the Petaluma River Park Planning Project, consisting of community engagement, park plan development, specific project designs, research and design of interpretive materials under the Coastal Stories Grant Program, and environmental review associated with development of Petaluma River Park (River Park) in Petaluma, Sonoma County (the project). See Exhibit 1 for the project location.

The Conservancy authorized the original grant of \$1,395,800 on December 1, 2022 (Exhibit 4) for the project, consisting at the time of community engagement, park plan development, specific project designs, and environmental review. In mid-2023, PRPF was presented with the prospect of acquiring the adjacent 500 Hopper Street (Exhibit 1, Figure 2) property (Hopper Property), separated by a dredged river channel to expand the acreage of the original 24-acre park (Peninsula Property). This new acreage would provide more space to site amenities proposed during community engagement. Additionally, the expansion would provide the opportunity to increase habitat restoration (Exhibit 1, Figure 3) to the new site, including the creation of two additional acres of tidal marsh along with more trail mileage for its internal trail system (Exhibit 1, Figure 4), which may be adopted into the Bay Area Ridge Trail network. Because this new property is separated from the original park by a dredged channel, installing a bike-pedestrian bridge (Exhibit 2, Figure 1) would connect the two properties. On January 8, 2024, PRPF acquired the 38-acre property using private funding with the intention of using 11 acres to expand the River Park from 24 acres to 35 acres.

PRPF's community engagement process (Exhibit 2, Figure 2) revealed a diverse set of community needs, including the need to highlight the untold stories that helped shape the place and culture of Petaluma and the River Park location. Along with the work to acquire additional property, PRPF submitted a proposal to the Conservancy's 2024 Coastal Stories Grant Program to research and design interpretive materials for these stories, which the Board authorized on November 21, 2024 (Exhibit 5). To create efficiencies, the Coastal Stories grant became part of the project.

The site expansion represented a 30% increase in the project scope and, thus, increased the total cost of the project. The project was augmented by \$148,880 on December 3, 2024 to support the increased costs associated with park expansion. However, due to inflation since the December 2022 authorization, along with the increased costs of the park expansion, including the design and permitting of a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge, more funding is needed to complete the existing scope of work.

PRPF has conducted two years of site analysis and facilitated an extensive community-driven park planning process. Through interactive workshops (Exhibit 2, Figure 3), community leaders, consultants, and PRPF staff collaborated closely to engage community members to gather input on topics ranging from park amenities (Exhibit 2, Figure 4) to habitat restoration (Exhibit 2, Figure 5), ultimately resulting in a conceptual design that is reflective of community needs. This process culminated in the release of the Petaluma River Park Concept Plan (Concept Plan) (Exhibit 6) in March 2025. Features requested by the community and reflected in the Concept Plan include a community center, restrooms, picnic areas, sports courts, an amphitheater, a playground, a perched beach, and a kayak launch site that may be incorporated into the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail system.

Outstanding tasks for this stage in the project include completion of remaining resource assessments and studies; completing design to a level sufficient for environmental review; completing an Equitable Development Plan; completion of research for Coastal Stories interpretive content; environmental review; and preparation of permit applications for construction.

Site Description: Creation of the McNear Channel as an offshoot of the Petaluma River resulted in formation of the 34-acre McNear Peninsula. Originally part of a meander of the Petaluma River, the peninsula area was filled in the early 1900's when the river was straightened to facilitate river navigation. Dredge spoils used to create the channel were deposited to its south side, creating a strip of uplands in the "v-shape" between the channel (to the north) and the Petaluma River (to the south). Elevations ranging from five to just over 23 feet above sea level. The peninsula was originally used for grazing but now contains the 9.7-acre City-managed Steamer Landing Park at its base, and the 24-acre Peninsula Property (Exhibit 1), which PRPF acquired in 2020. Existing amenities include the rustic David Yearsley River Heritage Center and a 1.3-mile wheelchair accessible trail. The site is adjacent to walkable, bikeable, transit-connected Downtown Petaluma near Highway 101, and near a segment of dedicated Bay Area Ridge Trail (Exhibit 1, Figure 4) that runs through neighborhoods southwest of the peninsula. Site access is available through Steamer Landing Park to the west. The site is characterized by ruderal herbaceous vegetation, including annual grasses, star thistle, fennel, and wild mustard. The shoreline consists of a narrow, steep shoreline, with cord grass, bulrush, salt grass, and a narrow band of pickleweed at the water's edge. The low point of the upland portion of park is near the southwest corner of the peninsula, where water gathers in a vernal pool (Exhibit 2, Figure 6) in the wet season.

The Hopper Property is a 38-acre undeveloped riverfront property formerly used as a concrete manufacturing facility; 11 of the 38 acres are included in the updated project site. The Hopper Property can be accessed from Hopper Street and is currently lacking public access, parking, or internal trails. The site slopes toward McNear Channel, contains poorly drained clay soils, and is affected by documented soil and groundwater contamination requiring remediation. Existing conditions include limited pedestrian and bicycle access and predominantly non-native grassland vegetation with low habitat value. A bridge (Exhibit 2, Figure 7) is needed to connect the original peninsula site with the Hopper Street addition.

The River Park is adjacent to a significant population of low-income residents and communities of color. These communities average 80% of area median income. The neighborhood directly to the east consists of a population that is 33% Hispanic (compared to the city average of 21%) while the area to the west is 6% Asian (compared to the city average of 4.4%). Areas of the peninsula and 500 Hopper Street have been utilized by the unhoused. Mutual aid interventions as well as the Mary Isaak Center Emergency Shelter have actively worked towards meeting the needs of the unhoused. Market factors, including local and regional housing deficits, contribute to gentrification and displacement risks (Exhibit 1, Figure 5).

Grant Applicant Qualifications: PRPF is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that formed in 2019 with the intent of acquiring the Peninsula Property to transform it into a public park. While the organization is new, PRPF executive staff have decades of combined experience in nonprofit management, project delivery, branding, and philanthropic campaigns. The PRPF board consists of a diverse set of individuals who bring a range of cultures, backgrounds, and skills, including art, sustainability planning, and accounting to inform its decisions. To help guide its decisions, the PRPF has consulted with industry professionals with experience in parks, placemaking, land and habitat conservation, and community engagement.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria as described in the December 1, 2022 (Exhibit 4) and November 21, 2024 (Exhibit 5) authorizations.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (proposed)	\$1,448,400
Coastal Conservancy (previous authorizations)	\$1,601,800
Wildlife Conservation Board	\$1,150,715
Peter E. Haas, Jr. Family Fund	\$1,750,000
Project Total	\$5,950,915

Funds are anticipated to come from the fiscal year 2025/2026 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (“2024 Climate Bond” or “Proposition 4”), codified at Public Resources Code (PRC), Sections 90000 – 95015. The 2024 Climate Bond makes funds available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for coastal resilience projects, including grants to protect, restore, and increase the resilience of wetlands, trails, and public access facilities. Funds may be allocated to projects for purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program under Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 (PRC Section 92010(a)(5)). “Protection” includes actions to improve access to public open-space areas or actions to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural, cultural, and historic resources; and “restoration” includes planning necessary to ensure successful implementation of the restoration objectives (PRC Section 90100(h), (i)(2)). The proposed project is consistent with Section 92010 because it will plan to restore tidal marsh and upland and riparian habitat and to improve public access or continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources in support of the purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

The City of Petaluma will provide \$30,000 in in-kind support by assuming the role of CEQA lead agency.

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 recommended authorization remains consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, as described in the December 1, 2022 (Exhibit 4) and November 21, 2024 (Exhibit 5) authorizations.

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

The recommended authorization updates the consistency statements as described in the December 1, 2022 (Exhibit 4) and November 21, 2024 (Exhibit 5) authorizations by adding the following:

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the project features designs that reflect the community's interests and concerns, implementing a community-led planning process, which includes participation by people from systemically excluded communities, and includes consideration for anti-displacement measures in its Equitable Development Plan.

Consistent with **Goal 1.3 Support Meaningful Engagement by Systemically Excluded Communities**, the project is implementing a community-led park planning process, which puts community members in leadership positions during engagement activities and centers the voices of systemically excluded communities, including local Indigenous peoples, Latino/Latinx, Black, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and other communities of color, as well as people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, older adults, youth, and LGBTQIA2+ communities.

Consistent with **Goal 2.2 Coastal Stories Program**, the project includes activities that plan and develop storytelling installations or materials, such as murals, signage, monuments, or guides, that represent communities and voices that have been historically excluded from accounts of California's coast and publicly accessible lands.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4 Build Trails**, the project will plan 1.6 miles of internal trails that increase access to the waterfront for recreation and active transportation purposes, including a 0.9 mile segment that may be designated as Bay Area Ridge Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the project will plan a riverfront park with amenities, such as picnic areas, parking lots, restrooms, and other amenities to enhance coastal recreational opportunities.

Consistent with **Goal 2.6, Piers and Waterfronts**, the project will develop plans on how to revitalize the waterfront by providing additional community gathering spaces on the waterfront and a kayak launch site.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies), which exempts planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded and that consider environmental factors. The project is consistent with this Section because the project includes preparing park development plans, designs, interpretive materials, and related permit applications, and review of environmental effects for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded.

The project is also categorically exempt from review under CEQA, pursuant to Title 14 of the CCR, Section 15306 (Information Collection), which exempts basic data collection, research, and

resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The project is consistent with this Section because the project includes information collection, such as collecting information for interpretive content, that doesn't result in serious or major disturbance to environmental resources.

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