



City of Grover Beach

*Mayor Jeff Lee Mayor Pro Tem Mariam Shah,
Council Member Karen Bright, Council Member Anna Miller, Council Member Robert Robert*

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City Manager*

March 12, 2021

California Coastal Commission
455 Market Street, Suite 300
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Chair Padilla and Coastal Commissioners:

This letter serves to provide a summary of concerns and interests from the Grover Beach City Council on the topic of the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (ODSVRA) Coastal Development Permit scheduled for review by the Commission on March 18, 2021. We appreciate the Commission's time in reviewing these comments as the Commission considers a number of significant actions that affect this important recreational and environmental coastal asset in our region and our beachfront community including the phased elimination of off-highway vehicle (OHV) use.

Grover Beach is located adjacent to both the ODSVRA and Pismo State Beach and serves as a "gateway community" with one of two entry points to the recreation area at the end of West Grand Avenue. We are a community of approximately 14,000 residents along with thriving local businesses many of which cater to the visitors who travel to the ODSVRA and Pismo State Beach. The past year has been very challenging with the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19 and our City has taken numerous steps to help local businesses in our community including allocating \$700,000 in business microgrants and partnering with the South County Chambers of Commerce on a #BuyLocal program to encourage local spending. At the same time, we have seen an increase in tourism and related tax revenues in our beachfront community over the past year though we recognize that COVID travel limitations make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions from 2020.

On March 8, 2021, our City Council heard an agenda item on the Commission's potential actions affecting the ODSVRA and whether to take a position on these actions on behalf of the City. Our Council scheduled this agenda item given the significance of this issue to our community despite not having jurisdiction or governmental authority over our beachfront area. We received nearly two hours of public comments which were evenly split between those supporting the Commission staff recommendations and those opposing them. These comments illustrated that this is a complicated and long-standing community issue with passionate sentiments on all sides and one that needs to be considered thoughtfully to ensure that the needs of those who live, work, and recreate in our area are addressed.

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Administrative Services/Water (805) 473-4550 ❖ City Council/City Manager (805) 473-4567 ❖ City Clerk (805) 473-4568
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To this end, our City Council unanimously authorized this letter to document the City's concerns and interests on this significant topic. It is important to note that this letter does not explicitly express support or opposition to the proposed actions by the Commission. Our Council recognizes the Commission's role and jurisdiction on these matters particularly with regards to assessing environmental impacts and determining compliance with the Coastal Act and Local Coastal Programs. Below is a listing and brief description of six concerns and interests of the City for the Commission's consideration:

- **Commission Representation:** The South Central Coast District seat on the Commission representing San Luis Obispo County is currently vacant. While we understand that the Governor's Office is working to fill this seat, we are concerned that a decision of this magnitude for our area will be decided without a local representative on the Commission. We therefore ask that this Commission seat be filled and preferably with a representative from San Luis Obispo County prior to any actions taken by the Commission though we also recognize the timing of the Commission's potential actions given the extent of previous discussions the Commission has had on this topic.
- **Economic Impact Assessment:** Grover Beach inherently benefits economically from coastal visitors who travel to and through the city including users at the ODSVRA. Such visitors can support the city's economy by staying at hotels and short-term rentals, shopping or dining at stores or restaurants, getting groceries or gas, or using other services within the city. In addition, there are several businesses involved in OHV rentals located in Grover Beach that are tied directly to vehicle activity at the ODSVRA. However, conflicting economic studies and methodologies make it difficult to determine informed conclusions around the impact of the ODSVRA on the local economy and specifically the impact of eliminating OHV use. The South County Chambers of Commerce and Visit SLO CAL are initiating an independent third-party, peer-reviewed economic study to provide an accurate assessment of economic impacts of the ODSVRA to help guide decision-makers in their understanding of potential impacts, along with subsequent mitigation measures. The City is helping to fund this study which is anticipated to be completed by this summer. While the results of this study would be useful before the Commission took any actions, the results will also help identify and shape future economic needs with regards to implementing these actions.
- **Traffic Impacts:** As currently one of the two vehicular access points to the ODSVRA, West Grand Avenue experiences traffic issues particularly during the summer vacation season along with regular wear-and-tear from over 20,000 vehicles per day using this major thoroughfare in Grover Beach. The roadway condition is in poor shape and costs to repair the street are over \$5 million. Our Council is concerned that the recommended closure of the Pier Avenue vehicular access point in Oceano will create a significant traffic problem on West Grand Avenue as this will become the only vehicular access point to the ODSVRA. This problem would likely spill over to other streets in our city including North 4th Street which is the nearest access point to Highway 101. We are particularly concerned about the Pier Avenue closure date of July 1, 2021 as this does not provide sufficient time to plan for these added traffic impacts. We recognize the stated

interest of creating a more “traditional” beachfront area in Oceano, but this closure at Pier Avenue would significantly impact Grover Beach and likely impede non-vehicular beachfront access at West Grand Avenue. We ask that a traffic study be commissioned to examine the impacts of this recommended closure and mitigation measures identified and implemented if this closure occurred.

- **Economic Assistance:** The results of the new economic impact assessment and requested traffic study on West Grand Avenue would identify the scope of economic impacts from eliminating OHV use at the ODSVRA as well as additional costs to the City’s infrastructure from making West Grand Avenue the only vehicular access point. Despite the conflicting studies, there is a level of economic activity generated by OHV use that would cease if this activity was no longer allowed. Once this level of economic impact is known along with the amount of City infrastructure costs, our Council requests economic assistance to help the City transition to different uses at the park if the Commission takes these actions. Such assistance could be similar to the one-time economic development assistance provided to jurisdictions in San Luis Obispo County through SB 1090 given the economic impacts from the pending closure of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant in 2025. This assistance could also include receiving a portion of the State Parks kiosk fees from the West Grand Avenue vehicular access point to help the City maintain West Grand Avenue particularly if this became the only vehicular access point.
- **Operational Concerns:** One of the recommended actions the Commission will consider is limiting vehicular access after five years to the beachfront area between West Grand Avenue and Pier Avenue and creating a new vehicular beach camping area at this location. We recognize the fact that this recommendation preserves vehicular access as a unique feature of our beach that also allows for disability access to our beachfront area. While there is beach camping currently at the ODSVRA, we are concerned about the practicality of creating a beach camping area at this proposed location given the high tidal activity of this area along with the lack of restrooms and other facilities. We also have questions about the practicality of creating a sufficient camping area in the same beachfront location that would allow up to 500 vehicles at one time. These concerns are more operational in nature that may be best addressed by State Parks in implementing this potential permit condition by the Commission and we request that the City of Grover Beach be included in this process.
- **Timeframe:** Lastly, our Council urges the Commission to establish realistic and attainable milestones in pursuing future actions at the ODSVRA. The current review of the ODSVRA Coastal Development Permit (CDP) arguably spans 40 years since the temporary CDP was first issued by the Commission in 1982 with the intent of subsequently establishing a permanent solution. The inability to establish this permanent solution has produced decades of community uncertainty and impeded business investment in our coastal area given the lack of certainty on beach access. There is a history of missed milestones by various agencies that has contributed to this lack of

resolution. Establishing realistic and attainable milestones along with accountability for achievement will help build greater credibility and trust that whatever actions the Commission decides will be carried out by other agencies and parties and by the Commission itself.

In closing, our Council recognizes the magnitude of the issue involving the ODSVRA and the impact of potential actions considered by the Coastal Commission. Our Council's decision to craft this position letter after hours of public and Council comments on a matter where we have no governmental authority reflects the importance of this issue for our community. We believe that ensuring a high quality of life for Grover Beach residents and businesses means ensuring a strong economy and sustainable environment which we believe should be a key factor for the Commission in determining the future of the ODSVRA. We respect the decision-making role of the Commission on this critical and timely issue on this section of the California coast and we value our positive relationships with Commission staff along with State Parks who operates our beachfront area. The City of Grover Beach is committed to participating with the Commission, State Parks, and other parties on the implementation of these potential actions affecting this unique coastal asset while supporting our beachfront community for current and future generations.

Thank you for your Commission's thoughtful deliberation and your consideration of these concerns and interests on behalf of the City of Grover Beach.

Sincerely,



Mayor Jeff Lee
City of Grover Beach

CC: Honorable Congressman Salud Carbajal
Honorable State Senator John Laird
Honorable Assembly Member Jordan Cunningham
Grover Beach City Council
Mr. Kevin Pearce, California State Parks Oceano Dunes District Superintendent
Ms. Jocelyn Brennan, President/CEO South County Chambers of Commerce
Mr. Chuck Davison, President/CEO Visit SLO CAL