



Board Report

File #: 24-340, Version: 1

Receive a status update on the Carmel Lagoon Ecosystem Protective Barrier, Scenic Road Protection Structure, and Interim Sandbar Management Plan Project (REF120051).

It is recommended that the Capital Improvement Committee receive a status update on the Carmel Lagoon Ecosystem Protective Barrier, Scenic Road Protection Structure, and Interim Sandbar Management Plan Project (REF120051).

SUMMARY

Since 2011, the Capital Improvement Committee has received periodic reports on the Carmel Lagoon Ecosystem Protective Barrier (EPB), Scenic Road Protection Structure (SRPS), and Interim Sandbar Management Plan (ISMP) Project (REF 120051, hereafter referred to as “Carmel Lagoon Project”). The last update was in January 2022. Public Works, Facilities & Parks (PWF) and Housing and Community Development (HCD) staff continue to work together to manage the Carmel River Beach sandbar between the Carmel Lagoon and the ocean to minimize flood risk to lagoon-adjacent properties while protecting the lagoon habitat. This report is an update on the longer-term project status, including the 2024 recirculation of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (RDEIR).

DISCUSSION

Updated sections of the Carmel Lagoon Project Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) were recirculated for public comment in February 2024, with the comment period closing March 20, 2024. The recirculated sections of the RDEIR included the technical studies on beach morphology, sediment transport, and the natural location of the sandbar breach. Additionally, the Alternatives section (Chapter 5.0) included a 30% design for the SRPS alternative at the mid-slope, an alternative for a ‘garden wall’ or temporary replacement for sandbags on lagoon adjacent property lines, and a hydrology study of flooding caused by the lagoon or stormwater runoff blocked behind the sandbag wall. All new sections of the RDEIR have been previously reviewed with the community, agencies, stakeholders, and the technical advisory committee (TAC).

Comments were received from permitting agencies, including the California Coastal Commission and Regional Water Quality Control Board, and from stakeholder agencies, groups, and local residents. Staff will work with the County’s Carmel Lagoon Project consultant, including technical sub-consultants, to respond to comments on both the RDEIR sections and the original 2016 DEIR. The Final EIR will then be brought before the Board of Supervisors in public hearing for certification and project selection in late Summer or early Fall 2024. Completing the EIR will allow the Board to make an informed choice on which project can be selected from the preferred project or list of alternatives described in the EIR.

The stated goals in the Carmel Lagoon Project RDEIR are to seek a long-term option that protects the Carmel lagoon environment and maintains the current level of flood protection to the adjacent neighborhood. Long-term options presented to the Carmel Lagoon neighboring community include managed retreat, raising or floodproofing of private homes, or a combination approach. The County’s Department of Emergency Management has included these alternatives in the 2021 updated Hazard Mitigation Plan, creating eligibility for future grant funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In 2023 HCD staff applied for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Funds for both the SRPS and for funds to implement a home raising program.

Both applications were withdrawn, as the County has not yet selected a project or allocated funds towards the necessary local match. Should the community wish to pursue these long-term options, the Board of Supervisors could direct staff to re-apply for grant funding to support the community to pursue these options, and work with the community to raise the necessary 25% match.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The following agencies are responsible for issuing permits and monitoring environmental compliance for Carmel Lagoon sandbar management: US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Program, Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), California Coastal Commission (CCC), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). The California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) is the landowner of the sandbar/beach areas and provides biological monitoring of protected bird species (western snowy plover) for the Project. The Monterey Peninsula Water Management District (MPWMD) provides lagoon and river condition monitoring. Under a separate contract with the County, MPWMD provides biological monitoring of protected fish species (steelhead) for sandbar-management activities. Key stakeholders engaged include: State Parks, Carmel Area Wastewater District (CAWD,) CSA 1-Carmel Point Advisory Committee, and property owners/residents in the vicinity of the lagoon (the ‘Fourth Addition’).

FINANCING

The cost of sandbar management activities from Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 to FY 2023 totaled approximately \$800,000, including costs for equipment rental and operations and vendor services for biological consulting, an average of approximately \$160,000 per year.

The total estimated cost of the Carmel Lagoon Project EIR is \$1,547,253. Of this amount, \$1,240,603 has been spent to date. In FY 2024, \$306,650 is budgeted to complete the Final EIR stage of the Project. It is anticipated that approximately \$30,000 of this budget will remain unspent at the end of FY24 and will be spent at the beginning of FY25. Future costs for project implementation are unfunded.

Prepared by: Shandy Carroll, Management Analyst III (x5643)

Reviewed by: Melanie Beretti, AICP, Acting Chief of Planning (x5285)

Approved by: Craig Spencer, Director, Housing and Community Development

Approved by: Randell Ishii, MS, PE, TE, PTOE, Director of Public Works, Facilities and Parks