

SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation  
April 16, 2021

**Marin City Urban Wetland Community Visioning Project**

Project No. RA-023  
Project Manager: Linda Tong

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 through the Community Grants Program to the Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership, fiscal sponsor for Shore Up Marin City, to conduct a community visioning and planning process to restore a degraded stormwater detention basin into wetland and open water habitat in Marin County.

**LOCATION:** Marin City, Marin County; North Bay

**MEASURE AA PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program; Integrated Flood Protection Program; Shoreline Public Access Program.

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**EXHIBITS**

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

Exhibit 2: [Project Photographs](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Support Letter](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority adopt the following resolution and findings:

Resolution:

The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) through the Community Grants Program to the Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership, fiscal sponsor for Shore Up Marin City, to conduct a community visioning and planning process to restore a degraded stormwater detention basin into wetland and open water habitat in northern Marin City. Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Authority the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Authority funding.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act, Gov. Code Sections 66700-66706.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with The San Francisco Bay Clean Water, Pollution Prevention and Habitat Restoration Measure (Measure AA).

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Authority authorize a grant of up to \$100,000 to the Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership for the Marin City Urban Wetland Community Visioning Project (“the project”). This project will be funded through the Community Grants Program, a new effort to improve equity in the Authority’s work by providing grants and increased staff support for community-based organizations in economically disadvantaged communities (EDCs). Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership will be the fiscal sponsor for the project, which will be undertaken and managed by Shore Up Marin City. The project consists of conducting a community visioning and planning process for the restoration of a degraded stormwater detention basin in northern Marin City, an EDC within Marin County (Exhibit 1) into wetland and open water habitat.

The planning phases of this urban wetland restoration project are already underway, with Audubon California as the lead, and local grassroots coalition Shore Up Marin City as a crucial partner and driver of the project. Other partners include Marin County Department of Public Works (DPW), Dr. Kristina Hill and graduate student researchers from UC Berkeley, Restoration Design Group consulting firm, and more. The general design configurations for the restoration project will likely be muted tidal wetland, managed wetland, or managed pond. In parallel, Marin County DPW is planning upgrades to flood control infrastructure in the lower Marin City watershed, including the detention basin’s inflow and outflow structures. Audubon California and Shore Up Marin City meet with these partners routinely and will coordinate the project to complement DPW’s work.

Shore Up Marin City has received funding from Audubon California to initiate community engagement, but needs additional funds to lead a robust community engagement campaign that will inspire residents to be active participants in the ongoing visioning and planning for this urban wetland. The project will weave together community engagement, local workforce and career development, and the opportunity for Shore Up Marin City to build organizational capacity through leading this project with support from Audubon California.

The project aims to have community involvement closely align with, and directly inform, technical planning and design of the urban wetland. In addition to closely following the preparation of technical studies, permitting process, and completion of up to 60% engineering design for the restoration effort, Shore Up Marin City intends to achieve the following:

- Host community events and creative activities to raise awareness and engage Marin City residents in the restoration project. Shore Up Marin City and their partners will solicit community input on how the current detention basin can be improved to provide flood protection, habitat for wildlife, and a beautiful place for community members to visit.
- Support workforce and career development by training a cohort of 10 community advocates and young environmental advocates on the process of a shoreline restoration project. The cohort will learn how to partner with landowners and the importance of planting native plants and removing invasive species. The cohort will also engage the broader community in the urban wetland restoration planning process.
- Develop a community-led conceptual plan for a multi-benefit habitat restoration project. Shore Up Marin City and their partners (Audubon California, engineering and design consultants, and others) will lead community meetings to facilitate in-depth conversations about the restoration, public access, and nature-oriented recreational amenities at the site. Community input will be integral to informing the design process of the restoration.

Shore Up Marin City is well-positioned to lead the community engagement efforts for the urban wetland restoration planning and design process. Shore Up Marin City is a multi-racial environmental coalition of residents, workers, and community stakeholders, and it advocates for the equitable inclusion of the community in local planning and community preparedness efforts. Shore Up Marin City has a decade long history of working with residents to uncover and understand environmental issues facing the community, and to identify the numerous agencies that are responsible for maintaining the infrastructure that impacts Marin City residents and their quality of life. Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership (CVNL), which aims to provide local leaders the guidance and resources needed to build resilient and impactful organizations, has been the fiscal sponsor for Shore Up Marin City in other grants awarded to restore the urban wetland. CVNL is a clear choice to be the fiscal sponsor in this community engagement project as well and will support Shore Up Marin City by passing through Authority grant funds.

### **Site Description:**

The project area is Marin City, an unincorporated area in Marin County that is adjacent to Highway 101. The stormwater detention basin in Marin City has been poorly maintained for decades, leading to inadequate drainage and frequent flooding (Exhibit 2). The flooding occurs because of stormwater runoff from the hillsides of the Marin City watershed, and because of high tides and malfunctioning culverts connecting the detention basin to Richardson Bay. The flood risk to this community will only increase as sea level rises due to climate change. Marin City is one of the highest-density areas of low-income residents in Marin County, and has historically been deprived of the resources necessary to maintain and enhance flood-control infrastructure to respond to a changing climate.

Investing in the transformation of the degraded detention basin into a high-quality urban wetland will serve as a model for nature-based flood protection, as well as create valuable habitat for native species. The water in the current stormwater detention basin becomes anoxic during the dry season since the area is disconnected from tidal flushing, and pollutants accumulate during the wet season. Reconnecting the site to tidal influence and restoring native vegetation and upland buffers will enhance the larger Richardson Bay ecosystem. Once restored, this site could

support a range of wildlife, including migratory waterfowl and shorebirds like American avocets, long billed curlew, Clark’s grebe, and white pelican. There is also a direct open space corridor connecting this site to the Bothin Marsh Preserve just north of Marin City. Local restoration will improve regional habitat connectivity, as well as expand opportunities for community members to enjoy nature close to home.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority</b>	\$100,000
Audubon California	\$164,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$264,000</b>

Audubon California secured \$495,999 in funds from the State Coastal Conservancy, the National Fish and Wildlife Federation, and the Ocean Protection Council to complete up to 60% design for the restoration project. A portion of the funds were allocated to community engagement and to building Shore Up Marin City’s organizational capacity. This project will provide more in-depth community engagement for the restoration project up to 60% design. Others on the project team, including Dr. Kristina Hill of UC Berkeley, have donated their time to support Shore Up Marin City’s efforts. Shore Up Marin City has also formed partnerships with two landscape architecture, planning and urban design firms (CMG Landscape Architecture and SWA Group) who are supporting this project pro bono.

Audubon California and Shore Up Marin City plan to seek funds for the complete design and implementation of the project as they finish up the conceptual design phase in 2021 and move forward with completing 60% design.

**CONSISTENCY WITH AUTHORITY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION, THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY ACT:**

The project is consistent with Government Code Section 66704.5 of the Authority’s Enabling Legislation, and therefore is eligible for grant funding from the Authority. Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership (fiscal sponsor of Shore Up Marin City) is a 501(3)(c) nonprofit organization, which is an eligible grantee under Section 66704.5(a). The project will occur along the shoreline of Richardson Bay in Marin County, which is within the Authority’s jurisdiction. The project will closely align with, and directly inform, the planning and design phases of wetland restoration and associated public access in Marin City, making it an eligible project as defined in Section 66704.5(b). Funding this community visioning and planning project is consistent with Section 66704.5(e), which allows the Authority to award grants for all phases of planning of eligible projects.

**CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:**

The project is consistent with the programs and activities of Measure AA, as outlined below:

The project would support the *Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program*'s purpose to significantly improve wildlife habitat, by restoring wetlands or other Bay and shoreline habitats to benefit shorebirds, waterfowl, and fish.

The project would support the *Integrated Flood Protection Program*'s purpose to use natural habitats to protect communities along the Bay's shoreline from coastal flooding, by planning nature-based flood protection through wetland and habitat restoration.

The project would support the *Shoreline Public Access Program*'s purpose to enhance the quality of life of Bay Area residents through improved public access, by planning nature-oriented public access and recreational opportunities for the community. The project would also provide interpretive materials and outreach events about wildlife habitat, public access, and flood protection, to protect the Bay's health and encourage community engagement.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:**

1. **Greatest positive impact.** The project will empower community members to engage in a key restoration effort that will also mitigate flood risk. The project will also inspire residents to continue advocating for their community and engage of stewardship of their natural resources.
2. **Greatest long-term impact.** Restoration of Marin City's urban wetland will be designed with flood protection and sea level rise resilience as a core goal. The community-oriented nature of the project will ensure that long-term benefits to current and future generations are at the forefront of the planning process.
3. **Leveraging resources and partnerships.** Shore Up Marin City has a remarkable partnership with Audubon California, whose staff have been unwavering advocates for Shore Up Marin City's vision of a restored wetland in their community (Exhibit 3). See PROJECT FINANCING section for details.
4. **Economically disadvantaged communities.** The project will directly benefit residents of Marin City, an economically disadvantaged community that is predominantly Black. Flooding of the current degraded stormwater detention basin affects the one road in and out of Marin City, which has serious implications for the daily lives of residents and public health of the community. In addition to engaging residents in planning restoration that will provide flood protection and public access amenities, the project will provide stipends to a cohort of community advocates and young environmental advocates.
5. **Benefits to economy.** Shore Up Marin City currently has a team of five community advocates, and this project's funding will provide financial compensation for up to 10 additional community advocates and young environmental advocates. The project will also provide education and training that will be valuable experience for future employment in environmental projects and other job opportunities.

6. **Engage youth and young adults.** Shore Up Marin City and its partners have reached out to hundreds of residents about the restoration effort, at community events that drew teens, single parents with children, seniors, people experiencing homelessness, and others. Residents will continue to be engaged in community visioning for the restoration project through an art contest, video vignettes, and other community activities. Project participants will gain experience in planning for natural resource restoration and enhancement, and youth within Shore Up Marin City's environmental advocates cohort will learn transferable communication and leadership skills that will support their career development.
  
7. **Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.** The project is consistent with the Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Criteria. The project's community engagement paired with the technical design work of the restoration and flood management improvements will benefit an entire region that relies on Highway 101. The project can be implemented in a timely manner, as Shore Up Marin City has been a key partner since the initial planning conversations and the planning phases of the urban wetland restoration began. If the project is not funded now, it will be a missed opportunity to ensure there is robust community engagement in the restoration effort.
  
8. **San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program.** The project is consistent with BCDC's Bay Plan, which is part of its Coastal Management Program. In particular, the project would support the Environmental Justice and Social Equity Policies of the Bay Plan, which state that the Commission recognizes the importance of low-income communities of color as invaluable stakeholders and is committed to uplifting the voices of communities who have been historically excluded from decision-making processes. The project would also support the Bay Plan's Climate Change Policies, which encourages innovative, nature-based sea level rise adaptation approaches wherever feasible and appropriate.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from preparing an environmental impact document under the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, California Code of Regulations Section 15262, because the project involves planning for possible future actions. The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15322, because the project consists of community engagement and will not involve any physical alteration of the project location. Upon approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.