



Date: September 11, 2014

To: Governing Board
San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority

From: Samuel Schuchat
Executive Officer, California State Coastal Conservancy

Subject: **What We Did Right, Where We Could Improve**

Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it.
Edmund Burke

The decision not to proceed with the ballot initiative in the fall of 2014 was jarring for everyone involved. Now that we have had some time to reflect on the last several years, and before we get too far down the road with preparations for 2016, it is useful to discuss what went right for the Restoration Authority, and what did not go so well.

Many things went well for the SFBRA

It would be easy to feel despondent because we are not able to have an initiative on the ballot this fall. Our decision not to proceed, however, should not cause us to forget the enormous progress that we've made during the last several years of work. A few things that went well for the restoration authority are enumerated below. They include:

- 1) Public opinion research: extensive opinion research conducted by the restoration authority and by some of our allies demonstrated convincingly that an initiative that created a \$9.00/parcel tax within the nine-county Bay Area could win a two thirds vote. In addition, the research showed clearly what kinds of messages would work well with voters, and how such a tax needed to be crafted. None of this research will need to be repeated in the future, unless the authority decides to go with a different funding mechanism. Even in that case, the authority would likely only need to test the actual new funding mechanism. It is reasonable to assume that attitudes towards San Francisco Bay will remain stable during the next few years.
- 2) The SFBRA, its Advisory Council, and allied organizations have carried out a great deal of outreach to an enormous number of elected officials, interest groups, civic organizations, and so on throughout the Bay Area during the last four years. As a result, we have built a substantial reservoir of support and awareness. We have also not uncovered any interest groups interested in spending money to defeat a potential ballot measure. A number of County Boards of Supervisors took votes in favor of the

What We Did Right, Where We Could Improve

September 11, 2014

2

restoration authority's general activities, and at least two organizations, the Bay Area Council and the Bay Planning Coalition, actually voted to support the parcel tax measure. None of this effort is wasted, and although looking towards 2016 we will need to touch base with this very long list of people, we have laid the groundwork.

- 3) The SFBRA has written an initiative, an expenditure plan, and developed a list of potential eligible projects. These documents have been vetted extensively with various interest groups, and have benefited from a great deal of legal scrutiny. We have also tested the initiative itself through public opinion research. A great deal of effort went into all of this, none of which will need to be repeated for 2016 unless the authority decides to consider another vehicle than the \$9 parcel tax.
- 4) Five years ago we estimated the cost of getting onto the ballot in all nine counties at somewhere between \$5,000,000 and \$8,000,000. As a result of legislation sponsored by Save The Bay and authored by Sen. Loni Hancock, this cost was reduced to \$2,000,000 for the first electoral venture of the authority as long as it is done by the 2016 election. This is a significant accomplishment!

One big thing that we didn't do

At the end of the day, nobody stepped up and said that they would raise the money necessary for a campaign. The restoration authority itself of course cannot raise campaign money; therefore there needs to be a campaign committee committed to doing so. It seemed as if the authority could raise the \$2,000,000 it needed for election costs from water and open space districts interested in funding wetland projects, although we never actually put this to the test. In hindsight, we were counting on a very small number of groups to raise money for us. They in turn were waiting for high level political support, which when it failed to materialize, meant we lost the (potential) fundraising.

A few members of the Advisory Council made a few attempts at fundraising, as did a few board members. Generally, it seemed as if support for SF Bay is rather like the Bay itself: broad but not very deep. This raises a number of questions:

- 1) How deep was the fundraising effort? Were all types of seemingly promising relevant funding sources approached? (There was no single person or organization in charge of this, so it is difficult to know what exactly was going on.)
- 2) Of the donors who were approached, why were they not motivated to commit funds?
- 3) Are there changes to the measure which would improve the likelihood of funding?
- 4) How should fundraising be phased going forward?
- 5) Should the initial effort be to obtain one or a few key challenge commitments?
- 6) Does this initiative need the support of leading high-level elected officials in California in order to raise money, or is there some combination of interest groups and high net worth individuals who will support it on its own merits?

Recommended Action

Information.