



# City of Emeryville

CALIFORNIA

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** December 18, 2018  
**TO:** Christine Daniel, City Manager  
**FROM:** Andrew Clough, Public Works Director  
**SUBJECT:** **Report To The City Council Of The City Of Emeryville Presenting The Conceptual Design For the Conversion Of The City Hall Front Lawn Into A Certified Bay-Friendly Landscape**

### RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council review the conceptual renderings and provide input on the design for the conversion of the city hall front lawn into a Bay-Friendly certified landscape.

### BACKGROUND

On May 16, 2017, the City Council approved a resolution authorizing the City of Emeryville to enter into an agreement with the Alameda County Waste Management Authority (StopWaste) to receive \$15,000 in funds for the design of a Bay-Friendly certified, sheet-mulched landscape to replace the lawn on the Park Avenue and Hollis Street sides of Old Town Hall (Resolution No. 17-66).

After reviewing bids for this project, the City hired PlaceWorks, a Bay Area landscape architecture firm which specializes in creating sustainable, context-sensitive, and inspiring environments, to prepare the conceptual design. Over the summer, city staff conducted media outreach through a series of short surveys aimed to gather the community's and City employees' preferences on design features. The surveys were posted on the City's website and distributed internally to City Hall employees through emails. The findings, along with Public Works and Maintenance staff recommendations, were presented during the first meeting with the team of landscape architects, which took place at the beginning of September.

The first round of graphic renderings submitted by PlaceWorks was analyzed in detail during meetings that engaged staff across Public Works, including environmental programs and maintenance, along with the current landscape contractor. Their remarks and concerns addressing issues related to design, site uses, plant selection, and construction, were incorporated into this final draft concept.

### DISCUSSION

Bay-Friendly Certified Landscape promotes the values of sustainable practices which provide many benefits, including water savings, maintenance labor savings, weed suppression without herbicides, reduced runoff, and reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In addition to myriad environmental benefits, research has shown that urban

nature, no matter how small, when incorporated into building design, provides calming and inspiring environments that encourage learning, inquisitiveness, and alertness.

Currently, City Hall's frontage is surrounded by a conventional turf-centered landscape, and lacks character. It relies on a large lawn, non-native plants, abundant irrigation, and use of fertilizers and pesticides. In the current state, the landscape requires frequent mowing, blowing, trimming and removal of plant debris. These practices clear away food and habitat for birds, insects, and beneficial soil organisms.

The new proposed design covers an area of 3,720 square feet fronting on Park Avenue and on Hollis Street. The lawn located in the back of the building is not part of this project. When finished, it will be the seventh certified Bay-Friendly landscape in Emeryville, which encompasses 5.9 acres in total. In a recent report released by StopWaste, Emeryville is ranked fourth in the county for the number of Bay-Friendly rated landscapes, coming close to larger municipalities like Hayward and Oakland. Furthermore, as a May 2018 StopWaste report released to the public indicates, there are another seven projects pending either approval or certification in the city. The increase in these projects is a good indicator of the growing popularity of sustainable landscapes that work with rather than against it.

The City Hall project is expected to save approximately 25,000 gallons of water and reduce GHG emissions by 2-4 tons each year. It will avoid the use of chemical herbicides using a system known as cardboard-sheet mulching to eliminate existing weeds from sprouting. The mulch layer creates healthy living soil by retaining soil moisture, thus reducing the area's overall water needs.

The plants selected for the project are drought tolerant; the Bay-Friendly rating requires that at least 75% of the plants fit this description. This and other requirements, including planting for mature spacing, save water and reduce waste. Existing mature shrubs nearest the building will be maintained; these use minimal water in their established state, and perform an aesthetic and security function for the building equipment they surround.

The irrigation system for the site uses subsurface drip and tubing for the shrubs, and bubblers for the trees. The drip system is the most water-conserving method of irrigation. It delivers slowly over a long period to targeted areas. There is no runoff, and the evaporation loss is minimal. The irrigation for existing foundation plantings will remain as is to minimize disturbance to these plants.

Besides the environmental benefits delineated above, this project will serve as a demonstration landscape for the community, offering a model for environments that are planned, designed, installed, and maintained with a watershed-based approach.

The simplicity of the design and the variety of flowering plants and shrubs will anchor the City Hall building, providing another testimony that the city is leading by example on a variety of sustainability goals.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

Development of this concept plan has been funded by the Major Maintenance Fund (Project No: 15650008). The total amount is \$27,516.00. The fund will pay \$12,516, and \$15,000 of this cost will be refunded through the already-approved grant from StopWaste.

Along with the concept plan, the landscape architect provided a rough financial estimate for this project as no more than \$80,000. This estimate includes a construction contingency of \$22,970, almost 35% of the total cost.

Public Works staff acknowledge that landscape improvements often constitute a high upfront cost. To incur a lower construction cost, Public Works is exploring the option of in-house project construction under the supervision of the current landscape contractor, Rubicon. The staff has requested a detailed estimate that would include various equipment options as well as more accurate plant counts, trees, and mulching quantities.

Based on the StopWaste analysis and published information, in the longer term, the project will provide significant cost savings through reduced maintenance and water savings which will amortize this upfront cost.

## **STAFF COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC**

As noted above, the staff conducted a social media survey outreach for the community and disseminated an internal survey to the City employees, to gather input on design feature rankings. The responses collected have been discussed during the initial meeting with the landscape designer, and they shaped the core design of the conceptual drawings.

## **CONCLUSION**

Updating the “City’s front yard” with a Bay Friendly landscape will demonstrate the City’s commitment to sustainability. The City will be practicing what it preaches by meeting our own Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance requirements, and will be modeling for others the benefits of a more natural, environmentally sound landscape. The costs for design have largely been covered by a grant from StopWaste, and the construction costs will be offset over the life of the landscape by savings through reduced maintenance and water use.

**PREPARED BY:** Izabela Cirloganu, Environmental Programs Intern

**APPROVED AND FORWARDED TO THE  
CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF EMERYVILLE:**



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Christine Daniel, City Manager

**ATTACHMENT**

- Proposed Designs