

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

November 6, 2008

**GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE SOUTH VISITOR PLAZA IMPROVEMENTS  
PHASE I: DESIGN**

File No. 08-110-01

Project Manager: Moira McEnespy

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$500,000 to The Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District to design improvements to visitor-serving amenities at the South Visitor Plaza of the Golden Gate Bridge.

**LOCATION:** South Visitor Plaza at the south foot of the Golden Gate Bridge, City and County of San Francisco

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map and Site Photo](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Photo – Existing Facility](#)

Exhibit 3: [Conceptual Drawing](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of up to five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) to The Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (the District) to design improvements to visitor-serving amenities at the South Visitor Plaza of the Golden Gate Bridge, City and County of San Francisco. This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of funds, the District shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a final work program, schedule and budget; and the scopes of work and the roster of contractors to be employed for the project.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

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

1. The proposed project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding access-related facilities.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorize disbursement of up to \$500,000 (five hundred thousand dollars) to The Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (the District) to design and conduct environmental review for improvements to visitor-serving amenities at the South Visitor Plaza of the Golden Gate Bridge (see Exhibit 1).

The designated routes of three major trail systems converge at the South Visitor Plaza before crossing the Golden Gate Bridge: the California Coastal Trail (a trail running along the State’s entire 1,200-mile coastline; also designated in 1999 by the White House and the State Governor as California’s Millennium Legacy Trail); the San Francisco Bay Trail (a network of hiking and cycling trails encircling San Francisco Bay that will connect the shorelines of all nine bay area counties); and the Bay Area Ridge Trail (a trail encircling the bay along the ridge tops, serving hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians). It is estimated that about ten million people from around the world visit the Bridge each year.

The District seeks to replace the public restroom facilities as part of a larger long-term renovation of the area’s visitor-serving components that includes upgrading bicycle and pedestrian access by widening, re-routing, re-grading and resurfacing bicycle and pedestrian paths and trails in the area; improving visitor flow through landscaping and hardscape surfacing improvements; and installing interpretive elements.

The existing restrooms are antiquated in design, severely undersized for the very heavy usage they experience, and require complete closure three times per day for cleaning (see Exhibit 2 for photos of existing restroom facility). As a result, there are often long lines, waiting times of up to 15 minutes on busy weekends, and serious crowd control and sanitation issues.

The proposed authorization will fund design of a new restroom facility. The new restroom structure will be located in the footprint of the existing facility, which will be demolished. The new restrooms will incorporate a divided design that will eliminate the need for complete closure during cleaning, will be accessible per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA-accessible), and will be able to accommodate a greater number of users at the same time (thereby lessening lines and waiting time) (see conceptual drawing in Exhibit 3). The design will also include an upgrade of the onsite sewage pump station (owned and operated by the District). Although the new restroom facilities will be larger and able to accommodate more users at the same time, the upgrades will not require any increase in capacity at the sewage treatment plant (at the City and County of San Francisco), i.e., the upgrade will simply increase local capacity at the site. The

District has prepared a conceptual drawing for the new facility, and anticipates commencing design work in early 2009.

Formed in 1928, the District is a public district created pursuant to the Bridge and Highways District Act. The District's mission is to provide safe and reliable operation, maintenance and enhancement of the Golden Gate Bridge and to provide transportation services for customers within the U.S. Highway 101 Golden Gate Corridor. To this end, the District operates the Golden Gate Bridge, Golden Gate Transit buses and Golden Gate Ferry. The District is funded via bridge toll revenue; transit fares; federal, state and local subsidies; and advertising and property equipment rental revenues. Although the Conservancy has not previously granted funds to the District, providing and enhancing public access to and along the shoreline, and related amenities, is common to both entities' missions, and the Conservancy welcomes this opportunity to establish a new collaboration with the District.

Conservancy staff has reserved a total of \$1 million to assist the District with the restroom facility upgrades at the South Visitor Plaza. Upon completion of this design work, staff will return to the Conservancy to request authorization to disburse the remainder (\$500,000) towards construction. At that time, Conservancy staff will bring findings of consistency with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and recommend, as part of the resolution, a finding requiring signage acknowledging the Conservancy, funding sources as appropriate, and providing information about the Coastal Trail, San Francisco Bay Trail and Bay Area Ridge Trail.

**Site Description:** The Golden Gate Bridge is acclaimed as one of the world's most beautiful and recognized bridges with its tremendous towers, sweeping main cables and great span. The Bridge spans the inlet to San Francisco Bay from San Francisco's Presidio on the south to the Marin County headlands on the north. Open to pedestrian and vehicle traffic since May 1937, the Bridge attracts national and international visitors.

The 5.5-acre South Visitor Plaza is within the federal Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and sits on land owned by the National Park Service (NPS) as successor to the Department of the Army following the federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process of de-commissioning the Presidio. The District occupies, manages and maintains the site under a permit granted in 1931 by the Department of War, which has succeeded through the ages from Department of War to Department of Army and finally to the NPS. The Plaza offers numerous public visitor-serving amenities, including parking, tour bus stop, restrooms, a restaurant and a gift shop.

**Project History:** Although the Conservancy has not previously granted funds to the District, providing and enhancing public access to and along the shoreline, and related amenities, is common to both entities' missions, and the Conservancy welcomes this opportunity to establish a new collaboration with the District. Furthermore, the proposed project will continue Conservancy support of the California Coastal Trail, which the Conservancy has pursued since a 2001 directive by the Governor and legislature, and the San Francisco Bay Trail and the Bay Area Ridge Trail, to which the Conservancy has provided funding assistance since the late 1990s.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$500,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from FY 07/08 appropriations from the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006” (Proposition 84) and the “Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000” (Proposition 12). Proposition 84 funds may be used for the purposes of promoting access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the State in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Consistent with the purposes of Proposition 84, the proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code), and will improve access to and visitor-serving amenities at the Golden Gate Bridge. Proposition 12 funds may be used for planning and constructing the Coastal Trail. Consistent with the purposes of Proposition 12, the proposed project will plan and design a supporting amenity of the Coastal Trail.

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

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, sections 31160-31165 regarding San Francisco Bay projects.

Pursuant to Section 31162, the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that help to achieve various specific goals, including the goal of increasing public access. This project is located entirely within San Francisco County, one of the designated nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed project will improve public access to the bay by designing upgrades to an access-related facility in order to provide capacity adequate for the high level of visitor use at the project site. The proposed project will not have a significant adverse effect on agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas or wildlife.

Consistent with Section 31163(c), the proposed authorization will be used to fund design of a facility that supports outdoor recreational trail use. The proposed project is supported by an adopted regional plan (see the “Consistency with the San Francisco Bay Plan” section); serves a regional, in fact an international, constituency; and can be implemented in a timely way.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective B** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will increase access to a recreational facility.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective L**, the proposed project will make an existing recreational installation ADA-compliant.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** Please see letters of support from State Senator Carole Migden and others in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located at the south foot of the Golden Gate Bridge, which serves as the division between "coast" and "bay." The proposed project would be located on the waterfront of the City and County of San Francisco, which is within the nine-county Bay Area, and would be located within the coastal zone of the City and County of San Francisco.
5. **Need:** Absent Conservancy funds, the proposed project would not be able to commence.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Golden Gate Bridge is arguably the most defining feature of the San Francisco Bay Area, and is an internationally-recognized landmark. The Golden Gate Bridge receives approximately ten million visitors from around the world each year, as well as serving as a local recreational and transportation feature.

**Additional Criteria**

12. **Readiness:** The grantee stands ready to begin the project in the first quarter of 2009.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the "Project History" section above.
15. **Cooperation:** The proposed project offers the first opportunity for the Conservancy and the District to collaborate on a project where their interests and goals overlap.

**CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:**

The proposed project is consistent with the applicable policies contained in Part IV, Development of the Bay and Shoreline: Findings and Policies, of the San Francisco Bay Plan adopted by the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) in January 2006.

Public Access Policy No. 8 states:

Access to and along the waterfront should be provided by walkways, trails or other appropriate means and connect to the nearest public thoroughfare where convenient parking or public transportation may be available. Diverse and interesting public access experiences should be provided which would encourage

users to remain in the designated access areas to avoid or minimize potential adverse effects on wildlife and their habitat.

Consistent with Public Access Policy No. 8, the proposed project will support access along and across the waterfront by designing upgrades to a visitor-serving node that provides parking and is accessible by convenient public transportation. The proposed project will lead to enhancement of an interesting public access experience (specifically, use of the Golden Gate Bridge, and use of the California Coastal Trail, the San Francisco Bay Trail and the Bay Area Ridge Trail) and will design restroom facilities adequate to serve a designated public access area (the South Visitor Plaza).

Appearance, Design and Scenic Views Policy No. 2 states in relevant part that “[a]ll bayfront development should be designed to enhance the pleasure of the user or viewer of the Bay” and “[m]aximum efforts should be made to provide, enhance or preserve views of the Bay and shoreline, especially from public areas....” Consistent with this policy, the proposed project will eventually enhance the pleasure of the user or viewer of the Bay by designing necessary upgrades to restroom facilities at the South Visitor Plaza of the Golden Gate Bridge, a public area.

Finally, Recreation Policy No. 3 states that recreational facilities should be encouraged by BCDC if they are located, improved and managed such that they (1) are concentrated as close to major population centers as is feasible, (2) do not preempt land or water area needed for other priority uses, (3) are feasible from an engineering standpoint and (4) are consistent with public access policies that address wildlife compatibility and disturbance. The proposed project consists of designing an upgrade to a recreational facility that is close to a major population center (the City and County of San Francisco), does not preempt land or water area needed for other priority uses (consists of an upgrade to an existing facility), will be feasible from an engineering standpoint, and will not disturb wildlife.

#### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project is statutorily and categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under two sections of 14 Cal. Code of Regulations. The proposed project design and environmental review are statutorily exempt pursuant to Section 15262, in that they would involve feasibility and planning analysis for possible future action that has not yet been adopted, approved or funded. Preparation of the design for the facility improvements does not legally bind the Conservancy to future implementation of the project. Consistent with this section, the environmental effects of the proposed restroom facility upgrade would be considered prior to approval of funding for construction. The proposed project activities are also categorically exempt under §15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.