NEWPORT BAY CONSERVANCY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING
MINUTES
Wednesday, January 28, 2026, 5:30 PM, In Person and **ZOOM**

Attending:
President – Bryan Tsu
Board Members – Peter Bryant (virtual), Mario Cuevas (virtual), Diane Daruty, Bettina Eastman, Lori Metherate (virtual), Julia Powers, Yugina Yun
Staff and guests - Heather Cieslak, Thomas Shields
OC Parks – Molly Waldram

Excused Absence: McKenna Wegner, Maureen Flanagan

5:33 Call to order/roll call: Bryan

Approval of Minutes: December 2025 Annual Board Meeting Minutes
Molly moved; Mario seconded; Unanimously approved

5:40 Approval to authorize a bank letter, directing McKenna Wegner to be added as an authorized signer on the Bank of America account, and removal of Susie Onate
Mario moved; Diane seconded; Unanimously approved

1. **Operations Report: Heather**

   The Operations Report was provided (see attached). The organization welcomed Andrea as the new restoration coordinator (Randall's replacement) and is currently reviewing applications for the Administrative Assistant position. Operational upgrades include a transition to the Humanitix ticketing system and plans to launch a live-streamed Osprey camera via Starlink this weekend. Heather discussed that the organization was awarded a $75,000 Warne Fund grant and finalized the Community Use Access grant.

   In advocacy news, the Snug Harbor Surf Park resolution was successfully rescinded following a petition; however, the board is monitoring new YMCA redevelopment plans for the site involving senior housing and a parking garage.

   Finally, leadership is initiating talks to establish a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to solidify the organization's growing operational presence and legal facility use at the Back Bay Science Center. Diane, Yugina and Bryan volunteered to support Heather in those conversations and in drafting the MOU.

2. **Restoration Committee: Yugina**

The Restoration Report was provided ([see attached]). The Conservancy is managing an unprecedented number of active programs, including its largest project ever, Big Canyon Phase 3, which Yugina and Thomas provided updates on.

Molly made the motion to approve to increase contractor hours available for bio-monitoring up to the cost of 40,000 USD and an additional 40,000 USD for a new contract for currently uncontracted works related to general biomonitoring; which will be allocated from a previously-approved contingency budget and not require an adjustment to the existing project budget. Diane seconded; Unanimously approved. The restoration committee plans to report back next month to provide an update on how much contingency has been used.

3. **Treasurer's Report: Julie**

The Finance Committee Report was provided. Financial consultant Deanna has successfully assisted in having the 2024 taxes filed and is currently overseeing a QuickBooks upgrade to modernize the chart of accounts for better revenue and donor tracking.

Due to projected revenue exceeding $2 million, the organization is now legally required by California law to undergo an independent audit and establish an independent Audit Committee. A formal motion was made to create this 2026 Audit Committee, which must consist of members—including potential non-board volunteers with financial backgrounds—who are not involved in daily financial management. This committee will be responsible for selecting an auditing firm and serving as the primary liaison between the auditors and the organization during the spring audit cycle. Motion to create an audit committee. Bettina made the motion, Yugina seconded; the board unanimously approved. Diane volunteered to lead the committee and will follow up with additional members.

4. **Education Committee: Mario**

The Education Committee Report was provided. The board approved the creation of an "Activity Leader II" position to support elementary school tours and weekend kayak events, primarily funded through the YCA grant. This new role will work approximately 20 hours per week to alleviate the administrative and operational burden on existing leadership. By shifting these routine duties to the new hire, senior education staff (Hillary and Mariah) will have increased capacity to focus on high-level naturalist training and collegiate programming.

Julie moved to approve the position, Molly seconded; the board unanimously approved.

5. **Board Development: Bryan**

Bryan shared an overview of the board committees, and responsibilities for serving as a chair for a committee. Discussion of whether any committees required changes in membership. Diane requested being added to the fundraising committee. Heather reminded the board that per the bylaws, the Bylaws Committee is always chaired by the Vice President. Yugina/Heather noted that the YCA grant requires the DEI committee to be active.

6. **Fundraising Committee: Bryan**

The Fundraising Committee Report will be provided at the next meeting.

7. **Research and Advocacy Committee: Peter**

The Research Committee Report will be provided at the next meeting.

8. **Community Outreach Committee: Bettina**

The Community Outreach Committee Report will be provided at the next meeting.

7:30: Adjournment: Bettina moved; Mario seconded.

Respectfully submitted,
McKenna Wegner, Secretary and Bryan Tsu, President