



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-19-120
Meeting 19-22
August 28, 2019

AGENDA ITEM 11

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Award of Contract to San Francisco Estuary Institute for Formation of a Science Advisory Panel

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Award a contract to San Francisco Estuary Institute for the formation of a Science Advisory Panel and first round of scientific review for a contract amount of \$100,000 across Fiscal Year 2019-20 and Fiscal Year 2020-21.
2. Authorize the General Manager to extend the contract for an additional round of scientific review, if the program is successful, for an additional \$100,000, bringing the total contract to \$200,000 ending in Fiscal Year 2021-22.

SUMMARY

The General Manager recommends a sole source contract with San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) to form a Science Advisory Panel to enhance the scientific validity of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) open space management decisions and practices. SFEI is uniquely qualified to provide these services to the District. The contract amount would be \$100,000 for each round of scientific review, with the first round taking place across Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20 and FY2020-21. If the program is successful, the contract would be extended for a second round of scientific review across FY2020-21 and FY2021-22 for an additional \$100,000, bringing the total contract to \$200,000. There are sufficient funds in the adopted FY2019-20 budget to cover the cost of the recommendation. The Science Advisory Panel would prepare up to three summary white papers on key topics of interest to the District and up to three reviews of specific land management projects or actions in the first round of scientific review, with results being presented to staff and the Board of Directors (Board) in fall 2020.

DISCUSSION

A Science Advisory Panel (SAP) would enhance the scientific validity of open space management decisions and serve as an important resource to inform regional management topics. Additionally, a SAP would provide an independent science-based review of the District's land management practices and decisions. The Board received a presentation on March 27, 2019 (R-19-32) on the functions of a SAP from a representative of San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI).

The District regularly works on projects that require scientific expertise to inform land management. Staff typically includes subject matter expertise on project teams. Additionally, staff have worked with local academic institutions on numerous projects to ensure that resource management decisions incorporate the latest research results, or directly drive scientific

exploration of key topics by funding original research. The District's practice of contracting with subject matter experts and local researchers ensures that staff applies the best and most current scientific findings to District projects. However, it can be challenging to translate scientific findings into land management decisions. Moreover, seemingly contradictory findings can exist on a subject, requiring a trained expert familiar with the full breadth of findings to determine 'what the science says' on a particular subject. Having a larger, independent scientific review body, such as a SAP, provides an opportunity to have a third party review panel with a wide breadth of expertise evaluate leading research, address potential contradictory findings, and arrive at important conclusions to guide and confirm complex or controversial land management decisions for the District.

Based on staff research, the General Manager recommends using a sole source contracting model to secure SAP services, which would provide flexibility in the formation and use of a body of scientists to provide independent review of District projects and topics of interest. The qualifications and justification for selecting two locally esteemed science institutions, SFEI and Point Blue Conservation Science (Point Blue), were described at the Board Retreat (R-18-148) and further discussed by the Board at their March 27, 2019 meeting (R-19-32). SFEI functions as an independent scientific body supporting environmental management throughout the region, specializing in water resources and pollutants. Point Blue is an interdisciplinary science nonprofit that works on a variety of land management and technical areas relevant to the District's interests, including rangelands, restoration, and climate change. SFEI and Point Blue have worked jointly on several projects. Because each organization has complementary conservation science expertise, the General Manager recommends forming a SAP as a contractual arrangement through SFEI, with Point Blue as a subcontractor. This structure would take advantage of SFEI's administrative experience running similar advisory bodies and tap into the significant terrestrial and working lands expertise provided by Point Blue.

The initial responsibilities of a SAP would be to prepare up to three summary white papers on key topics of interest to the District, and up to three reviews of specific land management projects or actions. The contract would fund one such round of scientific review, with the option to extend to a second round of scientific review if successful. The first round of scientific review would start in FY2019-20 and run into FY2020-21, and the second round would start in FY2020-21 and run into FY2021-22. The timing of the two rounds would be different in order to sync up with the Budget and Action Plan cycle. The process and first round timeline would be as follows (see also Process and Timeline Diagram, Attachment 1, for additional detail):

Step 1: Topic Selection (Round 1 September-December 2019)

SFEI will convene a staff workshop to brainstorm topics for white papers and management action reviews. A memo describing potential topics will be sent to Board members to invite feedback and topic suggestions. Then, SFEI will convene a workshop with the Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Committee to review the potential topics and Board member feedback and select up to five topics to recommend for consideration by the full Board. Finally, SFEI will convene a workshop of the full Board to consider PNR's recommended topics and make the final topic selection, ranking the topics in order of priority. SFEI will develop a research scope and budget for each selected topic. Staff will negotiate topic scopes with SFEI to ensure they fit within budget and authorize SFEI to proceed with research on the agreed topic scopes. Staff may determine there is not enough budget to proceed with all of the Board's selected topics and only authorize the top priority topics to proceed.

Step 2: Research (Round 1 January-September 2020)

SFEI will customize the research process to each topic, which may include literature reviews, data analysis, convening technical advisors, etc. SFEI will develop a process for ongoing communication and feedback with District staff throughout the research stage.

Step 3: Results (Round 1 October 2020)

SFEI will provide written reports on each topic as they are completed. Staff will review and determine the appropriate deliverable for each topic based on interest and relevance: FYI memo, presentation to the PNR Committee, or presentation to the full Board.

After the first round of SAP review, staff will evaluate how well the process and deliverables met District needs and identify improvements. Based on the evaluation, SFEI's contract would be extended and a second round of SAP review would be held in conjunction with the FY2021-22 Budget and Action Plan cycle.

FISCAL IMPACT

There are sufficient funds in the adopted FY2019-20 budget to cover the cost of the recommendation. Additional funds would be requested in future years as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process. The annual cost would vary based on the number and complexity of topics and management actions requested for review.

The recommended action is not funded by Measure AA.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item is presented to the full Board given full Board interest.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

NEXT STEPS

If awarded, SFEI would commence the topic selection process. Board members would receive a memo in October 2019 inviting feedback and suggestions on potential topics from staff. The PNR Committee would have a workshop in November 2019 to review and recommend topics. The full Board would have a workshop in December 2019 to consider and prioritize the topics recommended by the PNR Committee. Research results would be shared with the Board in fall 2020.

Attachment

1. Process and Timeline Diagram

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