

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 17, 2007

**MORRO BAY HARBORWALK**

File No. 04-022-02

Project Manager: Timothy Duff

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to the City of Morro Bay to augment a previous Conservancy grant for construction of a boardwalk on the Morro Bay waterfront.

**LOCATION:** Morro Bay waterfront, San Luis Obispo County (Exhibits 1 and 2)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Access

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Regional Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Site Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [May 27, 2004 Staff Recommendation](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following Resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et. seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an additional amount not to exceed two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to the City of Morro Bay for construction of a waterfront boardwalk, subject to the condition that the City install Coastal Trail signs to be provided by the Conservancy along existing Coastal Trail segments within its jurisdiction.”

The proposed project remains consistent with the authorization and findings made in the Conservancy’s May 27, 2004 authorization (File No. 04-022), attached as Exhibit 4.”

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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

In May 2004, the Conservancy approved a \$500,000 matching grant to the City of Morro Bay to construct a pedestrian boardwalk and bike path along the Morro Bay waterfront, a popular commercial and sport fishing village with a vibrant commercial/retail district, and a designated national estuary. Constructing an accessway along the Morro Bay waterfront that extends to nearby state beaches is a priority recommended in the Conservancy's Coastal Trail Report.

The accessway extends from the waterfront's commercial district along the bay towards the city's most obvious landmark, Morro Rock, where adjacent state beach property stretches north four miles to the town of Cayucos. The accessway follows the harbor's shoreline along the top of existing rock revetment adjacent to a two-lane roadway (Coleman Drive) that has been relocated to accommodate the project. The pedestrian boardwalk is being constructed with a combination of concrete and recycled plastic boards that simulate timber planks to establish a defined contrast in materials with the asphalt bike path (Exhibit 3). Additional amenities and features being constructed at various points along the accessway include directional and interpretive signs, benches, and an overlook platform. The entire length of the boardwalk will be wheelchair accessible. Scheduled for completion by the summer of 2008, the boardwalk will provide users with numerous vantage points and overlooks to view the Morro Bay National Estuary and dockside activities. Since May 2004, the grantee has invested substantial staff time and city funds to address unexpected and significant redesign, mitigation, and permitting requirements. Additional funds are needed to complete the redesigned, permitted project.

**Site Description:** The project area is located along the Morro Bay harbor fronting the area's main boulevard, Embarcadero Street, which provides visitors with access to the city's busiest commercial district. While the project area has several restaurants typical of the waterfront's adjacent commercial and retail center, this stretch of the harbor front is primarily devoted to working fishing boats and shoreside support for the harbor's active fishing operations. Further to the northwest and beyond the harbor's docks and associated developments, the pathway is routed adjacent to Embarcadero Street with the bay to the south and Morro Strand State Beach to the north. At this location the roadway is built over landfill created when the harbor's northern entrance was closed in the 1940s. The roadway, which provides the only vehicular access to the south end of Morro Strand State Beach and Morro Rock, terminates at two parking lots that serve visitors to the breakwater and adjacent sandy beaches that are popular for fishing, surfing, and other beach recreation. The site's waterfront location provides visitors with panoramic views of the open ocean and the Morro Rock. It also offers a variety of vantage points to observe the resources of the Morro Bay National Estuary and its abundant wildlife, including seals, otters, and over 100 species of birds.

**Project History:** Project planning was initiated in the 1990s during a period when the City Council, staff, consultants, and various City commissions, committees, and residents began to articulate a vision for the future of the waterfront by updating the City's waterfront master plan. Adopted by the City Council in 1996, the City of Morro Bay Water-

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front Master Plan (WMP) identified the need for infrastructure improvements to maximize the recreational potential and access from the harbor's waterfront to Morro Rock and adjacent beaches. The objective of the WMP has been to balance the need to maintain a working harbor while planning for improvements and enhancement of the commercial and public access elements of the waterfront. In 2000, the City funded the preparation of a feasibility study and conceptual designs for the proposed boardwalk improvements, refined those concepts between 2001 and 2002, and in 2003 initiated preparation of an environmental review document. A combined Mitigated Negative Declaration/Environmental Assessment was approved by the City of Morro Bay on May 24, 2004. On May 27, 2004, the Conservancy approved the Mitigated Negative Declaration/Environmental Assessment, and authorized a \$500,000 grant to match \$1,125,000 in other city, state and federal funding to construct the waterfront improvements.

Between June 2005 and May 2007, city staff with support from Conservancy staff, worked closely with Coastal Commission staff to address the Commission's remaining concerns with the project. With modifications to the project, including added mitigation measures to reduce impacts to the site's sensitive dune habitat, a permit was issued by the Commission in May 2007.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

2004-2007:

San Luis Obispo County Council of Governments/Caltrans	\$675,000
Coastal Conservancy	500,000
City of Morro Bay (General Funds & In kind staff services)	<u>450,000</u>
Subtotal:	\$1,625,000

Proposed 2008 Funding:

San Luis Obispo County Council of Governments/Caltrans	\$25,000
Coastal Conservancy	250,000
City of Morro Bay (General Funds & In kind staff services)	<u>50,000</u>
Subtotal	\$325,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$1,950,000</b>

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the Conservancy's FY 2002/03 budget appropriation from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund (Proposition 40), reappropriated in FY 2005. This funding source may be used for the development of land and water resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (Public Resources Code Section 5096.650(b)). The proposed project serves to assist in the development of land-based public access to and along the coast. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects

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with matching funds (Public Resources Code Section 5096.651), and this project is supported by matching funds.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project remains consistent with the authorization and findings made in the Conservancy's May 27, 2004 authorization, attached as Exhibit 4.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective B**, approximately .5 mile of trail in existing public ownership will be signed.

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective D**, the project entails the construction of approximately one mile of trail in public ownerships.

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective F**, the project expands recreational opportunities to the coast by constructing approximately .5 mile of trail along the Morro Bay waterfront and estuary from the City's commercial district to Morro Strand State Beach.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective B**, the project enhances park and recreational facilities along the Morro Bay waterfront and estuary.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective E**, the project increases and enhances coastal recreational opportunities along the Morro Bay waterfront, estuary and nearby beaches.

Consistent with **Goal 3 Objective B**, the project encourages and promotes public access to developed waterfront areas, promotes excellence and innovation in urban design, and increases wheelchair accessibility.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES, CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS, & LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The proposed project remains consistent with the authorization and findings made in the Conservancy's May 27, 2004 authorization, attached as Exhibit 4.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

All of the modifications to the project address environmental concerns of the Coastal Commission, and these modifications do not have a potential for a significant adverse environmental impact. The proposed project remains consistent with the authorization and findings made in the Conservancy's May 27, 2004 authorization, attached as Exhibit 4. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination.