

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 3, 2015

PACIFICA ESPLANADE BLUFFS COASTAL TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

Project No. 05-056-02
Project Manager: Timothy Duff

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$75,000 to the City of Pacifica for preparation of final design plans, permit applications and environmental documents for public access improvements along the bluffs in northern Pacifica, San Mateo County.

LOCATION: 400 Esplanade Drive, northern Pacifica, San Mateo County Coast

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Photographs](#)

Exhibit 3: [2005 Conservancy Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 4: [Preliminary Access Facility Designs & Pier Example](#)

Exhibit 5: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

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

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed seventy five thousand dollars (\$75,000) to the City of Pacifica (City) for preparation of final plans, permit applications and environmental documents for future public access improvements at 400 Esplanade Drive, Pacifica, San Mateo County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the City shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, budget, schedule, and names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed for these tasks.
2. To the extent appropriate, the City shall ensure that the final designs of the project are consistent with the Conservancy’s ‘Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location.’”

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3. The City shall submit a sign plan for the project identifying locations for posting directional signs and Coastal Trail signs.”

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 Conservancy’s current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
2. The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9, sections 31400 *et seq.* of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding coastal access.
3. The proposed project serves greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Conservancy staff recommends disbursing up to \$75,000 to the City of Pacifica (City) for the preparation of final design plans, permit applications and environmental documents necessary for the future construction of public access improvements along a City-owned blufftop property located on the northern San Mateo County coast (Exhibits 1, 2). The proposed project was anticipated when the Conservancy provided grant funds to the City to acquire the property for public access and open space purposes in 2005 (Exhibit 3).

For the millions of annual visitors seeking to reach the coast from San Francisco or the San Francisco airport, one of their first opportunities to do so leads them to the project site, which is accessed from the first exit off Highway One in northern Pacifica. Situated next to one of the City’s main commercial districts, the 2-acre site is the most visible and accessible public blufftop access point in the area and offers panoramic ocean views next to an existing segment of the Coastal Trail.

With Conservancy funding, the City will hire consultants to prepare the final designs and specifications and complete the studies required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the Coastal Act in order to obtain a coastal development permit from the Coastal Commission, which retains permit authority in the project area. Preliminary design concepts prepared for the site in 2007 recommend a paved 8- to 10-foot wide wheelchair-accessible walkway located on the eastern/inland edge of the property adjacent to Esplanade Drive with a seatwall on the western edge of the walkway. A similar design concept was constructed along the promenade at the nearby Pacifica pier (Exhibit 4). In addition, the project design will include an entry point or gateway to attract visitors to the site as well as directional and interpretive signs.

Conservancy and City staff will coordinate with the consultants to obtain Coastal Commission staff support for the project. Commission staff has already expressed support for the conceptual plans as well as support for directing Commission in-lieu funds to construct the project following Commission approval of the coastal development permit. The City is very supportive of enhancing public access to its beaches and bluffs and City staff is committed to completing this project with support from Conservancy and Commission staff.

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Site Description: The property is located within a beachfront corridor in a neighborhood known as West Edgemar-Pacific Manor in northern Pacifica and is readily accessible from Highway One (Exhibits 1, 2). Across Esplanade Drive from the property are apartment buildings, a café and a post office, a vacant parcel to the north, two single-family homes to the south, and the ocean to the west. South of the two homes, the city has developed a half-mile segment of the Coastal Trail, including a segment the Conservancy funded which runs through an RV park. The 2-acre property includes approximately 600 feet of frontage along the coastal bluff. The width at the north and south ends of the property are approximately 190 feet and 100 feet, respectively. The blufftop provides expansive views of the Pacific Ocean. The site varies from generally level to slightly sloping downward in a westerly direction from Esplanade Drive toward the bluffs, with a near vertical 40-60 foot drop to the beach below. The bluffs consist predominately of dunes covered with foredune vegetation and coastal bluff scrub.

Project History: The Conservancy awarded a \$250,000 grant to the City in 2005 to acquire the project property for public access and open space purposes (Exhibit 3). The City also directed \$250,000 to the purchase. The Conservancy retained a Coastal Trail/Access easement over the property which requires the City to assume responsibility for operating and maintaining the access and trail improvements once they are constructed. Conservancy staff obtained preliminary design plans for the access improvements in 2007 but no funds were identified to complete the plans and construct the project until the summer of 2015.

In the summer of 2015, Conservancy staff met with Coastal Commission staff to discuss use of Commission-generated in-lieu funds that had recently become available for access projects in northern Pacifica. Commission staff agreed the project was a good fit and expressed support for directing a portion of these funds to the construction phase of the project following completion of the design and permitting phase (see Commission letter in Exhibit 5).

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$75,000
Project Total	\$75,000

The anticipated source for the Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code section 75001 *et seq.* (“Proposition 84”). Proposition 84 authorizes the Conservancy’s use of these funds for the purposes of promoting access to and enjoyment of coastal resources through projects undertaken pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resources Code), including Chapter 4.5 regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. Section 75060(c) allocates funding specifically for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program and states that “not less than 20% of the funds allocated by this paragraph shall be expended on projects in watersheds draining directly to the Pacific Ocean.” Consistency of the project with the Conservancy’s statutory mission is discussed below in “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation.”

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Through the proposed action, the Conservancy will play a primary role by funding the planning of a link in the California Coastal Trail (CCT), a trail system of statewide significance.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for development of accessways to and along the coast that serve more than local public needs. Consistent with this section, the proposed access improvements will support development of a new segment of the Coastal Trail that will attract visitors from throughout the region and beyond. The San Francisco Bay Area region, including the coastal city of Pacifica, attracts millions of visitors per year.

Section 31400.2 requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for an access project. Consistent with this section, the proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal access projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, and the Conservancy's project selection criteria (see Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines). The City has only limited funds available for recreational trails, and will commit the funds necessary to operate and manage the proposed improvements once they are installed.

Section 31400.3 enables the Conservancy to assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by improving and enhancing public access in a heavily-visited coastal region as part of a regional, comprehensive public access plan.

Consistent with Section 31408, the Conservancy is coordinating development of the CCT in consultation with the Coastal Commission and others.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources: Consistent with Standard No. 1, the proposed access facilities will be located on a bluff adjacent to a city street where they can safely accommodate public use and will be designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms and be subordinate to the setting's character.

Standard No. 2, Correct Hazards: The trail planning process will assure that the trail is designed to reduce the potential of any hazard, including erosion.

Standard No. 3, Access Easements: Construction and Location: The Conservancy owns an access and Coastal Trail easement at the project site. The proposed paved accessway will not exceed 10 feet in width and will be designed to accommodate wheelchair access..

Standard No. 4, Privacy: The design and location of accessways will ensure the privacy of adjacent private landowners.

Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas: The site consists predominately of dunes covered with foredune vegetation and north coastal bluff scrub. The proposed accessway will be

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located on the inland edge of the site adjacent to a city street and away from the majority of site's more sensitive dune habitat.

Standard No. 8, Trails: The proposed trail will provide continuous public access along a coastal bluff with appropriate paving materials, adequate trail drainage, trash receptacles, benches, and signs.

Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access: The accessway will be wheelchair-accessible.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN
GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C**, the proposed project will result in the design of a new trail segment.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A**, the project will serve to expand opportunities for barrier-free access to coastal trails.

**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 October 2, 2014, 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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** By developing public access and Coastal Trail facilities the project serves to promote and implement state Coastal Act policies as follows:
 - **Coastal Act (1976), Public Resources Code Section 30210** on public access and recreation calls for "maximum access, which shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people consistent with public safety needs and the need to protect public rights, rights of private property owners, and natural resource areas from overuse," and **Section 30214** calls for public access and recreation "takes into account the need to regulate the time, place, and manner of public access depending on the facts and circumstances in each case..."
4. **Support of the public:** The project has broad support of the public, public agencies and elected officials as demonstrated by the letters attached as Exhibit 5.
5. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of San Mateo County.
6. **Need:** Conservancy funds are needed to complete the planning phase of the project prior to construction.

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7. **Greater-than-local interest:** With its proximity to San Francisco and San Francisco airport, the Pacifica coast attracts hundreds of daily visitors from throughout the state, the country and the world.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project location is located on a coastal bluff that ranges in elevation from 30 feet to 60 feet above sea level. It is not vulnerable to sea level rise.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the City of Pacifica Local Coastal Land Use Plan (LUP). The LUP identifies the project site and recommends that it be developed for public access if it comes into public ownership, which it did in 2005. The LUP also makes special note of the importance of the City's north-south pedestrian and bicycle pathway systems and proposes that the pedestrian pathway be separated from Highway 1. The proposed trail will separate trail users from Highway 1.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed preparation of final plans and permit documents for the project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, section 15262, as this would involve only planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions. The planning and permitting portion of the project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities from CEQA.

Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization.

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