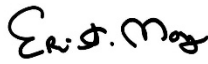


## AGENDA ITEM NO. 7-D

### MONTEREY PENINSULA REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT BOARD REPORT

**DATE:** December 4, 2025  
**TO:** Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Eric Morgan, General Manager   
**SUBJECT:** Update on Laguna Grande Park Improvements

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#### SUMMARY

The Laguna Grande Regional Park, a 35-acre urban park straddling the cities of Seaside and Monterey, serves as a vital recreational, ecological, and community space on the Monterey Peninsula. Developed under a 1978 Master Plan, the park features a freshwater lake, picnic areas, playgrounds, trails, and sensitive wetland habitats. However, it has faced persistent challenges, including overgrown vegetation in southern marsh areas, widespread homeless encampments, public safety concerns, fire hazards, and illegal dumping. These issues intensified in 2015 prompting renewed action.

In 1976, the Cities of Seaside and Monterey, along with the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District (MPRPD), formed the Laguna Grande Regional Park Joint Powers Agency (JPA) to coordinate planning, operations, and maintenance. While the JPA was instrumental in developing the Master Plan, it remained largely dormant until reconvening in 2019 amid community pressure.

A major focus since 2021 has been the Trail and Vegetation Maintenance Strategy, developed by BFS Landscape Architects. Adopted in 2023 via a Mitigated Negative Declaration under CEQA, the strategy aims to formalize trails, clear invasive species, enhance accessibility, and deter encampments through increased public use. Permitting has recently been completed involving multiple state and federal agencies due to the park's sensitive habitats, including western pond turtle populations. Trail implementation funding is helped with a \$1.6 million recreational trails grant awarded to Seaside in 2024.

#### FISCAL IMPACT

MPRPD programmed \$65,000 this FY to support trail and vegetation management work. Community proponents for the senior exercise parklet have suggested that \$200,000 is a reasonable funding goal to begin that and have offered to work with JPA agencies on applying for grants.

#### FUNDING SOURCE

N/A

## FUNDING BALANCE

N/A

## DISCUSSION

Laguna Grande Regional Park originated as a coastal estuary (historically Laguna del Rey) fed by Canyon del Rey Creek. Sediment accumulation transformed southern areas into dense willow and bramble forests, while northern sections were developed with recreational amenities like barbecues, playgrounds, and a looped trail around the lake. The park hosts community events, birdwatching (over 260 species recorded), and serves as a drainage endpoint for the Canyon del Rey Watershed.

### Recent and Ongoing Issues:

**Overgrown Vegetation and Habitat Degradation:** Southern marshlands filled with sediment, creating impenetrable thickets of non-native and invasive species. This reduced open space, hindered water flow, and degraded habitat quality.

**Homeless Encampments and Public Safety:** Dense vegetation provided cover for chronic encampments, leading to trash accumulation, trespassing, noise complaints from adjacent neighborhoods (e.g., Del Monte Grove-Laguna Grande in Monterey), and occasional fires or overdoses. Reports from 2019 highlighted visible camps from residential fences, prompting police interventions and inter-city coordination (See Attachment 2).

**Fire and Environmental Risks:** Thick underbrush increased wildfire hazards and homeless encampments contribute to hazardous materials risks.

**Accessibility and Maintenance Gaps:** Unofficial "social trails" created erosion and safety issues, while lack of formalized paths limited public access and discouraged deterrence through visibility.

### Formation and Role of the Joint Powers Agency (JPA)

The Laguna Grande Regional Park Joint Powers Agency was established in 1976 via a Joint Powers Agreement among the City of Seaside, City of Monterey, and Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District (see Attachment 1). Ownership is split roughly 42% Seaside, 6% Monterey, and 52% MPRPD, reflecting land contributions.

The JPA's mandate includes long-range planning, development, operations, and maintenance "for the use and benefit" of regional residents. It operated effectively during initial park development (opened 1982) but became inactive as the 1978 Master Plan's recreational visions were only partially realized.

Dormancy ended in 2019 when the JPA reconvened amid encampment crises. Quarterly or as-needed meetings (often at Seaside City Hall) resumed, focusing on funding pooled projects. The JPA contracted BFS Landscape Architects in 2021 (\$109,965 initial contribution) and oversaw public engagement via the "Have Your Say Monterey" portal. It also coordinated with a separate Canyon del Rey Watershed JPA for water quality issues.

## Planning and Permitting for Trail and Vegetation Management

Recognizing funding constraints for a full Master Plan update, the JPA prioritized a targeted Trail and Vegetation Maintenance Strategy in 2021. Key components include:

- Formalizing seasonal and permanent trails through overgrown areas.
- Selective vegetation clearing (e.g., invasives like willow thickets).
- Accessibility improvements (e.g., ADA-compliant paths).
- Native planting restoration.
- Potential lighting additions.
- Ongoing maintenance protocols to sustain open sightlines and deter encampments.

Public input occurred via town halls (2021), site walks, and online surveys. The strategy emphasizes balancing recreation with habitat protection, particularly for species like the western pond turtle.

**Environmental Review:** An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (ISMND) was prepared, identifying potential impacts (e.g., biological resources, hydrology) mitigated through measures like seasonal work windows to avoid turtle nesting. Adopted by Monterey (June 2023), Seaside (June 2023), MPRPD (July 2023), and the JPA.

**Permitting Challenges:** Implementation requires approval from:

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Lake/Streambed Alteration Agreement). COMPLETE
- Regional Water Quality Control Board (water quality certification). COMPLETE
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (wetlands). COMPLETE
- California Coastal Commission (coastal zone impacts, including separate Monterey picnic area enhancements). COMPLETE

Joint funding progress includes a \$1.6 million California Recreational Trails Program grant (2024) to the City of Seaside for trail enhancements. Full implementation could begin by the end of 2025. MPRPD identified \$65,000 in District funding to further implementation of proposed trail and vegetation management within the plan.

**Senior Exercise Equipment Proposal:** Independently of the coordinated trail and vegetation management planning through the JPA, community leaders proposed the establishment of a senior exercise parklet on MPRPD lands near the City of Monterey developed and maintained soccer fields. Under the Master Plan for the park, this area is designated for sports field development and construction of a tot lot. While the project appears consistent with the master plan, the City of Monterey currently has not submitted a proposal to MPRPD for consideration. Should the project be proposed, accepted and developed, the City of Monterey would be responsible for maintenance and associated liability as per the master plan and JPA.

At the November 10, 2025, JPA meeting, the MPRPD general manager thanked the Board for their leadership in guiding the preparation of the trail and vegetation management plan and associated permitting which furthers the implementation of high priority actions at the park. Furthermore, the general manager introduced the basic proposal of the senior exercise

equipment parklet provided to MPRPD staff at the MPRPD Board Meeting on October 1, 2025. The Board deliberated the proposal and acknowledged that the lack of a detailed plan made it difficult to provide directions. Ultimately, the City of Monterey and MPRPD representatives felt the proposal had merit and encouraged further study, cooperation and analysis, and the City of Seaside representative expressed concern with the fiscal impact of developing new park equipment when the JPA was just beginning to begin addressing trail and vegetation management backlogs.

### **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Staff request that the Board receive the report.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. [Laguna Grande Regional Park, Joint Powers Agency Agreement \(February 26, 1976\)](#)
2. [Media Clippings Regarding Vegetation and Trail Management Issues and Associated Unhoused Population](#)
3. [Diagrams from the Laguna Grande Trail and Vegetation Maintenance Strategy](#)