



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 21-137

Board Meeting Date: 2/23/2021

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Subject: The Tunitas Creek Beach Improvement Project's Preferred Concept Design

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the Tunitas Creek Beach Improvement Project's Preferred Concept Design and direct the San Mateo County Parks Department to proceed with the preparation of detailed project Plans, Specifications, and Estimates and California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") review.

BACKGROUND:

The Tunitas Creek Beach Property (the "Property"), located in unincorporated San Mateo county approximately eight miles south of the City of Half Moon Bay, totals approximately 58 acres in size and includes almost one mile of sandy beach, steep coastal bluffs, and the mouth of Tunitas Creek. The Property has sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean to the west and is framed by sandstone cliffs to the north. Numerous special status and protected plant and animal species, including the Western Snowy Plover, can be found on the Property.

In May 2019, this Board authorized the execution of a grant agreement with the California State Coastal Conservancy ("SCC") for funds to plan, permit, and design visitor amenities on the Property. This effort has been branded the Tunitas Creek Beach Improvement Project (the "Project").

To gather initial feedback and guidance on the Project, the Parks Department ("Department") and Peninsula Open Space Trust ("POST") formed the Community Advisory Committee ("CAC"). The CAC was comprised of representatives from local non-profits, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups. Its structure allowed members to provide a voice for their respective community and relay Project updates to their respective constituents. The CAC also identified four core values for the Project: *Environmental Protection; Education and Awareness; Equity and Inclusion; and Outdoor Experiences.*

In October 2019, the Department's consultants prepared an Opportunity and Constraints Analysis to better understand existing site conditions. The analysis focused on view corridors, parking demand, parking lot entrance configuration, hydrology and geology, sea level rise, and cultural and biological resources. A separate analysis assessed the condition of the single-family dwelling currently on the

Property.

The Opportunity and Constraints Analysis confirmed that the Property has unstable geology due to active, inactive, and ancient landslides. Further, social trails have exacerbated bluff erosion. The analysis also determined that due to unstable geology and sensitive natural resources, construction of visitor amenities should be limited to areas already disturbed by human activity. It was also confirmed that the existing single-family dwelling is not salvageable due to the structure's integrity and the condition of its foundation. Therefore, the dwelling must be razed.

Beginning in April 2020, the Project Advisory Team-comprised of representatives from the Department, the County's Department of Public Works, POST, and SCC-initiated a robust community engagement process consisting of paper and online surveys, online learning modules and videos, and virtual public workshops. Throughout this process, members of the public provided input regarding their vision and preferred uses for the future park. The Department made all outreach materials available in English and Spanish, and co-hosted its first all-Spanish language public workshop on October 22, 2020 with the Department's community partner, CARON.

As a result of the public engagement process, the Department received 1,300 survey responses, and 2,100 views of videos posted to the Department's website. Throughout the process, the public advocated for improved access for people of all abilities and for limiting development to maintain the Property's natural character.

DISCUSSION:

Incorporating input from the public engagement process, the Department developed the Preferred Plan. The Preferred Plan considers: (i) the core values identified by the CAC, (ii) data collected during the public engagement process, (iii) impacts to natural and cultural resources, (iv) environmental permitting requirements, (v) known Property constraints, and (vi) the Department's ability to efficiently and effectively manage the Property for coastal access and recreation and habitat restoration and preservation.

To address public concerns regarding the built environment, the Preferred Plan sites amenities with the highest level of development on the upper-bluff and amenities requiring medium level of development on the mid-bluff, with minimal development on the beach itself. A rendering of the Preferred Plan is found on the attached Exhibit A. With this design approach, the Department can offer a unique experience at each level of the Property. For example, if someone would like to enjoy the Property's views, they can do so from the upper-bluff without having to hike down to the beach. And, if someone wants to enjoy the views during a picnic, they can do so on the mid-bluff away from Highway 1 traffic and without experiencing crowds on the beach.

Upper-bluff amenities include: an improved parking area with space for approximately 65 vehicles and overflow parking potential, a scenic overlook with bench seating, and an accessible pedestrian pathway to the mid-bluff with rest stops and overlooks. A loop trail leading to the beach begins at the south end of the parking area.

Mid-bluff amenities include: public restrooms, tiered amphitheater style seating and gathering space, picnic tables, interpretive displays and signage, and improved beach access via the existing service road. For added site security, a ranger residence is also proposed at the mid-bluff. At this time, no source of potable water has been identified. If a water source is not identified during the environmental review phase of the project, the ranger residence must be removed from the Preferred Plan.

The beach has minimal development, and instead offers park users opportunities for passive recreation. A wildlife viewing boardwalk adjacent to the Western Snowy Plover habitat is included in the design. The boardwalk will allow guests to observe the plover habitat and creek corridor without causing disturbance to this threatened species.

The Department presented the Preferred Plan to the public at a virtual workshop held on January 27, 2021, as well as to the County's Parks Commission at its February 4, 2021 meeting. The Commission voted 4-0-1 to recommend that this Board approve the Preferred Plan and direct the Department to proceed with the preparation of detailed project Plans, Specifications, and Estimates, as well as CEQA review.

The Department estimates that all environmental permits and approvals will be completed by the end of Summer 2021, and the 100% Design Plans, Specifications, and Estimates will be completed during Winter 2021. This will allow a contract for construction services to be awarded early 2022, with construction anticipated to commence Spring 2022. The new park is estimated to open to the public Spring 2023. This timeline assumes a Mitigated Negative Declaration will satisfy CEQA requirements. Should an Environmental Impact Report be required, however, the timeline would likely be significantly extended.

Fiscal Impact:

There is no Net County Cost associated with accepting the recommendation. There is sufficient grant funding in the FY 2020-21 Budget to prepare the Concept Design documents and conduct the CEQA review.