

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**SAND CITY COASTAL TRAIL PLANNING**

Project No. 23-089-01  
Project Manager: Irvin Tang

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$473,500 to the City of Sand City to prepare trail alignment and restoration plans, designs, permit applications, and environmental documentation for a 0.7-mile segment of the Coastal Trail in Sand City, County of Monterey.

**LOCATION:** Sand City, Monterey County

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Proposed Trail System Map](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [West Dunes Property Map](#)
  - Exhibit 4: [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 seventy-three thousand five hundred dollars (\$473,500) to the City of Sand City (“the grantee”) to prepare trail alignment and restoration plans, designs, permit applications, and environmental documentation for a 0.7-mile segment of the Coastal Trail in Sand City, County of Monterey.

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.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, the City of Sand City shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Coastal Access Project Standards'.

Findings:

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

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding provision of public accessways.
2. The accessway to be created by the proposed project will serve more than local public needs, pursuant to section 31400.1 of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
3. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$473,500 grant to the City of Sand City (The City) to prepare trail alignment and restoration plans, designs, and environmental documentation for a 0.7-mile segment of the Coastal Trail in Sand City in the County of Monterey (Exhibit 2). The proposed trail would create a formal trail system leading from Sand City's city-center to the managed coastal dunes of Monterey State Beach. Monterey State Beach is owned by State Parks, which will be involved in the proposed planning for coastal trail and public access improvements and has expressed support for the project (Exhibit 4).

The proposed segment of the Coastal Trail will connect the city center to the coast, providing walkable coastal access for the surrounding low-income community as well as for visitors. Currently, the route to the beach from the city-center involves a network of fragmented sidewalks that extends across Highway 1 on Tioga Avenue and ends at an informal parking lot at the edge of the West Sand Dunes bluff top (Exhibit 2). West Sand Dunes is bordered by two roads (Tioga Avenue and West Bay Street) that provide rudimentary coastal access and parking along Sand City's shoreline. There is currently no trail through the dunes to connect the end of Tioga Avenue to the Vista Point viewing platform and beach access point at West Bay Street. The lack of a dedicated dune trail has resulted in many informal footpaths meandering through sensitive dune habitats.

The proposed project will develop plans to connect existing sidewalks within the city-center, and create a formal dune trail from Tioga Avenue to West Bay Street including an ADA compliant trail section and viewing platform, a new restroom by the West Bay Street end, and parking improvements at Tioga Avenue end. The project will also include plans for wayfinding coastal access signs and education interpretive panels featuring information about traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous history of the area. Once constructed, the combined 0.7 miles of trail system on the East and West side of Highway 1 would improve access in and around Sand City's shoreline and provide a useful linkage for the community-members and

visitors to this popular location. It will also provide direct connections to the existing Monterey Bay Coastal Recreational Trail – a paved 18 mile trail that connects Sand City to the cities of Monterey and Pacific Grove. The proposed project will include preparation of a habitat restoration plan to restore approximately 12 acres of native habitat at West Sand Dunes. This will include retiring informal social trails within the dunes thereby protecting and rehabilitating sensitive dune habitat.

The proposed project will include preparation of environmental review documents and permit applications. As part of the project, the City will work with State Parks to secure an agreement for constructing and maintaining the portion of trail that would be located on Monterey State Beach. If it is determined that public access cannot be located on State Parks land, the proposed project will include an alternative route to use Sand City's right-of-way on Eight Way, which connects perpendicularly from Sand Dune Drive and traverses the middle of the West Sand Dunes (Exhibit 2).

The City will lead community outreach efforts as part of the proposed project, which will include a joint community workshop/ City Council meeting and tabling at the Sand City Night Market. During these community outreach efforts, the City will solicit input from community members to understand their needs and desire for the trail system and parking improvements. Additionally, the project plans to conduct tribal outreach and consultation which would inform best management practices to protect archaeological and cultural resources, as well as help develop educational signage for the project.

**Site Description:** Sand City is located along the Monterey Bay shoreline, bordered by Highway 1 and the Pacific Ocean to the West and the City of Seaside to the East. It is a small town with roots in heavy industry, including sand mining. Sand City's city-center is located east of Highway 1. Compared to surrounding cities, there is little coastal access and recreational opportunities within the City. Sand City is a low-income community that is identified as severely disadvantaged on the State Parks Community Fact Finder maps.

Directly west of Highway 1 is mostly undeveloped rolling sand dune habitat, the West Sand Dunes, elevated on a coastal bluff. There are two roads (Tioga Avenue and West Bay Street), that border the West Sand Dunes. Tioga Avenue provides informal (unstriped) parking spaces and abuts a steep coastal bluff. There is no formal beach access at the end of Tioga Avenue, and accessing the beach here can be dangerous due to the steep topography. Approximately 0.3 miles south of Tioga Avenue, West Bay Street provides 15 formal striped parking spaces, two of which are designated for handicapped parking. West Bay Street provides coastal access to the beach, and the City is currently constructing the Vista Point Viewing platform at the end of West Bay Street to enhance the coastal access in this area.

The West Sand Dunes has multiple parcel owners; California State Parks holds the majority ownership of the parcels, Sand City, and independent entities hold right-of-way and ownership over the rest of the properties respectively (Exhibit 3). The proposed project plans to utilize land on the West Sand Dunes for the trail alignment that is within the public right-of-way or is on land owned by State Parks. The land east of Highway 1 is on a privately held parcel that will need to be acquired for a planned segment of the sand dune trail to connect Calabrese Park and Tioga Avenue (Exhibit 2).

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** Sand City has received and administered numerous state grants with a Local Early Action Planning Grant and a Prop 1 Integrated Regional Water Management grant among the more recent. After the completion of the proposed project, the trail system will be maintained by the Sand City Public Works Department which currently maintains all the City's streets and pedestrian walkways. The City's planning, building, and engineering departments will manage and monitor the project in the long run.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, 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 project will protect and enhance approximately 12 acres of dune habitat, including a section of the Monterey State Beach. The trail realignment will reduce the risk of future dune erosion impacts. Further, the project will create more accessible coastal access for a low-income community with enhanced ADA trails, planned parking spaces, and a restroom by the West Bay Street end, which will be enjoyed by community-members and visitors.

**3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.**

Sand City will initiate outreach to the local tribes and keep close communication with the tribes throughout the life of the project. The Project will incorporate traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous history of the area on educational signage, which will be placed along the proposed trail-system. Best management practices will be incorporated into the construction plans to protect archaeological and cultural resources.

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

The project will explore the best coastal adaptation practice to ensure the project provides sustainable public access in the face of sea level rise and coastal erosion. The coastal trail realignment to higher ground will both encourage hikers to remain on the designated path, which will minimize human impact on the sand dune habitat and reduce erosion; the realignment will also account for a retreating shoreline for years to come.

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

The proposed project will connect Sand City's city-center to oceanfront beach and trail access. In addition to beach and coastal access improvements, the Project will also protect and enhance sensitive dune ecosystem.

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

The project plans to engage the community at a joint community workshop City Council meeting and at the Night Market in Sand City. At both events, Sand City staff will provide information about the trail designs and plans as well as solicit input from community members to understand their needs and desires for the trail system and coastal access improvements.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$473,500</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$473,500</b>

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of “urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies” (Budget Act of 2022, SB 154, as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). The coastal resilience funds are available for the purposes described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which include nonmotorized trails of statewide significance. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will develop plans to close a gap in the California Coastal Trail, a nonmotorized trail of statewide significance.

**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. Section 31400.1 provides that the Conservancy may provide grants for public agencies to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. The recommended authorization is for the Conservancy to grant funds to a public agency to develop plans for a coastal accessway to and along the coast, which will improve access to and enjoyment of coastal resources along the Central California Coast.

Section 31400.1 requires that the Conservancy determine that the subject accessway will serve more than local public needs prior to providing a grant to a local agency. The proposed project will serve more than local public needs because it will provide improved access to the Monterey Bay shoreline, which is one of the main draws of visitors to the region, and will also provide scenic views of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):**

Consistent with **Goal 1.1, Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will improve recreation conditions and benefit a systemically excluded community.

Consistent with **Goal 2.3, Expand Accessibility**, the proposed project will prepare plans for an ADA compliant section of the coastal trail as well as parking and restroom facilities.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4, Build Trails**, the proposed project will plan, design, and prepare permit applications for a 0.7 mile segment of the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5, Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will prepare plans for coastal access amenities including improved parking, a restroom, and interpretive signage.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The project consists of design and planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded, and data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The project is therefore statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 and categorically exempt pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306.

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