



November 3, 2024

City of Petaluma

Mayor and Members of the City Council

11 English Street

Petaluma, CA 94952

Re: November 4<sup>th</sup> – Consent Calendar, Item 6 -Awarding Contract for Shollenberger Amphitheater and Kiosk (C14502012)

Dear Mayor McDonnell and Members of the City Council:

Birds are indicators of the health of ecosystems. Bird songs and seeing birds bring humans joy. COP-16, the UN Convention on Biodiversity in Colombia, just concluded - The state of the world's habitat areas for species is dismal. Notably, 70% of land on our planet has been taken by humans.

From 2014 to 2018, Madrone Audubon, funded. Prepared and consistently followed up on status an application to add the Petaluma Wetlands to the San Francisco Bay Estuary designation as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. The status became official in 2018.

The Petaluma Wetlands Ramsar designation includes Alman Marsh, Shollenberger Park, Ellis Creek wetlands and ponds, and one additional parcel. This is an important honor.

The original Petaluma Wetlands Alliance Board decision to discontinue pursuing the amphitheater project was the appropriate decision, honoring the environment first. A discussion to enhance the picnic table area and maintain a low human impact also reflected honoring the environment and existing and potential habitat. Migratory Bird Nesting Season from mid February to early September must be the priority, ensuring active nests are protected with no new additional potential disturbances and demarcated buffer zones away from nests. Over-wintering birds at the Petaluma Wetlands also need to be the priority for access to foraging and any available habitat.

In the past, a discussion about an area or center at the Ellis Creek operational area for PWA education was considered. Never in our experience with Petaluma Wetlands Alliance was an imposing structure of a concrete stage and seating for up to 50 – regardless of downsizing the project or use of recycled or permeable materials relevant to the actual project itself, prioritizing humans over the environment. This project sends a dysfunctional message to young students coming to the wetlands for education – that an amphitheater to accommodate humans for learning is more important than the very habitat area and environment where the project is located. Parks and Recreation Commissioners seemed enthusiastic about this project and suggested (instead of protecting habitat and the actual living birds) including foot imprints of birds in the concrete stage.

This agenda item on your Consent Calendar seems to be missing an important CEQA evaluation of biological resources impacts with seasonal evaluations, including the potential habitat to be utilized where the project is planned and the longstanding active nesting areas in proximity to this project location.

Just two nesting seasons have completed since the City of Petaluma began to integrate nesting survey practices into your procedures related to vegetation management. Those procedures evolved from a meeting with a Department of Fish and Wildlife Warden in early 2023. This past Spring, the time lapse between a biologist's nesting survey and then power equipment mowing was too long. In one instance – three weeks instead of three days.

The City of Petaluma would benefit much more from prioritizing the Petaluma Wetlands and the international Ramsar honor as most important and, within that context, supporting the PWA Education program at an assured protective location – modified existing picnic tables or at the the Ellis Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility operational area. Either of these choices would support young students cultivating an understanding of how we respect and protect the environment, and then how we learn about birds, wildlife and wetlands.

We write on behalf of our approximately 3,000 members in Sonoma County, many of whom reside in Petaluma.

Sincerely,

*Susan Kirks*

Susan Kirks, President  
Madrone Audubon Society