

January 19th, 2021



Dennis Scremin, Chair
Marin County Parks and Open Space Commission
350 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903

By e-mail (ParksComments@marincounty.org)

Subject: Agenda Item #7: Parks, Open Space, and Farmland Preservation

Dear Commissioners:

Marin Conservation League is firmly committed to supporting the renewal of Measure A as presented in Exhibit A of the draft ordinance, and we will devote our efforts to ensuring that the measure is renewed!

The about-to-expire Measure A, from onset in 2013 to the present, has transformed the capacity of the county to invest prudently in the protection and enjoyment of the county's natural resource values for current residents and generations to come. Revenues from the ¼ cent sales tax authorized by Measure A have been leveraged over and over, bringing in many external sources of funds for the benefit of both environment and the people of Marin and the region.

MCL believes that the expenditure plan as modified over recent months strikes a sound balance that represents community interests and concerns as surveyed and reflects many knowledgeable voices on protection and management of open space and working lands across the county.

The existing allocations of 65 – 20 – 15 percent have been modified in important ways to achieve the balance needed for successful passage of Measure A, as discussed below:

1. 65% allocation Marin County Parks (MCP) to protect or restore and maintain existing county parks and open space preserves now includes a specific category for managing fire risk. Although not called out as a line-item, under the existing measure the County has been spending nearly \$2 million annually on managing vegetation on its preserves to strategically reduce hazardous wildfire fuel while protecting biodiversity and sensitive resources. The new allocation will increase that amount to approximately \$2.25 million. The MCP will continue working hand-in-hand with other public land agencies that are responsible for managing

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vegetation on the other 90 percent of the county that is public and wild. MCP is also coordinating its work with the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority that receives up to \$19 million annually from property (structure) assessments for carrying out many different programs for protecting communities and residents from wildfire, largely on private lands. All together these constitute a comprehensive campaign to protect our Marin communities from future wildfire.

In addition to the broad range of repair, replacement, and maintenance of park and open space facilities and management of sensitive resources that take up the bulk of Measure A funds, the allocation has also enabled the County to acquire long-targeted lands for permanent protection. This allocation will be cut in half to 10% of the MCP total, adding roughly \$0.9 million annually to a cumulative fund to acquire easements or lands in-fee as they become available. The acquisition fund currently has a balance of \$8 million for that purpose. MCL accepts this cut in funding, although we would have preferred the existing 20% (of the MCP allocation).

2. 20% to support and enhance the farmlands that cover almost one-third of the county. Marin's working lands are privately held but serve broad public purposes, such as ecosystem services (clean air and water), climate resiliency including carbon capture, natural resources values such as habitat support, and local food supply. In addition to the 50% that will be used to match perpetual conservation easements, the allocation sets aside 20% of revenues for competitive matching grants for a wide assortment of beneficial range practices as well as community gardens and habitat improvements and increased access to farming by underserved communities. Marin Resource Conservation District will also receive 20% of funding for managing matching grants for carbon farming and numerous other enhancement and restoration projects that currently make up their efforts. The MRCD has been serving a critical function for many decades, bringing in government and private grants to assist farmers in restoring their stream corridors, improving their soils, and implementing other restorative projects.
3. 15% to cities and special districts, where every resident has an opportunity to weigh in on local environmental and recreational priorities. This program has been highly successful over the past nine years in assisting Marin's municipalities to manage their parks, recreation programs, open spaces, and fire risk management.

In conclusion, we commend the Marin County Parks Department for its rigorous and thoughtful management of the existing Measure A and for all it has accomplished, and

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look forward to a renewed Measure A that generally conforms to but also improves on the programs that were allocated in the original measure.

Sincerely,



Robert Miller
President



Nona Dennis
Parks and Open Space Committee

CC: Max Korten, Director and General Manager, Marin County Parks Department
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