

# Capitola City Council

## Agenda Report

**Meeting:** September 25, 2025

**From:** Public Works Department

**Subject:** Coastal Conservancy Grant Application



**Recommended Action:** Authorize staff to submit a grant application to the State Coastal Conservancy for the Esplanade Park Coastal Access Enhancement & Adaptation Plan.

**Background:** Esplanade Park is located at the intersection of Esplanade and Monterey Avenue in Capitola Village, directly adjacent to Capitola Beach. The site has been home to several historic buildings over the years, including the Hotel Capitola and the Capitola Ballroom. In 1960, restrooms and a parking lot were constructed at the site, and the park itself was formally dedicated in July 1984. The bandstand, completed in 2007 through community contributions, added a focal point for concerts and events. Today, the park includes restrooms, outdoor showers, benches, plantings, and the bandstand, which supports regular programming and community use.

A major underground sewer pumping station is located beneath the restrooms operated by the Santa Cruz County Sanitation District. The Park is subject to an easement that allows the District to access and operate this facility, and all development must be coordinated with the District to ensure continued operation.

Esplanade Park is Capitola's most heavily used public park, serving as a central hub for both residents and visitors. Its open lawn areas, seating, and shoreline-adjacent walkways provide direct access to Capitola Beach and host a wide range of community activities and events.

Because of its low elevation and direct shoreline exposure, the park and adjacent seawall are routinely overtopped by waves during winter storm events, resulting in flooding, debris deposition, and repeated damage to park infrastructure. Impacts were especially severe during the January 2023 atmospheric river storms, which left the park inundated and covered with debris. Any long-term park improvement project should therefore consider strategies to mitigate these recurring hazards and ensure resilient public access.

During adoption of the FY 2025-26 budget, the City Council allocated \$50,000 toward updating Esplanade Park. In an effort to obtain outside funding for this effort, staff submitted a pre-application to the State Coastal Conservancy under its Climate Ready and Coastal Access grant program to determine whether a design project for the park would be eligible. The Conservancy—whose mission includes supporting sea level rise adaptation, improving public coastal access, and advancing nature-based shoreline resilience—responded the project is eligible and invited the City to submit a full application for funding.

**Discussion:** The proposed Esplanade Park Coastal Access & Adaptation Plan will complete technical studies, community engagement, and conceptual design (up to 30%) for improvements and climate adaptation measures at the park. Specific tasks include:

- Sea level rise modeling, drainage analysis, and coastal hazard studies.
- Development of 3–4 concept alternatives, including traditional park enhancements along with nature-based, hybrid, structural, and retreat strategies.
- Refinement of one preferred alternative.
- A regulatory and CEQA pathway analysis to identify required approvals for future implementation.
- Robust community engagement through three workshops, an online bilingual survey, and pop-up outreach at park events.

If the grant is awarded, the project would begin in February 2026 and be completed by April 2027. Technical studies would be completed in early 2026, with community engagement and concept alternatives carried out through the summer and fall. A preferred concept, and regulatory pathway analysis would be finalized by spring 2027. These deliverables will provide the City with a 30% design, cost estimates, and a clear roadmap for future permitting and funding.

This is a planning effort only; future implementation will require additional design, environmental review, and construction funding.

Fiscal Impact: The proposed grant request is \$275,000 from the State Coastal Conservancy. A \$50,000 in-kind contribution of City staff time will serve as the local match, for a total project cost of \$325,000. No General Fund contribution is required with this grant; the existing General Fund allocation of \$50,000 could be made available for future project phases.

Attachments:

1. State Coastal Conservancy Grant Application Guide
2. Draft Grant Application (Esplanade Park Coastal Access & Adaptation Plan)

Report Prepared By: Jessica Kahn, Public Works Director

Reviewed By: Julia Gautho, City Clerk

Approved By: Jamie Goldstein, City Manager