

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

September 17, 2026

HALF MOON BAY LANDFILL CLIMATE RESILIENCE PLANNING

Project No. 26-015-01

Project Manager: Trish Chapman

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to the County of San Mateo to undertake the Half Moon Bay Landfill Climate Resilience Planning Project, consisting of conducting technical studies; analyzing alternatives; engaging the community; and preparing 30% conceptual designs, a plan for funding implementation, and a plan for permitting and environmental review for adaptation of the landfill located at Poplar Beach in San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Poplar Beach, Half Moon Bay, San Mateo County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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 one million dollars (\$1,000,000) to the County of San Mateo (the “grantee”) to undertake the Half Moon Bay Landfill Climate Resilience Planning Project, consisting of conducting technical studies; analyzing alternatives; engaging the community; and preparing 30% conceptual designs, a plan for funding implementation, and a plan for permitting and environmental review for adaptation of the landfill at Poplar Beach in the City of Half Moon Bay (the “project”).

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.

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 \$1 million grant to the County of San Mateo (County) to undertake the Half Moon Bay Landfill Climate Resilience Planning Project. The project includes conducting technical studies; analyzing alternatives; and preparing 30% conceptual designs, a plan for funding implementation, and a plan for permitting and environmental review for adaptation of the landfill at Poplar Beach in the City of Half Moon Bay (the project). The County will lead the project but will undertake it in collaboration with the City of Half Moon Bay, San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD), and the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone (ARO).

The County-owned Half Moon Bay Landfill began operations in the 1950s and was sited in a historic drainage gully. Surface waters that previously flowed across the landscape were channelized into the Seymour Ditch which runs along the southern perimeter of the County property. The landfill was graded and capped in 1978. The 2018 San Mateo County Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment and 2025 City of Half Moon Bay Climate Adaptation Plan identify the landfill as highly vulnerable to erosion from both the coastal bluff and along the Seymour Ditch. This vulnerability is increasing with sea level rise and increased swell energy and storm intensities. Accelerated bluff erosion and degradation of the Seymour Ditch now risks exposing landfill waste materials to the environment and threatens the landfill drainage system and nearby California Coastal Trail (Coastal Trail) infrastructure. Past bluff repairs, including installation of a concrete block mat revetment, have partially failed under recent storm conditions. Emergency measures have been insufficient, and a permanent solution is needed to stabilize the bluffs, restore hydrologic function, manage stormwater, and prevent landfill waste exposure. The project planning will also prioritize habitat restoration and public access at the site and along the Coastal Trail.

The project will develop three 30% alternative designs for adapting the landfill to ensure long-term sequestration of landfill waste. The planning will evaluate options, including relocating landfill waste on site, moving some or all of it offsite, and utilizing nature-based solutions to stabilize the bluffs along a quarter mile stretch of shoreline. Other potential design solutions that will be evaluated include re-routing the Seymour Ditch through a restored natural drainage on the landfill property; restoring coastal prairie, coastal bluff scrub, riparian, and seasonal wetland habitats; and installing a new trail network. If implemented, the project is expected to restore the quality of approximately 33 acres of habitat for multiple species and ensure that

public recreational opportunities, including preservation and connectivity of the Coastal Trail, are maintained into the future.

As part of the project, the County will undertake an extensive site characterization that will include: a surface water and drainage management study; wave and stream erosion study to evaluate bluff erosion and site stability; habitat mapping; and soil and groundwater sampling to better characterize depths of refuse and clean cover soils and verify contaminants of concern and concentrations that will help identify options for offsite disposal or waste reinternment. This refined data will allow the project team to develop more accurate, comprehensive cost estimates, reduce financial and technical risk, and provide feasible cleanup alternatives that will be protective of human health and the environment. The project also includes preparation of a memo outlining a path for permitting and environmental review of the project and a separate memo on options for funding implementation of the landfill coastal resilience project.

The County will convene a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) led by the RCD to provide input on technical studies, design concepts, other project deliverables, resource agency priorities and requirements, and to guide the alternative analysis and community outreach efforts. If interim emergency measures are needed while design and permitting are being completed, the TAC may discuss short-term design options for implementation. Implementation of any proposed interim or emergency measures are not included in this project. Broader community engagement will include a virtual open house to provide the community with project background information; a survey to gain input from the public about community priorities, such as future uses, recreational amenities, and restoration priorities; and an in-person community workshop for input on technical deliverables, the alternatives analysis, and preferred alternatives.

Site Description: The Half Moon Bay Landfill is located on the southern edge of the City of Half Moon Bay (City), adjacent to protected open space, active agriculture, and a residential neighborhood. The landfill, which was operated by the County, was capped and closed in 1978. It occupies approximately 22 acres on a 33-acre bluff property owned by the County. The closed landfill is now maintained as open space and is considered an important recreational asset, as the Coastal Trail runs along the western perimeter, and a series of informal trails are present throughout the property. There is a City-owned parking lot immediately north of the landfill property that serves Poplar Beach. The City owns several bluff properties to the north of the landfill and further north is Half Moon Bay State Beach. The Coastsides Land Trust owns the coastal bluff land to the south, known as Wavecrest. The Seymour Ditch runs between the County property and Wavecrest property.

Historically, the project site was a combination of coastal prairie, coastal bluff scrub, riparian scrub, and coastal wetland habitat. The landfill was created by filling a historic coastal drainage gully with waste. Despite filling the historic drainage, loss of wetland and riparian habitats, and spread of non-native plants, the landfill property and Wavecrest property to the south still support a diversity of plants and wildlife. The project site has high potential for restoration of sensitive habitats, including coastal prairie, coastal bluff scrub, seasonal wetland, and riparian forest. The project site also offers high restoration potential for special status species associated with these habitats, such as Choris' popcorn flower, perennial goldfields, federally

threatened California red-legged frog, federal candidate monarch butterfly, and protected raptors.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The County's Department of Public Works and Sustainability (Department) will lead the project and manage all elements of the project, including grant administration. The Department has a proven track record of successfully managing grant-funded projects of similar magnitude, including a \$1.7 million stream restoration grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board and multiple Caltrans Active Transportation grants. County staff have several decades of experience in planning, budgeting, permitting, engineering, and managing complex multi-benefit projects. The project will be carried out as a collaborative effort between the County, RCD, ARO, and the City, and in coordination with adjacent landowners, the Coastside Land Trust and the Peninsula Open Space Trust. The County will hire consultants with extensive experience in landfill engineering and site restoration to lead the technical components and key deliverables for the project. The RCD will lead the project TAC and play a key role in community outreach and providing input on the site investigations, conceptual plans, and alternatives analysis.

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 project is a good investment of state resources because it will proactively address the potential for widespread landfill failure and loss of public access amenities. It will be far more cost effective to address these issues before contaminants have been released into the environment or public access amenities are lost or damaged. The project will allow the County to gather the site specific information needed to develop a resilient and scientifically sound plan for resilient modification of the landfill and restoration of the site.

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 County will partner with the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone for this project. The Ramaytush (pronounced rah-my-toosh) Ohlone are the original peoples of the San Francisco Peninsula. ARO will be directly involved with the development of conceptual designs and alternatives analysis. Specifically, ARO will provide input on restoration design concepts, including opportunities to incorporate Ramaytush Ohlone interpretive elements and to ensure that Ohlone culture, heritage, and history are properly and accurately represented and

respected. ARO will also be involved with community outreach, including participation in community workshops and development of a land acknowledgement statement.

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

By prioritizing thorough site characterization, the project will reduce future uncertainties and risks, supporting informed decision-making and adaptive management. The alternatives will be evaluated through the lens of climate adaptation, ecological enhancement, sustainability and public access, taking into consideration projected sea level rise and increases in extreme weather events. The proposed alternatives will be environmentally protective, resilient to the impacts of climate change, and result in a net ecological benefit compared to the existing condition.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The primary goal of the project is to find a feasible solution to prevent failure of the Half Moon Bay Landfill and release of landfill materials into the beach and ocean in order to protect water quality, adjacent habitats, and public access. The analysis of alternatives will also prioritize protecting the Coastal Trail and other public access infrastructure and restoring blufftop habitats.

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

The project includes community engagement to help identify community needs and priorities early in the planning phase. Engagement activities will include an in-person workshop, online meetings, an online survey and website. In addition, a technical advisory committee will provide input throughout the project. The TAC, led by the RCD, will include representatives from multiple County departments (Public Works, Sustainability, Real Property, Parks, and Environmental Health), the RCD, the City, OneShoreline, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Coastside Land Trust, Association of Ramaytush Ohlone, Coastal Conservancy staff, project technical consultants, and regulatory and resource agencies.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,000,000
County of San Mateo	\$135,000
Project Total	\$1,135,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is an appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, also known as the 2024 Climate Bond or Proposition 4 (Public Resources Code (PRC), Sections 90000 to 95015). The 2024 Climate Bond, PRC Section 92000 allocates funds “to increase coastal and ocean resiliency and to protect coastal lands, waters, communities, natural resources, and urban waterfronts from sea level rise and other climate impacts.”

More specifically, PRC Section 92015 allocates funds for “the purpose of coastal and combined flood management projects and activities for developed shoreline areas, including areas with

critical community infrastructure, including, but not limited to, transportation and port infrastructure at risk of current flooding and flooding due to sea level rise.”

The multi-benefit project is consistent with the 2024 Climate Bond in that it will develop plans to reduce the risk of landfill failure caused by increased erosion from sea level rise, increased storm and wave intensities, and increased flooding and erosion from the Seymour Ditch. This will be done through a combination of strategies, such as strategic relocation and/or reconfiguration of landfill materials and restoration of site drainage patterns to reduce erosion from the Seymour Ditch. The project will also identify opportunities for habitat restoration onsite and long-term resilience of the coastal trail segment on the project. Developing plans to reduce the risk of landfill failure from flooding and erosion will improve public safety by protecting critical infrastructure, habitat, and a public access trail. The County will provide approximately \$135,000 towards the project plus approximately \$81,500 in staff time to support the project. The City will also provide significant staff time to support the project.

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 project will be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (PRC), which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (PRC Section 31113(a)).

Pursuant to Section 31113(b)-(c), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to public agencies to undertake projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, address extreme weather events, sea level rise, bluff erosion, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.

Pursuant to Section 31113(c), the Conservancy must prioritize grants for projects that maximize public benefits and have one of several purposes including enhancing coastal wetlands and natural lands and providing recreational opportunities.

Pursuant to Section 31113(d), the Conservancy must prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure to help coastal communities adapt to climate change; prioritize projects that provide multiple public benefits, including protection of communities, natural resources, and recreational opportunities; and consider projects in a variety of ecosystems along the state’s coastline. (PRC Section 31113(d)(1).)

The multi-benefit project is consistent with this section because it will be carried out by a public agency; address a coastal hazard that threatens the coastal community, infrastructure, and natural resources; and protect public recreational opportunities. The main adaptation approach is expected to be managed retreat to allow continued natural evolution of the shoreline.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Project**, the project will develop an adaptation plan for the Half Moon Bay Landfill to reduce the risk of landfill failure as a result of increased erosion caused by sea level rise, increased storm and wave intensities, and increased flooding and erosion from the Seymour Ditch.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to 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 it includes conducting technical studies; analyzing alternatives; and preparing conceptual, funding, and permitting plans for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded; and it will consider environmental factors.

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 data collection and resource evaluation components that will not cause a major or serious disturbance to the environment.

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