

SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation

March 22, 2024

SACRED SPACES PLANNING PROJECT

Project No. RA-040

Project Manager: Sara Haugen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$200,000 through the Community Grants Program to Coastal Quest, fiscal sponsor for Ninth Root, to conduct the Sacred Spaces Planning Project, consisting of collecting planning data, holding community engagement workshops, and creating plans for habitat and public access enhancements along the Damon Marsh Trail, including a series of climate-resilient and culturally relevant wellness zones at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline in Alameda County.

LOCATION: Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline, 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; Shoreline Public Access Program

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Project Site Photos and Design Renderings](#)

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 exceed two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to Coastal Quest, fiscal sponsor of Ninth Root, to conduct the Sacred Spaces Planning Project, consisting of collecting planning data, holding community engagement workshops, and creating plans for habitat and public access enhancements along the Damon Marsh Trail, including a series of climate-resilient and culturally relevant wellness zones at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline 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.

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 \$200,000 through the Community Grants Program to Coastal Quest, fiscal sponsor for Ninth Root, to conduct the Sacred Spaces Planning Project (project), consisting of collecting planning data, holding community engagement workshops, and creating plans for habitat and public access enhancements along the Damon Marsh Trail, including a series of climate-resilient and culturally relevant wellness zones at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline (Exhibit 1). The project will include (1) conducting a site assessment; (2) conducting community engagement; (3) creating plans for erosion control, invasive species removal, native planting, interpretive art, and site monitoring; and (4) creating conceptual designs for habitat and public access enhancements along the Damon Marsh Trail. This planning project will result in 30% designs and plans for habitat enhancement and a series of five climate-resilient and culturally relevant wellness zones along the Damon Marsh Trail at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline in East Oakland.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline is managed by East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD). EBRPD has expressed support for the project and will participate in the development of plans and designs for the site (Exhibit 3). Specifically, personnel from Park Operations will participate in the site assessment, attend erosion control plan meetings, and provide feedback on native species selection and for ongoing monitoring. Any changes to the park as proposed by this planning project must be approved by EBRPD alongside a long-term maintenance plan by Ninth Root.

The site assessment will identify erosion-prone areas, sea-level rise concerns, soil conditions, and existing vegetation to inform constraints and opportunities for habitat restoration and public access designs. The assessment will also directly inform the plans for erosion control and invasive species removal. Ninth Root will engage the community through online surveys, community workshops, and social media outreach. The goal of the engagement is to ensure that community members have a direct say in the project's iterative design process and eventual

implementation. The community workshops will be multi-faceted opportunities to learn about the habitat, engage with the site through shoreline cleanups and invasive species removal, and participate in focus group sessions to provide input on plans for trail enhancements and the wellness zones. (See initial renderings in Exhibit 2.) Ninth Root will incorporate community input to ensure that the project reflects the values and needs of Oakland's residents while fostering a sense of ownership and pride within the community.

Informed by the site assessment and community engagement, Ninth Root and their partners will develop a series of plans: erosion control, invasive species removal, native planting, interpretive art, and site monitoring. The site monitoring plan will be for both the planted areas and the public access components and will incorporate opportunities for workforce development for community members. Ninth Root will contract with a landscape architect, who will develop 30% design plans with input from EBRPD staff. Ninth Root will also contract with local artists as consultants to develop the artistic components of the wellness zones. This holistic approach to planning will consider the current conditions, community ideas, habitat improvements, and future stewardship once the wellness zones are constructed and plantings are completed.

Ninth Root's goal is to connect people to marshes and shorelines through culturally relevant, naturally restored, climate adaptive, spiritual and mental health-oriented wellness zones, transforming the Damon Marsh Trail into a sanctuary space for the community. The founder of Ninth Root participated in the Authority-funded Oakland Shoreline Leadership Academy, hosted by the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project, where the idea for the project came to be. Ninth Root has partnered with Coastal Quest to serve as their fiscal sponsor. Coastal Quest is a 501(c)(3) organization that collaborates with partners on coastal issues by providing project management, scientific expertise, grantmaking, and fiscal sponsorships. Ninth Root also participated in the Authority's Community Grants Cohort in 2023, which consisted of a series of meetings and trainings to provide technical assistance and support to current and potential Authority grantees. In addition, Ninth Root is an outreach partner of the [San Leandro Bay-Oakland Alameda Estuary Adaptation Committee](#) to communicate impacts of sea level and groundwater rise and gather input from stakeholders on coastal adaptation approaches.

Ninth Root is committed to meaningful community engagement and has garnered enthusiastic community support, including residents, community leaders, and local organizations. So far Ninth Root has held several site tours with community members and conducted a small-scale pilot of a Community Wellness and Shoreline Knowledge Survey. The paper survey was completed in-person by a handful of community members, and several of the respondents expressed interest in being part of the project as community advisors or supporting future stewardship. Ninth Root has also developed a network of partners to provide technical support (see *Leveraging Resources and Partnerships* section below).

Site Description:

The project will be implemented along approximately a half mile of the Damon Marsh Trail at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline in East Oakland, an area adjacent to historically redlined communities and surrounded by industrial buildings. The habitat consists of primarily

wetland-upland transition zone, upland, and seasonal wetland species, including significant coverage of invasive species. The trail is in good condition, but floods during king tides and storm surges and the picnic areas have become degraded and some were damaged by fire. The park parcel in the Sacred Spaces project is owned by the City of Oakland and managed by EBRPD as part of a long-term lease agreement. Both the City of Oakland and EBRPD are members of the stakeholder committee and their staff will review draft plans to ensure that they are consistent with the allowable uses of the property.

PROJECT FINANCING

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority	\$200,000
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation via BayCAN	\$150,000
Greenlining Institute	\$100,000
Coastal Quest	\$ 5,000
Project Total	\$455,000

Ninth Root has secured three other grants to support the project, including \$150,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation via Bay Area Climate Adaptation Network (BayCAN), \$100,000 from the Greenlining Institute’s Greenlining the Block grant program, and \$5,000 from Coastal Quest as part of their fiscal sponsorship. The Authority’s grant would leverage these funds to execute the planning project.

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. Ninth Root’s fiscal sponsor, Coastal Quest, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which is eligible to be a grantee under 66704.5(a). The project is within the Authority’s jurisdiction because it will occur at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline. The project is eligible for Authority funding because it will restore natural habitat and provide community-led public access amenities on the San Francisco Bay shoreline, per Section 66704.5(b). 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 measures of Measure AA, as outlined below:

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

The project will support the *Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program*'s purpose of significantly improving wildlife habitat by creating plans for restoring habitat at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline and supporting community participation, maintenance and monitoring of the future restored area.

Finally, the project will support the *Shoreline Public Access Program*'s purpose of enhancing the quality of life of Bay Area residents, including those with disabilities, through safer and improved public access, as part of and compatible with wildlife habitat restoration projects in and around the Bay by creating plans for improved public access along the shoreline informed by robust community engagement.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:

1. **Greatest positive impact.** The proposed project's public access benefits will be integrated with planned habitat restoration through community workshops, which will engage the community in removal of invasives, planting native plants, and monitoring the project area.
2. **Greatest long-term impact.** The community-driven process to create habitat restoration areas and wellness zones will benefit future generations and inspire a sense of stewardship and mindfulness along the shoreline. Ninth Root's partnerships with experienced restoration partners will provide them with access to the best available science for habitat restoration plans that take sea level rise into account.
3. **Leveraging resources and partnerships.** Ninth Root has secured both community and financial support for this project (Exhibit 3). The following entities are serving as partners:
 - *East Bay Regional Park District* is the land manager of Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline, will serve as a stakeholder and advise on designs and plan.
 - *San Francisco Estuary Institute* will help develop science-supported nature-based adaptation options that are appropriate for the site and serve as technical advisors for Ninth Root. This technical assistance is included with the funding from BayCAN.
 - *Save The Bay* will provide information on the site's history of native and invasive plant cover and assist with developing the habitat restoration planting palette based on their past vegetation monitoring reports of the site.

Additionally, Ninth Root has assembled two committees with representatives from local agencies and organizations to provide planning guidance and technical support for the project:

- *Stakeholder Committee:* BayCAN, Coastal Quest, San Francisco Estuary Institute, EBRPD, the Reap Center, Sogorea 'Te Land Trust, Wild Oyster Project, Save the

Bay, Planting Justice, and City of Oakland. Members of the committee have agreed to various levels of engagement, from staying informed to providing input to hands-on technical support.

- *Community Engagement Committee*: San Francisco Estuary Institute, Coastal Quest, Hood Planning Group, Save The Bay, Wild Oyster Project, and Frontline Catalysts. Members will help Ninth Root hone their engagement strategies to prepare restoration plans.

4. **Economically disadvantaged communities.** The proposed project location is near historically marginalized communities that have faced challenges such as redlining and generational disinvestment from social and government institutions. The surrounding communities lack access to safe and peaceful green spaces and are considered economically disadvantaged according to the Authority's Economically Disadvantaged Communities mapping tool. The project aims to address this disparity by providing a safe and culturally relevant space for all residents, contributing to the well-being of the surrounding community.
5. **Benefits to economy.** The project will develop a monitoring plan including workforce development with guidance for how to care for the project area after the implementation phase. During the community engagement phase, Ninth Root will hold community workshops for residents to experience the space and participate in stewardship to gauge their interest in carrying out the monitoring plan as future interns or staff.
6. **Engage youth and young adults.** As part of the community workshops, high school students will be the primary focus for engagement and future internships, with all-age community members as a secondary focus. As the project moves from planning to implementation, it will provide more opportunities for youth to be involved and gain skills in habitat restoration and adaptive monitoring on the site.
7. **Monitoring, maintenance, and stewardship.** As mentioned in *Benefits to economy*, one aspect of the project is to create a monitoring plan to ensure the future plantings remain healthy and free of litter along the trail and in the wellness zones.
8. **Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.** The Sacred Spaces project is consistent with the Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The proposed project will improve public access at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline with outdoor wellness zones driven by meaningful community engagement and deliver habitat benefits through community restoration workshops. Because of the partnerships and community support around the project, the conceptual designs will lead to a feasible implementation project for this under resourced area of Oakland.
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. Specifically, the project would support the Environmental Justice and Social Equity Policies of the Bay Plan, which state that BCDC 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.

CONSISTENCY WITH AUTHORITY’S INTERIM TRIBAL CONSULTATION POLICY:

Per the Authority’s Tribal Consultation Policy, Resolution 108, twelve letters were sent to tribes of Alameda County on February 22, 2024. No responses were received.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The project is exempt from preparing an environmental impact document under the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved. The community workshop component of removing trash and invasive species 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 cleaning disturbed areas through the use of hand labor only.

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