

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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February 6, 2026

TO: Commissioners and Alternates

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SUBJECT: Staff Report and Recommendation on a Contract with San Francisco Estuary Institute to consult on the update to the BCDC Shoreline Plants design guidance document.
(For Commission consideration on February 19, 2026)

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission authorize its Executive Director to enter into an up to \$190,000 contract, terminating June 30, 2027, with San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) to consult on a comprehensive update to the Shoreline Plants Design Guidelines, contingent on approval by the Department of General Services. The staff further recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to amend the contract as necessary, including revising the amount or duration of the agreement, so long as the amendment does not change the amount more than ten percent or involve substantial changes to the services provided.

STAFF REPORT

Shoreline Plants, a Landscape Guide for the San Francisco Bay Area (Shoreline Plants) was published in 2007 as part of a suite of design guidelines to support public access to and along the San Francisco Bay shoreline. The BCDC design guidelines serve as companion documents to the McAteer-Petris Act and the San Francisco Bay Plan (Bay Plan), as well as other policy documents that inform the regulatory program within BCDC's Coastal Management Program.

BCDC recognizes that planting and landscape design play a critical role in protecting the shoreline, encouraging habitat for wildlife, and enhancing the shoreline public access experience for everyone. The current Shoreline Planting document provides planting design guidance to permit applicants, consultants, and the public, a wide-ranging user group with varying degrees of expertise. Updating the document allows for the opportunity to widely communicate information on best practices for multi-benefit landscapes in support of a healthier and more resilient San Francisco Bay to the spectrum of practitioners.



There are three objectives at the heart of the current document and the updated version will build upon these concepts.

Improve Habitat. Building biodiversity, supporting habitats, and restoring ecological services through planting design. Planting design can be a means to protecting, restoring, and enhancing habitats throughout the Bay. Beyond the immediate application of vegetation as habitat, planting design is also used to provide buffers and transitions between sensitive areas and adjacent uses where there may be a conflict between wildlife and public access or other site uses. There are many considerations that go into plant selection for buffering and in addition to listing suitable plant species, the guidance would include a discussion on the characteristics of certain types of plants and their applications in design.

Improve Public Access Experience. The Shoreline Plants guidance was initially created as part of a suite of design guidelines that support public access to and along the San Francisco Bay shoreline. The guidance recognized that plants can be used to celebrate what makes the San Francisco Bay area special and identifiable, that public access takes many forms and integration of a local plant palette appropriate to the use will reinforce the sense of place. Many native plants that characterize shoreline landscapes, such as pickleweed marshes or live oak groves, are familiar to residents of the region; using native vegetation strengthens personal connections with the regional landscape and provides the co-benefit of building habitat for the other species that call the Bay home. There are also many non-native species that have been used historically along the more developed shoreline areas that contribute cultural value and lend to the recognition of the Bay and its shore. Plants along the shoreline can beautify the landscape and enhance the visual experience for all shoreline visitors, human and non-human. Replacing a degraded shoreline with native plants or softening the hardscape of an urban edge with successful vegetation improves the aesthetics of those areas dramatically. Plants can also be used as a design element that enhances interaction with and enjoyment of the shoreline landscape through thoughtful and subtle wayfinding methods.

Stabilize Shoreline. When Shoreline Plants was written in 2007, erosion control was the impetus for shoreline stabilization. Since then, best available science has better identified the breadth of site issues resulting from sea level rise and climate change. Sea level rise is impacting the design conditions of shoreline sites as well as driving innovative approaches to shoreline protection. The update to the Shoreline Planting guidance would include applications and implementation approaches of nature-based solutions using vegetation for building shoreline protection and stabilizing the shoreline to address coastal hazards. Many projects are small and may not necessitate engineering consultation but could benefit from the basic principles of using vegetation to stabilize or protect a shoreline. This guidance would not be a replacement for professional consultation but could inform vegetation selection in the application of smaller solutions within the region.

Through a competitive bidding process via a request for proposals, staff have selected SFEI as the consultant. SFEI is a 501c(3) non-profit and one of California's premier aquatic and ecosystem science institutes. They bring a deep interdisciplinary expertise in plant ecology, landscape architecture, nature-based adaptation, and inclusive engagement.

Funding for this project is provided through a NOAA Grant for Projects of Special Merit and BCDC's general fund. The contract period ends June 30, 2027 (or upon approval) and is contingent on approval by the Department of General Services.

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