

SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation
May 5, 2023

San Leandro (Lisjan) Creek Community Project

Project No. RA-039
Project Manager: Virgilio Cuasay

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 through the Community Grants Program to the Social Good Fund, fiscal sponsor of the David R. Brower, Ronald V. Dellums Institute for Sustainable Policy Studies and Action, to host community planning meetings, provide workforce education and training for creek stewardship, and install native vegetation along the bank of San Leandro Creek in Alameda County.

LOCATION: San Leandro Creek, Oakland, Alameda County; Measure AA Region: East Bay

MEASURE AA PROGRAM CATEGORY: Safe, Clean Water and Pollution Prevention Program; Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program.

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Photographs](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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 one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the Social Good Fund, fiscal sponsor of the David R. Brower, Ronald V. Dellums Institute for Sustainable Policy Studies and Action, to host community planning meetings, provide workforce education and training for creek stewardship, and install native vegetation at San Leandro Creek in Alameda County. 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.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.

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 grant up to \$100,000 through the Community Grants Program to the Social Good Fund, fiscal sponsor of the David R. Brower, Ronald V. Dellums Institute for Sustainable Policy Studies and Action (the Institute), to carry out the San Leandro (Lisjan) Creek Community Project (Community Project or project) in Alameda County (Exhibit 1). The Community Project will: (1) establish and operate a communications hub (the Hub), a platform for agencies, community-based organizations, and residents to exchange information on planning, restoring, and stewarding San Leandro Creek; (2) recruit and train students and community members to steward the creek and its surrounding habitat; and (3) plant and maintain native vegetation at the Madison Park Academy campus along the bank of San Leandro Creek.

The first major element of the project is the establishment and operation of the Hub, which is a series of in-person meetings that will provide a forum for government agencies, community-based organizations, and residents to exchange information related to the project. The Institute will engage its stakeholders through a minimum of 10 meetings at Madison Park Academy's community center to identify project leads, create meeting agendas, plan restoration projects, and develop training materials. Best practices and lessons learned from previous community projects, including the 2010 Green Works pilot project (Exhibit 2, Figure 1) where high school youth were trained in green landscape design and construction, will inform program design. In addition to coordinating the activities proposed for this project, the Hub will also serve as a platform to discuss future opportunities for restoring and stewarding San Leandro Creek. Attendees will receive stipends for participating in Hub meetings.

The second element of the Community Project involves recruiting and training high school youth and community members to conduct habitat restoration activities on Oakland Unified School

District (OUSD) property at the southern border of Madison Park Academy adjacent to the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District's (the District's) maintenance path atop the north bank of San Leandro Creek (Exhibit 2, Figure 2). The Institute will partner with its network of community-based organizations and consultants to recruit and train a minimum of 10 participants to steward the creek and its surrounding habitat and to use planting methods informed by traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous knowledge developed over millennia through interaction with the environment. Project leads consisting of consultants and Institute staff will bring participants to the project site to assess existing conditions and finalize the restoration plan. Participants will visit the site, learn of successful illegal dumping reduction programs from other cities, meet with waste management professionals, engage in a group clean-up, and bring their experience to the Hub to design a longer-term program with partners to address the waste going into the Bay.

Hands-on restoration activities will take place at two specific locations. One planting area will extend the existing tree canopy, consisting primarily of decorative trees such as Black Acacia, onto bare leveled ground near the campus playing field (Exhibit 2, Figure 2). Native tree species, such as coast live oak and Fremont cottonwood, will be chosen to provide habitat for native wildlife species. The second restoration area is on sloped ground shaded by the existing tree canopy on the edge of the property bordering a fence separating the campus from the maintenance path (Exhibit 2, Figure 3). While the final habitat restoration plan has yet to be developed, activities will include a preliminary assessment, weeding, plantings, and monitoring and maintenance. Plantings in this area will consist of a diverse palette of native plants that serve ecological and Tribal purposes. The participants will install and maintain a minimum of four native trees and a minimum of 30 understory plants in the proposed planting areas. Restoration activities will be designed to promote biodiversity, traditional cultural resource knowledge, and raise community awareness about environmental issues. The Institute will provide stipends to participants.

The proposed Community Project lays the groundwork for a planned collaborative effort led by the District to construct a 1.2-mile greenway trail and restore riparian habitat along San Leandro Creek, connecting the East Oakland neighborhoods of Sobrante Park, Brookfield, and Columbia Gardens (Exhibit 1, Figure 3) with the Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline. Under the future San Leandro Greenway Trail Project, the Institute will work with community partners and government agencies, including the District, to facilitate Hub meetings, develop site-specific restoration and stewardship activities, and produce interpretive signage. Authority staff intend to recommend funding for the Institute's proposed work on the Greenway Project once road crossing safety and contracting issues are resolved and the Greenway Project is ready to be implemented.

The Institute has worked with public and private partners on hands-on creek restoration, environmental curriculum development, field studies, urban planning, and public art for the last five decades. Institute staff have hosted or participated in over 120 San Leandro Creek Watershed area stakeholder meetings and site visits and worked with community stakeholders with the goal of developing culturally inclusive, equitable, and environmentally sustainable public projects. The Institute is especially well-suited to lead this project due to the level of buy-in they have received from East Oakland communities. This is evidenced by their deep ties with community-serving organizations such as Sobrante Park Resident Action Council, Planting

Justice, and Higher Ground Community Development Corporation, as well as their experience working with public agencies, including the City of Oakland, OUSD, and the District.

Site Description: San Leandro Creek is a natural stream that flows for 21.7 miles from the hills east of San Leandro and Oakland into San Leandro Bay, an embayment of San Francisco Bay. It is part of the nearly 50 square mile San Leandro Creek Watershed, one of three major watersheds in the East Bay. Tidal influence extends from the mouth of the creek to the head of tide, which is the average location of the furthest extent of tidal influence and is located 1.8 miles upstream. The habitat restoration area is on the north creek bank of San Leandro Creek on OUSD property at Madison Park Academy and is characterized by a mix of decorative trees, weeds, and a small percentage of native trees. A path leading to the restoration site is accessible from the West gated entrance of Madison Park Academy (Exhibit 2, Figure 5). A fence separates the campus playing field and the sloped habitat restoration site. Another fence separates the sloped habitat restoration site from the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District-owned maintenance path. It is a quarter mile upstream from the head of tide and adjacent to the creek bank on an engineered portion of the creek installed in the 1970s. During large storm events and king tides, tidal influence extends well upstream from the head of tide (Exhibit 2, Figure 6). The area is often used for illegal trash and stolen car disposal due to its discreet nature (Exhibit 2, Figure 7).

PROJECT FINANCING

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority	\$100,000
Others	\$0
Project Total	\$100,000

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

The proposed 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. The Institute’s fiscal sponsor, the Social Good Fund, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which is eligible to be a grantee under Section 66704.5(a). The project is within the Authority’s jurisdiction because it will occur in the transition zone of San Leandro Creek, an area that will be subject to significant future tidal influence due to anticipated sea level rise. The project is eligible for Authority funding because it will restore natural habitat and provide the education and community-led planning necessary to future development of plans for restoration of natural habitats and improvement of public access on the San Francisco Bay shoreline. Section 66704.5(b). This project will also increase public engagement in planning processes that often leave behind communities most impacted by environmental burdens. Funding the community-based planning and habitat restoration elements of the project is consistent with Section 66704.5(e), which allows the Authority to award grants for “all phases of planning, construction, monitoring, operation, and maintenance” of eligible projects.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

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

The project would support the *Safe, Clean Water and Pollution Prevention Program*'s purpose of removing pollution, trash, and harmful toxins from the Bay by facilitating the education and partnerships needed for communities to reduce pollution and engage in restoration activities, protect public health, and make fish and wildlife healthier.

The project would support the *Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program*'s purpose of significantly improving wildlife habitat by restoring habitat in the San Leandro Creek corridor and supporting community participation, maintenance, and monitoring of the restored area.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:

1. **Greatest positive impact.** The proposed project will support community members in continuing and expanding their engagement in planning processes and decision-making on issues affecting San Leandro Creek and its habitat. The on-the-ground habitat restoration and enhancement, monitoring, stewardship, and community engagement work will encourage a sense of ownership and investment in natural areas in the community.
2. **Greatest long-term impact.** Through the proposed Community Project, participants will receive education and training to steward the creek and its surrounding habitat and for habitat restoration work that will enhance the site for current and future generations.
3. **Leveraging resources and partnerships.** The proposed project will leverage the Institute's deep relationships with the local community and with several local and regional agencies. The Institute will work with Authority staff, LM Consultants (now Ocelotl), The Hood Planner, and RM Freeman & Associates to develop and execute the project. The Institute will also work with Madison Park Academy, Higher Ground Community Development Corporation, Planting Justice, Sobrante Park Resident Action Council, and the East Oakland Neighborhood Initiative to facilitate the Hub and provide technical assistance to attendees. Additional groups, such as the Associated Villages of Lisjan's Sogorea Te' Land Trust, East Bay Regional Park District, East Oakland Collective, and the Oakland Parks Foundation will be formally invited to participate at the Hub.
4. **Economically disadvantaged communities.** The proposed project is intended to provide resources to East Oakland communities, who are predominantly Black and Latinx. These East Oakland communities have experienced generational disinvestment from social and government institutions and are considered economically disadvantaged according to the Authority's Economically Disadvantaged Communities mapping tool.

5. **Benefits to economy.** The proposed project will provide stipends for participants who attend the Hub sessions for community engagement, visioning, trainings, and restoration activities. Participants who receive education and training in habitat restoration will develop skills that will prepare them for potential employment opportunities in their community, as well as elsewhere in the Bay Area.
6. **Engage youth and young adults.** A wide range of residents, including youth, will be recruited to participate at the Hub. The Institute will also recruit from local schools, including Madison Park Academy, to engage students in culturally relevant land management practices. Program participants will gain experience in a range of disciplines including community planning and will learn transferable leadership skills.
7. **Monitoring, maintenance, and stewardship.** Institute staff and participants will facilitate monitoring and maintenance, consisting of watering, pruning, weeding, and plant replacements, of the restoration site for a one-year period to promote the success of the plantings. Monitoring will take place bi-weekly at minimum, with a goal of achieving a 90% survival rate. Ongoing community meetings at the Hub will identify future sources of support for stewardship of the site.
8. **Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.** The San Leandro Creek Community Project is consistent with the Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The proposed project can be implemented in a timely way as the Institute has an existing relationship with Madison Park Academy staff and has numerous partnerships and networks to draw on to recruit participants and implement the program.
9. **San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program.** The proposed project is consistent with BCDC's Bay Plan, part of its Coastal Management Program. In particular, the proposed 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. Meaningfully involving these communities means making sure people can participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and health. The project would help equip youth in East Oakland with the knowledge and skills necessary to become local conservation leaders and empower them to participate in government decisions that affect the Baylands near their community.
10. **San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's Implementation Strategy.** The Institute has gone through informal advisory conversations with San Francisco Bay Joint Venture staff and is in the process of submitting the project to the Venture's Conservation Committee to initiate a review for consistency with the Implementation Strategy.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The Community Project is exempt from preparing an environmental impact document under the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines. The planning component of the Community Project is exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved. The curriculum development and training components are exempt under Section 15322, which exempts the development of curriculum and training methods. The habitat restoration component of the Community Project is exempt under Section 15333, because it will not exceed five acres in size and will restore and enhance habitat for fish, plants, and wildlife by revegetating disturbed areas with native plant species through the use of hand labor only.