



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: January 27, 2015

Staff Report #: 15-021

INFORMATIONAL ITEM: **Update on the Priority Conservation Area Program and a Potential Application Partnering with the City of East Palo Alto, City of Palo Alto and Midpeninsula Open Space District for the Baylands**

RECOMMENDATION

This is an informational item and no action is required.

POLICY ISSUES

The Priority Conservation Area (PCA) designations are designed to position areas for access to funding sources for enhancements to open space areas. A PCA does not carry regulatory requirements, nor does it impact a local jurisdiction's land use control.

BACKGROUND

Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) approved Plan Bay Area, a long-range, integrated transportation and land-use/housing strategy through 2040 for the San Francisco Bay Area. Plan Bay Area includes the designation of PCAs to balance housing and transportation demands with the need to preserve the region's diverse farming, recreational, and resource lands for future generations. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) administers the program and plays a leadership role by providing guidance and support to local leaders as they submit PCA applications.

Priority Conservation Area Program

The PCA program was initiated in 2007 to identify Bay Area open spaces that (1) provide regionally significant agricultural, natural resource, scenic, recreational, and/or ecological values and ecosystem functions; (2) are in urgent need of protection due to pressure from urban development or other factors; and (3) have broad local support. As a result of the 2007 PCA process, there are currently 101 existing PCAs throughout the nine-county Bay Area. The City of Menlo Park submitted an unsuccessful PCA application in 2007 primarily because most of the land area in question was already in public ownership.

Subsequently ABAG updated the PCA program in July, 2014 in order to provide clearer specificity about the types, characteristics, and functions of PCAs, and also provide a

process to confirm existing PCAs and to create new ones with greater public notification. The program now limits nominating entities to city and county jurisdictions, and park and open space special districts. Thus, non-governmental entities are no longer able to sponsor a PCA, but can still partner with a jurisdiction or open space and park district. Another change to the programs allows existing protected lands to be included, which greatly increases Menlo Park's chances for a successful application compared to 2007.

The program identifies four categories of PCAs that recognize the role of different kinds of PCAs in supporting the vitality of the region's natural systems, rural economy, and human health.

1. **Natural Landscapes** – Areas critical to the functioning of wildlife and plant habitats, aquatic ecosystems and the region's water supply and quality.
2. **Agricultural Lands** – Farmland, grazing land and timberland that support the region's agricultural economy and provide additional benefits such as habitat protection and carbon sequestration.
3. **Urban Greening** – Existing and potential green spaces in cities that increase habitat connectivity, improve community health, capture carbon emissions, and address stormwater.
4. **Regional Recreation** – Existing and potential regional parks, trails, and other publicly accessible recreation facilities.

Of these four categories, staff believes that any of them except Agricultural Lands would be applicable to the potential PCA. Having more than one designation may increase eligibility for a broader array of future grant opportunities.

ANALYSIS

PCA designations serve to identify regionally significant open spaces and to position agencies to attract potential grant funding (Attachment A). In addition, the four categories give the PCAs flexibility and eligibility for a variety of funding sources that may either be targeted or broad in their scope. In 2014, the pilot PCA Grant program distributed \$12.5 million in grant monies to a variety of projects throughout the Bay Area.

The current PCA process requires that nominating agencies send notifications to all of the jurisdictions in which the PCA is located. If a jurisdiction opposes the PCA, it will have 90 days from receipt of the notification to adopt a resolution of opposition. A resolution of opposition would invalidate the nomination. Applications are due to ABAG on May 30, 2015 and require the following items be included.

1. An adopted resolution by City/Town Council, Board of Supervisors, or Open Space or Park District Board, from the lead nominating jurisdiction in which the PCA is located.
2. A map and text describing the general area and boundaries of the PCA.
3. Selection of one or more of the PCA designations described below with supporting text and data.

4. Discussion of the regional and local importance of the PCA.

Staff has coordinated with staff from the City of East Palo Alto, City of Palo Alto and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to explore a potential application. Menlo Park has offered to serve as the lead agency for the application since the greatest area of the PCA is within Menlo Park's jurisdiction. The working draft of the Potential PCA Boundary is included as Attachment B. The area covers Bedwell Bayfront Park, the Ravenswood Salt Pond Restoration Area, the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, the Ravenswood Open Space Preserve, Cooley Landing, and the Baylands Nature Preserve. A common connector of many of these features is the existing/proposed Bay Trail. Menlo Park is already collaborating with the City of East Palo Alto and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District on closing a gap in the Bay Trail by connecting University Avenue to the Ravenswood Preserve. Specific to Menlo Park, the PCA designation would expand funding opportunities for enhancing the current Bay Trail around Bedwell Bayfront Park and connections from the Belle Haven neighborhood to the Park, topics which have come up during the ConnectMenlo process.

The geographic area covered by the potential PCA includes a number of critical transportation (e.g., Dumbarton Bridge and Dumbarton Rail, utility (e.g., water, sewer, and electric facilities) and infrastructure issues (e.g., levees). It is staff's understanding that a PCA designation would not impede any efforts to maintain or enhance these facilities and will confirm so prior to submitting an application. Staff is also in the process of reaching out to the San Franciscquito Creek Joint Powers Authority, especially related to the SAFERBay project, which looks to install levees in this area to address tidal flooding and sea level rise while restoring habitat and enhancing recreational opportunities. In the coming weeks, staff will also reach out to other property owners/service providers in the area. The exact boundary of the PCA will be refined over the coming weeks based on these consultations.

The PCA will require a resolution from the City Council. In addition, staff will need to notify affected jurisdictions and provide 90 days for their elected bodies to consider the nominations. These notification letters will be sent to respective City/General Managers. A resolution of opposition will invalidate the nomination and impede the City's ability to submit an application for that PCA. It is staff's hope that early coordination and collaboration with jurisdictions will result in broad support for the nominations to ensure a successful PCA application is submitted by the application deadline.

Staff will continue coordination with partners and jurisdictions, and anticipates bringing this item to the City Council for the adoption of resolutions in April 2015. With the Council's adopted resolution, staff would be able to submit application for the nominated PCA to ABAG.

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES

There is no fiscal impact related to providing an informational report on the Priority Conservation Area program and application process.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and no CEQA analysis is therefore required.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public Notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Priority Conservation Area Concept Paper
- B. Potential Priority Conservation Area Map

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