

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 22, 2011

BENICIA URBAN WATERFRONT RESTORATION PLAN

Project No. 10-028-01
Project Manager: Melanie Denninger

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$140,000 to the City of Benicia to prepare an urban waterfront restoration plan and associated environmental review for approximately 15 acres at the foot of First Street in Benicia, Contra Costa County.

LOCATION: City of Benicia in Solano County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Project Photograph](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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 an amount not to exceed \$140,000 (one hundred forty thousand dollars) to the City of Benicia (“the City”) toward preparation of an urban waterfront restoration plan for approximately 15 acres at the foot of First Street, along with completion of environmental review for the plan subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the City shall submit for review and approval by the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (“the Executive Officer”):

1. A work program, budget and schedule for the project and
2. All contractors that the City intends to retain in connection with 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.

2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.”

PROJECT SUMMARY: Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$140,000 to the City of Benicia (“the City”) toward preparation of an urban waterfront restoration plan for approximately 15 acres at the foot of First Street, including approximately one-half mile of waterfront (Exhibit 1) and completion of environmental review for the plan. The project area has a rich history of water-related uses and has gorgeous views of the Carquinez Strait and the Martinez shoreline and hills beyond. Within the project area, there are tidal and freshwater wetlands, a community green, small sandy beaches, a pier, a railroad station converted to offices, a vacant lot, a segment of the Bay Trail, and adjacent streets. The First Street commercial district and a marina and residential area are immediately adjacent. However, the project area is under-used and has a number of interrelated problems including degradation of the wetlands; flooding from urban runoff; lack of launch sites for non-motorized boats and of amenities for visitors, such as interpretive displays, benches and restrooms; and absence of unifying and enlivening design elements. Moreover, much of the project site is subject to rising sea-level, presenting both challenges for adapting over time and the opportunity to provide a model for other shoreline urban areas. Additional information about the project area and project history is provided in the “Site Description” and “Project History” sections below.

The proposed project is the creation of the Benicia Urban Waterfront Restoration Plan (the “Plan”), consisting of a master plan, an adaptive management plan for sea-level rise, estimates of implementation costs, and a schedule for phasing construction. The proposed project also includes completion of environmental review of the Plan. The Plan will address the following objectives:

- Improve public access to and along the shoreline;
- Improve amenities for visitors, such as interpretive and educational displays;
- Increase passive recreation and non-motorized boat use of the area;
- Explore the potential for developing a launch site for the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail;
- Protect and enhance existing tidal wetlands and other fish and wildlife habitat;
- Improve storm water management and integrate it with other project objectives;
- Plan for adaptation of all project elements to rising sea level;
- Ensure that the Plan is cost-effective and affordable; and
- Other objectives that may be identified during consultation with stakeholders.

Over the years, the City has obtained a number of Conservancy grants for planning and construction of public access improvements along its 15-mile shoreline and has demonstrated its ability to manage and complete grant projects.

Site Description: The approximately 15-acre proposed project area is on the Carquinez Strait shoreline of Benicia, about two miles west of the Benicia-Martinez Bridge (Exhibit1). The site encompasses mudflats and tidal marsh, a pocket of freshwater marsh, small sandy beaches, vacant uplands, a community green, the First Street Peninsula Pier, remnants of a shoreline railroad, and adjacent streets, all owned by the City. A train station converted to offices is surrounded by the project area. Immediately adjacent are the First Street commercial district and a marina and residential areas. The proposed plan will include recommendations for improvements within the project area and for connections with the surroundings. Because of the low elevation of the site, a major component of the Plan will be devising prudent measures for adapting to rising sea level. The site gradually slopes up from the Carquinez Strait, reaching an elevation of about 9 feet along the inland edge and a bit higher on the pier and site of the converted train station. Thus, the site is subject to the 100-year flood and to rising sea level. Localized flooding already occurs on adjacent streets.

Project History: The Conservancy has previously assisted the City in the proposed project area. In 1991, the City completed preparation of an urban waterfront restoration plan for approximately 7.5 acres including the currently proposed project area with a grant of \$42,000 from the Conservancy. That plan analyzed and recommended extensive private and public development. Little of the private development--which was expected to help finance much of the public facilities--has ever been built. In the 1990s and early 2000s, there was insufficient private sector interest and then in 2005, passage of an initiative known as “Measure C” resulted in a key parcel in the project area being rezoned from “waterfront commercial” to “waterfront park.” The Conservancy and others assisted the City with construction of some public improvements identified in the plan, including construction of the First Street Promenade (\$440,000 from the Conservancy in 1991) and public access and storm water improvements on the First Street Peninsula Pier (\$150,000 from the Conservancy in 2003).

After passage of Measure C in the 2005, a group of citizens formed a Waterfront Committee to discuss visions for the property affected by that initiative. Participants quickly recognized the property to be part of a larger area with unrealized opportunities for public enjoyment.

The project now proposed is an outgrowth of the Waterfront Committee’s deliberations and advice. It would salvage any usable elements of the 1991 plan and develop new elements to respond to current conditions, including rising sea level, limited public and private funding, and the community’s vision of retaining shoreline open space, enhancing wetlands, encouraging passive public recreation, and providing interpretation of local history and natural resources.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$140,000
City of Benicia	<u>20,000</u>
Total Project Costs	\$160,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the FY 10/11 appropriation to the Conservancy from the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006” (“Proposition 84”) (Public Resources Code Sections 75001 *et seq.*) These funds are available for San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program projects that protect bays, protect and restore natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands, and promote access to and enjoyment of coastal resources. Use of these funds for preparation of the Benicia Urban Waterfront Restoration Plan and completion of environmental review is appropriate, because the Plan will include planning and design of: 1) improved storm water management facilities, which will protect San Francisco Bay, 2) wetland restoration and protection, which will protect and restore natural habitat values of coastal waters, and 3) facilities for public use, which will promote access to and enjoyment of the Carquinez Strait, a portion of San Francisco Bay. Funding the proposed project is consistent with the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program established by Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as described below.

The City is expected to contribute \$20,000 toward engaging consultants to assist with preparation of the Plan and is also expected to contribute staff services with an estimated value of \$10,000 for managing the consultants and coordinating communications with stakeholders and the City Council and Parks and Recreation Commission.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with the provisions of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165, which state that the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area to help achieve stated goals. Consistent with Section 31162 (a), the proposed project will help “to improve public access to, within, and around the bay...and urban open spaces” by providing a conceptual plan and environmental review for improvements to spur trails off of the Bay Trail, and trails that connect to the adjacent urban residential and commercial areas, without having adverse impacts on agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas or wildlife. Consistent with Section 31162(b), the proposed project will help “to protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats...[and] scenic areas...” by providing a conceptual plan and environmental review for improvements to the existing tidal wetlands and to storm water run-off management facilities as well as a strategy for adapting to rising sea level. Consistent with Section 31162(c), the proposed project will help “to assist in the implementation of the policies and programs of the San Francisco Bay Plan...” For detail, please see “CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN” below. Consistent with Section 31162(d), the proposed project will help “to promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes” by providing a conceptual plan and environmental review for improvement of public recreation facilities intended to draw visitors from within the City and from other cities within the Bay Area.

The proposed project also satisfies the criteria for determining project priority under Section 31163(c), since the project has the following characteristics: the goals of the proposed plan are supported by the Benicia Waterfront Area Special Plan, which is a component of the San Francisco Bay Plan; the facilities to be designed in the Plan are intended to serve visitors from around the Bay Area; the City has staff and funding available to contribute to preparation of the

Plan; and the City will provide at least \$20,000 in matching funds and will also provide in-kind services.

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

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in development of a plan for recreational facilities including picnic areas, parking, and interpretive signs.

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 June 4, 2009, 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:** As described in "Project History" above, the proposed project was initiated by an ad hoc citizens' group. Evidence of public support is also provided by the letters received and attached as Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located on the shore of the Carquinez Strait in San Francisco Bay within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding assistance, the proposed project will not be undertaken because the City of Benicia lacks sufficient funding to prepare a master plan for the project area.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project is of regional importance because it is intended to serve visitors from around the region and because the planning for adaptation to rising sea level can serve as a model for other cities on the San Francisco Bay shoreline.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Consistent with Executive Order S-13-08, the proposed project, which is located in an area vulnerable to future sea level rise, will address a range of sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100 in order to assess project vulnerability and, to the extent feasible, reduce expected risks and increase resiliency to sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed project is intended to resolve multiple issues, including reducing flooding, enhancing tidal wetlands, and providing amenities for visitors, while also planning for adaptation to rising sea level.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
10. **Innovation:** The proposed project is innovative in planning for adaptation to rising sea level.

11. **Readiness:** The grantee, the City of Benicia, has demonstrated through the availability of its staff and submittal of a grant application that it is ready to begin work on the Plan. The leadership of the Waterfront Committee, a citizens' group formed to pursue multi-purpose planning for passive recreation and wetland enhancement in the area, helped prepare the grant application and is eager to see preparation of the Plan commence.
12. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above."
13. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The proposed project will take into account predicted changes in urban runoff.
14. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** To the extent appropriate in conceptual designs, the proposed Plan will include designs and construction methods that avoid or minimize greenhouse gas emissions to the extent feasible, and the environmental review component of the proposed project will identify and evaluate potential measures for minimizing green house gases.

CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:

The San Francisco Bay Plan has findings and policies specific to the proposed project area in its Benicia Waterfront Special Area Plan. Within the Special Area Plan, most of the proposed project falls within the Marina District and a small portion falls within the Historical Business District. Consistent with Section II.B in the Special Area Plan, the proposed project will result in a master plan for uses permitted in the BCDC Shoreline jurisdiction, including open space, public recreation and access. Consistent with Section III.B in the Special Area Plan, the proposed project will create a master plan for uses permitted in the Bay, Tidelands, and Marshes portion of the Marina District including open space, ecological reserve, water-oriented public recreation and access. Consistent with Section III.C in the Special Area Plan, the proposed project will result in a master plan for uses permitted in the BCDC Shoreline Jurisdiction portion of the Marina District, including public recreation and access, open space, and ecological preserve.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project involves only planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been authorized or approved by the Conservancy or another agency and is thus statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262. Planning carried out as part of the project will, however, consider environmental factors, as required by Section 15262. In addition, to the extent that data collection and resource evaluation activities are conducted for this project, they are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306. This categorical exemption applies to activities that consist of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval.