

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 22, 2022

**PACIFICA BLUFF PROTECTION PROJECT**

Project No. 22-007-01  
Project Manager: Timothy Duff

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$440,000 to the City of Pacifica to prepare plans, environmental review documents, and permit applications for two bluff protection structures to protect City-owned infrastructure along Esplanade Avenue in northern Pacifica, San Mateo County.

**LOCATION:** City of Pacifica, San Mateo County.

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)  
Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)  
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
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**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 four hundred and forty thousand dollars (\$440,000) to the City of Pacifica (“the grantee”) to prepare plans, environmental review documents, and permit applications for two bluff protection structures to protect City-owned infrastructure in northern Pacifica in San Mateo County.

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.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

Findings:

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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 Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
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### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

#### PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$440,000 to the City of Pacifica to prepare plans, environmental review documents, and permit applications for two bluff protection structures proposed to be located in northern Pacifica, San Mateo County (Exhibits 1 and 2). The structures are needed to protect critical city-owned infrastructure from increasing beach and bluff erosion caused by sea level rise, extreme weather events, and storm surges. The threatened infrastructure includes a major storm drain that directs runoff to an ocean outfall, and water, sewer, gas, and electric utilities that serve nearby residences. While historic erosion rates have ranged from one to three feet per year, in more recent years five or more feet per year have been documented, further increasing the potential for major damage to both essential infrastructure and City-owned blufftop land. While the Conservancy would typically not fund projects that focus on coastal armoring, in 2021 the Legislature appropriated nearly \$8 million to the Conservancy specifically to fund the design, permitting, and eventual construction of the two proposed Pacifica bluff protection structures.

The proposed grant funds will be used to evaluate the most effective and appropriate bluff protection design alternatives to protect city infrastructure and existing public blufftop park land, as well as options for enhancing public beach access currently impacted by rock revetments. Replacing existing rock revetments with vertical seawalls would serve to increase, at least temporarily, public access to sandy beach areas currently made inaccessible by the revetments. Protecting city-owned blufftop property from erosion would also ensure these areas remain available longer for the public to access and enjoy.

The grant will also be used to prepare an array of technical studies, including geotechnical exploration and analysis, biological and cultural resource assessments, and evaluations of projected sand supplies, wave runup, and sea level rise. These studies will inform the development of project alternatives, and ultimately the selection of preferred designs to be prepared and then reviewed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City's federal agency partner, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), will take the lead on National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review. Once the design, permit, and environmental review phase is completed, the City will determine whether to request the balance of the funds already appropriated to the Conservancy to construct the structures.

**Site Description:** The two structure sites are located on the beach in northern Pacifica below steep bluffs adjacent to Esplanade Avenue, a two-lane city street adjacent to highly erodible cliffs (Exhibits 1 and 2). At the northern-most site along the 300 Esplanade block, three

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apartment buildings threatened by a rapid loss of land were vacated and demolished, and the land was transferred to the City. This property is approximately 600 feet long and averages 60 feet wide. A dispersed rock revetment lies on the beach at the base of the bluffs. An existing seawall is located to the north of the site that protects an apartment complex and includes a public beach accessway that provides the only beach access in this area.

To the south along the 400 Esplanade block, there is a City-owned blufftop property that provides unimproved public access to the bluffs and beach. The property is approximately 300 feet long and ranges between 30 to 80 feet wide. A temporary rock revetment was installed in 2018 to reduce erosion until a more permanent solution is identified and constructed. The City acquired the blufftop property with Conservancy funds in 2006 and the Conservancy owns a trail easement over the property. Immediately adjacent to the property's southern border is the City-owned 500 Esplanade block that features a developed segment of the Coastal Trail. This segment connects to another completed segment of the Coastal Trail constructed with Conservancy funds that extends along the bluffs fronting an RV park.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The City's finance department tracks all expenditures and works closely with public works staff to manage state grants per state guidelines. The City has sufficient cash flow to pay for the project upfront and then request reimbursement and has several project managers with professional engineer licenses to oversee the project. The City has previously worked with the Conservancy and other state agencies on past state grant-funded projects and has demonstrated the necessary capacity to successfully complete the projects. The City has a budget plan in place for the long-term management, maintenance, and monitoring of the project.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, 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 Conservancy's investment would be leveraged by \$660,000 of federal funds totaling 60 percent of the total \$1,100,000 cost of this phase of the project. The project provides important benefits to Californians by protecting critical infrastructure in this popular coastal town.

#### **3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes.**

The Conservancy sent tribal consultation letters to several tribes in the region but did not receive any comments on the proposal.

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

The proposed project will improve resiliency of the adjacent bluff to the increased impacts from sea level rise and large waves, thereby protecting critical city infrastructure. The City projects that the seawalls will last for at least 30 years.

### **5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

The project will protect critical city infrastructure, including water, sewer, gas, and electric utilities, and protect city-owned blufftop land.

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

The project includes a community outreach and engagement plan to solicit community feedback on the project designs. The conceptual plan to replace existing rock revetments with vertical seawalls and protect critical city infrastructure has broad community support.

## **PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$440,000</b>
Federal Emergency Management Agency	<u>\$660,000</u>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$1,100,000</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding is a fiscal year 2021/2022 appropriation from the General Fund specifically for the Pacifica Bluffs Protection Project. The Budget Act of 2021 (AB 128, 2021), as amended by SB 170 (2021).

The FEMA funds have been secured by the City of Pacifica to design and construct the structures.

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 proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (specifically, Section 31113). Consistent with Section 31113(b) the Conservancy may undertake projects within its jurisdiction that address extreme weather events, sea level rise, storm surge, beach and bluff erosion, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. Consistent with Section 31113(c) the Conservancy may award grants to public agencies for activities authorized pursuant to Section 31113(b). The proposed project is consistent with Section 31113(b) because it protects critical infrastructure from the impacts of sea level rise, storm surge, and bluff erosion. The project is

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within the Conservancy's jurisdiction because it will occur in San Mateo County, within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code).

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The proposed project is not consistent with the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan which calls for implementing projects to increase resilience to sea level rise or other climate change impacts using nature-based solutions and other multi-benefit strategies (Goal 8, Objective C). However, the Legislature has deemed this project a state priority by appropriating funding specifically for it.

### **CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed preparation of plans, environmental review documents, and permit applications is statutorily exempt from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact report or negative declaration under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15262, in that it would involve only planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded. The proposed work is also categorically exempt from CEQA under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization.

Upon Conservancy authorization of the grant, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.