

ALBANY CALIFORNIA



CITY OF ALBANY
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May 15, 2017

The Honorable Cecilia M. Aguiar-Curry
Chair, Committee on Local Government
Legislative Office Building 1020 N Street, Room 157
Sacramento, CA 94249

RE: OPPOSE – AB 898 (Frazier D-Discovery Bay) Redirection of \$10.5 million East Bay Regional Park District General Fund Dollars

Dear Assembly Member Aguiar-Curry:

The Albany City Council is writing in strong opposition to AB 898 proposed by Assembly Member Jim Frazier. The Assembly Member has amended AB 898 to reallocate \$10.5 million in property tax revenues from the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) to the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District (ECCFPD).

For 80+ years, East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) has been transparent in managing public funds by listening to taxpayers in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. This has allowed EBRPD to successfully obtain the two-thirds votes needed for several park funding measures, including the 2008 \$500 million bond Measure WW which passed with 71%. In contrast, the ECCFPD has tried unsuccessfully three times to pass a funding measure (2012, 2015 and 2016).

Property tax diversion from a high performing agency, which has the trust of the voters, to an agency which has not built sufficient voter support is a dangerous precedent. It should concern all government agencies which rely on property tax funding. The diversion proposed by Assembly Member Frazier would be a legislative precedent: Rewarding local agencies who lack sufficient local voter support at the expense of those doing the job voters asked them to do.

The \$10.5 million tax transfer scheme would cut 1/5 of the Park District's budget in Contra Costa County. This funding grab would require a reduction in services and staff, including the District's own firefighters who are represented by AFSCME, throughout both Alameda and Contra Costa counties. If this misguided transfer transpires, cuts in Park District services, operations and maintenance would occur, including at: Big Break Regional Shoreline and Visitor Center at the Delta, Contra Loma Regional Park, Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, and the Delta DeAnza, Iron Horse and Marsh Creek regional trails, to name a few.

This reduction in funding would also impact the District's ability to move forward with park development at Concord Naval Weapons Station or proposed new Delta access near Discovery Bay.

The Park District strongly supports firefighters and public safety personnel. EBRPD firefighters were among the first responders to the 1991 Oakland hills fire which cost 25 people their lives, destroyed 3,354 homes and apartment units, burned 1,500 acres and cost \$1.5 billion in damages. Park District public safety air support provided primary fire suppression for the Morgan/Mount Diablo fire in 2014 which cost EBRPD \$4 million. The Park District provides critical wildfire fuels management for 30 miles of the East Bay hills in 11 regional parks directly adjacent to tens of thousands of nearby residents and businesses. EBRPD is also the first responder for, and funder of, fire suppression in East Bay State Responsibility Areas (SRAs) where the State of California has primary responsibility for prevention and suppression of wildfires. These vital services would be compromised by a \$10.5 million reduction in the Park District's general fund.

EBRPD's primary source of revenue in East Contra Costa County is a Landscape and Lighting District (LLD) which generates approximately \$700,000 annually. This LLD is largely coterminous with the boundaries of ECCFPD. The Park District spends over \$10 million annually to maintain 17 parks and trails and 30,000 acres in this part of the county. Given the services EBRPD provides to East County, no proportional funding comes from ECCFPD residents. Taxpayers in this jurisdiction are receiving a tremendous return on investment, yet AB 898 proposes other East Bay cities like Concord, Richmond, Martinez, Pittsburg and Antioch pay for ECCFPD's operations. A precedent of pitting agencies and cities within a county against each other is one legislators should judiciously dismiss as bad politics.

Any redirection of funds that ultimately results in a loss of revenue for EBRPD could also have an adverse impact on park services within Alameda County, which is of high concern to the City of Albany. For example, the City of Albany is currently working in coordination with EBRPD to further the McLaughlin Eastshore State Park by incorporating the Albany waterfront into this larger regional park. This project involves a significant amount of planning in an effort to establish additional park space to benefit the entire region. Budget cuts could certainly have a negative impact on all the progress that has been made on park planning and improvement projects such as the projects planned at McLaughlin Eastshore State Park.

As a matter of good governance and the highly negative precedent this bill would establish, we urge your strong opposition of AB 898 as amended to divert funding from EBRPD.

Sincerely,


Peggy McQuaid

Mayor, City of Albany

CC:

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