BOLINAS COMMUNITY PUBLIC UTILITY DISTRICT
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MEMORANDUM

TO:	Board of Directors
FROM:	Georgia Woods, General Manager
RE:	***Item 2.*** *Update on Septic Drainage Program and Work in Preparation for El Nino*
DATE:	October 21, 2026

Purpose

To provide the Board with an update on Septic and Drainage Program activities, discuss priority drainage work identified for completion prior to the upcoming winter season, review available funding sources, and consider whether additional reserve funding should be authorized to address high-priority drainage maintenance and improvement projects.

Background

BCPUD's Septic and Drainage Program was established following the community's decision not to pursue a consolidated wastewater treatment approach on the Big Mesa. Instead, the District, with community support and regulatory approval, developed a program focused on improving surface drainage, lowering localized water tables, and improving drainage conditions so that individual onsite wastewater systems could function more effectively. The program's underlying premise was that improved drainage conditions would support septic system performance and help address many of the wastewater-related challenges experienced throughout the Mesa.

Over time, however, the level of drainage work actually being performed did not match the level originally envisioned for the program. As a result, service charges were reduced to better reflect the reduced level of activity. While that approach may have been appropriate at the time, it also contributed to a growing backlog of deferred maintenance throughout portions of the drainage system.

In recent years, the Board has recognized both the importance of the program and the District's ongoing responsibility to manage and maintain drainage infrastructure that supports septic system function throughout the Big Mesa, and drainage more generally on the Gridded Mesa roadway network. As a result, the Board has begun increasing both the program budget and service charge revenues toward levels that more closely reflect the resources originally intended to support the program.

While these funding increases have allowed the District to begin addressing long-standing maintenance needs, significant deferred maintenance remains. In many cases, drainage easements, rights-of-way, and drainage corridors that receive limited maintenance become substantially more expensive to restore over time. What may begin as routine vegetation management or ditch maintenance can ultimately require major restoration efforts, including removal of large trees, reestablishment of drainage channels, and rehabilitation of neglected drainage infrastructure.

With forecasts indicating the potential for a significant El Niño winter, staff believes there is value in evaluating whether additional drainage maintenance and improvement work should be completed during the remaining dry-weather construction window, even if that work ultimately requires use of reserve funds.

Work Completed During Fiscal Year 2026/27

The District typically contracts with Gospel Flats Farms to perform much of its drainage maintenance work.

Contracted work completed to date includes:

- 500 Block of Cedar Road (between Poplar and Mesa) – re-establishment of roadside drainage ditches.
- Poplar Road (Birch to Dogwood, north side) – re-establishment of roadside drainage ditches.

Remaining Priority Contracted Work

Staff has identified several drainage maintenance and improvement projects that would be beneficial to complete before the onset of significant winter storms:

- Walnut/Larch Road Drainage Project.

- Birch Road (Poplar to Mesa) Drainage Project.
- Laurel Road (Elm to Alder) Drainage Project.
- Grove/Alder Drainage Improvements and Ditch Restoration.

These projects have been prioritized based on drainage performance concerns, risk of winter storm impacts, and the opportunity to address long-standing maintenance deficiencies before wet-weather conditions limit access.

District Staff Work on Septic and Drainage Projects

The District's recent efforts to expand drainage maintenance activities have highlighted the complexity of administering the Septic and Drainage Program. Unlike many public works projects, drainage improvements frequently require coordination with individual property owners, access agreements, easement reviews, field investigations, project planning, environmental considerations, contractor scheduling, and ongoing communication before work can proceed.

As a result, even relatively modest drainage projects can require substantial administrative and field staff time.

In addition to coordinating contracted work, staff is arranging long-overdue servicing of the District's Herco-Vac to enable District personnel to undertake systematic culvert cleaning in preparation for the winter rainy season. Staff is developing an inventory of public culverts in need of cleaning and encourages community members to contact the District office with information about specific culverts that require attention.

Community members on the Gridded Mesa who have driveway culverts in need of clearing are also encouraged to contact the District office to determine whether assistance may be available. Please note that clearing culverts located on private property or beneath private driveways may be subject to a fee.

Additionally, the District continues to make culverts available to community members at cost for those who need to replace existing culverts.

Challenges of the Current Program Model

Contractor availability during the October work season has been limited, creating scheduling challenges for several priority projects staff had hoped to complete before the onset of winter weather. As a result, even when funding is available, the District's ability to

complete additional drainage work may be constrained by contractor schedules and availability.

While staff anticipates continuing to utilize contractors whenever practical, recent experience has highlighted the challenges associated with relying heavily on outside contractors to perform drainage maintenance and emergency response work.

Importantly, drainage work is not solely preventative in nature. While much of the District's annual effort focuses on preparing drainage facilities for wet-weather conditions, the District is also periodically called upon to respond to time-sensitive and, at times, emergency drainage issues. These situations can include blocked drainage facilities, localized flooding, rapidly deteriorating drainage corridors, or conditions that threaten septic system function, roadways, or private property.

In such circumstances, delays associated with contractor availability can limit the District's ability to respond quickly and effectively.

For this reason, staff believes the Board should begin considering whether the District would benefit from developing additional in-house capacity to support the Septic and Drainage Program. Such capacity could include:

- Purchase of an excavator and supporting equipment;
- Additional staff training;
- Additional staffing resources; and/or
- Other operational capabilities that would allow the District to perform certain drainage work directly when contractor availability becomes a limiting factor.

It is also important to recognize that the program requires substantial staff time to effectively manage. The District's current field staff are primarily responsible for operating and maintaining the water and wastewater systems. Realistically, the existing staffing structure and available budget do not provide sufficient capacity to manage the Septic and Drainage Program at the level needed to address both ongoing maintenance and accumulated deferred maintenance.

Staff believes the program would ultimately be better supported by a dedicated employee whose responsibilities would include ongoing drainage system management, project implementation, property owner coordination, and emergency response support.

Budget Status

Current Septic and Drainage Program budget information is summarized below.

Fiscal Year 2026/27 Contractor Services Budget

- Total Budget: $11,000
- Expenditures to Date: $7,320
- Remaining Budget: $3,680

Septic and Drainage Reserve Funds

- Total Reserve Balance: $120,621
- Designated Excavator and Trailer Reserve: Approximately $70,000
- Undesignated General Reserve: Approximately $50,000

Given the limited construction window remaining before winter storms arrive and the number of identified priority projects, staff recommends that up to **$10,000** from the undesignated reserve balance be allocated toward completion of priority drainage maintenance and improvement projects by an outside contractor.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends authorizing the use of reserve funds to complete additional priority drainage work before the onset of winter storm conditions.

While the District has made meaningful progress over the past several years in restoring portions of the drainage system, substantial deferred maintenance remains. The identified projects represent an opportunity to improve drainage performance, reduce localized flooding risk, and avoid more costly repairs in the future.

Recommended Board Action

1. Authorize expenditure of Septic and Drainage reserve funds in an amount not to exceed **$10,000** to complete priority drainage maintenance and improvement projects identified by staff.
2. Provide any additional direction regarding the future management and administration of the Septic and Drainage Program.