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RESTORETHEDELTA.ORG

May 24, 2021

Mr. Harry Black  
City Manager  
City of Stockton  
425 N El Dorado Street  
Stockton, CA 95212

Letter sent by email: [harry.black@stocktonca.gov](mailto:harry.black@stocktonca.gov)

**Re: Multi-benefit flood project planning for Van Buskirk Park**

Dear Mr. Black:

Restore the Delta (RTD) is a grassroots campaign of residents and organizations committed to restoring the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta so that fisheries, communities, and family farming can thrive there together again; so that water quality is protected for all communities, particularly environmental justice communities; and so that Delta environmental justice communities are protected from flood and drought impacts resulting from climate change while gaining improved public access to clean waterways. Ultimately our goal is to connect communities to our area rivers and to empower communities to become the guardians of the estuary through participation in government planning and waterway monitoring. RTD advocates for local Delta stakeholders to ensure that they have a direct impact on water management decisions affecting the well-being of their communities, and water sustainability policies for all Californians.

In 2019, we published an extensive report on climate and the potential for flooding which can be found [here](#). In that report, using data from the State's Fourth Climate Change Assessment, we identified the Conway Homes community and all the housing developments surrounding the former Van Buskirk Golf Course and Community Center as the most vulnerable community for flood threat within the Delta. Modeling from the Department of Water Resources estimates seven feet of overtopping of the levees near French Camp Slough and the San Joaquin River due to a combination of storm inundation, storm surge and sea level rise. In the event of such a storm event, water from the

confluence of French Camp Slough and the San Joaquin River would overtop the west end of the golf course and could potentially back up into Walker Slough broadening a flood emergency. A mere walk around these levees reveals their significantly shorter height than the levees across the sloughs surrounding Weston Ranch.

Throughout the United States, one has to simply look at outcomes for communities hit by floods in New Orleans, Houston, and New York City to know that environmental justice communities seldom fully recover from flood events. Research further reveals that housing for environmental justice/economically disadvantaged communities has historically been constructed in floodplains because land in those areas is cheaper for development. Redlining has also forced communities of color to secure housing in these more affordable areas. The Van Buskirk family understood the flood threat to the community and that is why they initially donated it as land suitable for a golf course. It was a smart land use plan back for that era before climate change impacts began to manifest or were understood.

Conway Homes and the surrounding neighborhoods sitting at the bottom of these levees are identified environmental justice communities found within Cal EnviroScreen and are densely populated. The residents in that area are living with a very high likelihood of experiencing flooding – and the majority within the community are not aware of what climate change holds for their future. While SJAFACA is working with the Army Corps of Engineers to solve the levee issue, there is more that can be done to protect this vulnerable community from flood threat.

Restore the Delta and Climate Fellows from several area organizations have partnered this year with the Delta Stewardship Council (DSC) to respond to their recently published Climate Vulnerability Assessment. Our fellows and associated staff from these environmental justice organizations have also received extensive training on the flood threat to local communities from our policy analyst, River Partners, American Rivers, and Chris Elias at SJAFCA. Our Climate Water Advocates through their independent research reached the same conclusions suggested by Mr. Elias: that fuller flood protection for the Van Buskirk area neighborhoods could be achieved with the creation of floodplain with a portion of the existing golf course. (To learn more about our work with the DSC, please watch this [video](#) and/or [read](#) this report.) We also believe that the State should be posting flood warning signs within the community that are similar to the Tsunami signs posted in California's coastal communities.

In March, Restore the Delta reached out to the City's Planning Department to discuss the need for the creation of a multi-benefit floodplain within the redesign of the Van Buskirk Park. We sadly never heard back from the City. We know that Mr. Elias understands how much land is required to enhance public safety. We also know from his prior work with

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Santa Clara Valley Water District that he is an expert on how multi-benefit flood control projects can enhance the quality of life for communities with nature trails, wildlife areas, improved water quality of surface waters etc. We are honored to collaborate with such a thoughtful professional on flood control issues.

We respectfully request that the consultants hired by the City work closely with Mr. Elias to incorporate flood protection planning within their redesign of Van Buskirk. We are also requesting that the consultants for the May 25<sup>th</sup> event share with the community findings that indicate why flood protection is a needed part of redesign.

We would still like to have a conversation with the consultant regarding floodplain protection for the Van Buskirk communities. We hope that you can make that happen.

Please let me know how we can be of service. We believe a great opportunity exists for enhanced flood protection and a park of beauty with access to a wonderful nature area for the community.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla', with a stylized, cursive script.

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla

Cc: Councilmember Kimberly Warmesley

Mr. Chris Elias, SJAFCA

Morgan Chow, Delta Stewardship Council