

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report

Meeting: August 28, 2025

From: Public Works Department

Subject: Cliff Drive Resiliency Project and Local Coastal Program Update



Recommended Action: Receive an update on the Cliff Drive Resiliency Project and the associated Local Coastal Program (LCP) amendments and provide direction to staff as needed.

Background: The Cliff Drive Resiliency Project is a comprehensive effort to address bluff erosion, sea-level rise, and stormwater drainage impacts along the Cliff Drive corridor while enhancing pedestrian, bicycle, and coastal access. The project extends from the western City limit to Capitola Village and includes connections to Hoopers Beach and the Capitola Wharf overlook.

In August 2024, the City Council reviewed the feasibility study and directed staff to move forward with Alternative 3 – Full Bluff Protection, which envisioned continuous bluff stabilization along the project length, a Class I facility, cantilevered sections where needed, overlooks, and reconfigured parking.

Since that meeting, staff and the consultant team have determined the full buildout of Alternative 3 in one phase is not feasible given the current \$10.5 million committed through the Federal Highway Administration Emergency Relief (FHWA ER) Program and \$500,000 California Coastal Commission (CCC) LCP grant. Detailed engineering review, tidal access limitations, and seasonal weather constraints also limit how much work can be completed in a single season. Additionally, FHWA ER funds are restricted to eligible repair scope and require a local match (approximately 11.47%).

To advance the project within these realities, while maintaining compatibility with full buildout, staff developed Alternative 4 – Partial Bluff Protection (Phased). This approach prioritizes the most at-risk bluff segments and implements the work in phases as funding is secured.

Discussion: Since the last Council update, detailed engineering and constructability reviews have shown the full project cannot be completed with the funding currently available. The work area is subject to seasonal weather restrictions and tidal limitations, and certain bluff segments present a more immediate risk to roadway stability. For these reasons, the project will need to be implemented in phases.

Phase 1 will focus on the section of bluff that is most vulnerable to ongoing erosion. The design incorporates a shotcrete tieback wall, supported by reinforced rock slope protection to an elevation that protects against a 100-year storm event. Based on geologist recommendations, Phase 1 will embed the wall into the Purisima formation to provide stability, with existing Rock Slope Protection (RSP) reused and new RSP added to reduce wave energy. If new RSP is not permitted, the design can be modified to increase embedment depth instead. Temporary pedestrian and bicycle safety measures will be installed along the coastal side of Cliff Drive until later phases are built.

Future phases will extend stabilization east and west, complete the Class I path improvements, reconfigure parking, and add native landscaping and overlooks. These phases remain compatible with the original Alternative 3 vision and can be implemented as funding becomes available.

The CCC grant supports design, outreach, and LCP updates, and required Local Coastal Program (LCP) updates. The LCP is composed of two parts: the Land Use Plan (LUP), which sets policies for coastal land use, access, and resource protection, and the Implementation Plan (IP), which provides zoning regulations and procedures to carry out the LUP. The current amendments primarily update outdated references, clarify definitions, and align hazard policies and related provisions to facilitate the Cliff Drive project. This is considered a policy “cleanup” phase; more significant changes will occur after

development of the City's mandatory Climate Adaptation Plan, for which the City has applied for an Ocean Protection Council grant and is awaiting an award decision. The FHWA Emergency Relief Program funding covers eligible repairs and requires a local match, with its own obligation/use deadlines. Staff has requested—and Caltrans has indicated support for—an extension to this funding deadline. This will allow environmental review to be completed after the LCP amendments are adopted, provide additional time to coordinate with design and permitting, and extend the window for pursuing additional construction funding for later phases.

Coordination between City staff and CCC has resulted in Draft amendments for both the Land Use Plan and Implementation Plan. Public access policies have been updated to reflect Cliff Drive enhancements, remove outdated Southern Pacific Railroad and RTC references, and incorporate multimodal improvements. The natural hazards section now includes sea-level rise policies and specific objectives for Cliff Drive and Capitola Village. Implementation Plan updates clarify zoning allowances for project improvements, refine hazard definitions and evaluation requirements, and update parking and right-of-way references.

A community meeting was held on August 12, 2025, to present the refined concept, phasing approach, and LCP updates. Key questions discussed included the purpose of the cantilevered walkway for continuous access, the project's seismic performance, design measures to prevent erosion at wall endpoints, and the role of rock slope protection (RSP) in reducing wave energy. The Planning Commission is scheduled to receive an informational item on the LCP on August 21. Following that, staff will release the draft LCP policy amendments for public review and schedule Planning Commission and City Council hearings for adoption. Adopted policy amendments will then be submitted to the California Coastal Commission for certification.

Fiscal Impact: Phase 1 is partially funded through the \$10.5 million FHWA Emergency Relief Program grant and the \$500,000 Coastal Commission LCP grant. FHWA ER funds require a local match of approximately 11.47%. Additional construction funding will be required for subsequent phases. The requested funding extension will allow more time to secure these funds before later phases proceed.

Attachments:

1. Q&A from Community Meeting
2. Preliminary Design Drawings

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