



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

City Council Staff Report

July 14, 2026
Agenda Item No. 8

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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TITLE: Approval of Professional Services Agreement with Marine
Taxonomic Services, LTD for Newport Harbor Shallow-Water
Eelgrass Surveys – Contract No. 7487-5

ABSTRACT:

In 2015, the Eelgrass Protection and Mitigation Plan for Shallow-Waters in Lower Newport Bay was added as an important component of the City of Newport Beach's (City) RGP-54 dredging permit. The Ecosystem Based Management Plan (Eelgrass Plan) allows for calculated impacts to eelgrass from dredging and therefore relieves the harbor residents from the standard eelgrass mitigation requirements. A critical condition of the Eelgrass Plan is a harbor-wide survey conducted every two years to reflect the most current eelgrass conditions and quantities. Staff requests City Council approval to enter into a professional services agreement with Marine Taxonomic Services, LTD of San Marcos, for the necessary eelgrass survey and mapping services for a total not-to-exceed fee of \$174,208.62.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
- b) Approve a Professional Services Agreement with Marine Taxonomic Services, LTD for the 2026 Newport Harbor Shallow-Water Eelgrass Surveys for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$174,208.62, and authorize the Mayor and City Clerk to execute the agreement.

DISCUSSION:

The Eelgrass Plan requires tracking shallow-water eelgrass distribution in the harbor every two years, and deep-water tracking every four years. Eelgrass is surveyed within three zones (stable, transitional and unvegetated) based on eelgrass presence and variation in overall abundance. Each zone is subject to different allowable annual eelgrass impacts caused only by routine maintenance dredging activities.

Every two years, a shallow-water eelgrass survey along the perimeter of the harbor tracks eelgrass distribution in relation to these established zones, and to assess long-term eelgrass trends within the harbor. Detailed information on the distribution and abundance of eelgrass (acreage) is documented in a comprehensive report that is published on the [City's website](#).

Every four years, a deep-water eelgrass survey within the main navigation channel is conducted to gauge the overall health and distribution of the entire eelgrass population in Newport Harbor. This current cycle does not require a deep-water survey.

For historical context, the current survey cycle will be the City's tenth survey with the total shallow-water eelgrass acreage ranging from 30 acres in 2003 to 125 acres in 2024 – a significant 317% improvement that reflects the harbor's significantly improved water quality and clarity, in addition to other eelgrass management efforts. (The deep-water eelgrass acreage ranged from 20 acres in 2006 to 64 acres in 2024 – a 220% improvement.)

The City issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in May 2026. Services requested in the RFP included surveying for shallow-water eelgrass consisting of a diver and a surface support biologist in a kayak; augmenting the diver survey with a down-looking sonar in larger or hazardous areas; conducting focused eelgrass turion counts (plant shoots and blades); documenting and measuring general health and physical eelgrass characteristics as well as soil conditions, water visibility, temperature, depth and fauna and flora; identifying underwater debris to support subsequent harbor clean-up efforts; evaluating the relative effectiveness of a recent City eelgrass study that compared traditional and new transplant methods; generating detailed eelgrass maps; coordinating survey data with the City's GIS Division for website posting; and generating a final report. This effort also includes conducting focused "surveillance level" Caulerpa surveys alongside the eelgrass review.

Several firms reviewed the RFP online, yet staff received only two proposals (one from a local firm and one from a Louisiana-based firm). Staff believes that due to the complexity, project detail, and diver-based survey requirement, many qualified consultants opted to pass on proposing. The proposals were reviewed and the scoring for the proposals is as follows:

PROPOSER	TOTAL SCORE (Out of 100)	OVERALL RANK
Marine Taxonomic Services, LTD	96	1
Coastal Mapping & Sciences, LLC	60	2

Marine Taxonomic Services, LTD (MTS) is qualified in the field of eelgrass and Caulerpa surveys and is familiar with the City's program after having completed the previous four harbor-wide surveys.

Coastal Mapping & Sciences LLC is a firm specializing in advanced hydrographic surveys. It proposed a sonar-based survey approach versus the required diver-based approach as stated in the RFP's scope of services, hence it's lower score.

Staff reviewed the MTS proposal to confirm responsiveness to the RFP. The proposal included the required background, experience, similar work history, and ability to perform the specific tasks as outlined in the scope of services including, and most importantly, providing a diver and surface support biologist survey approach. The sealed fee schedule was reviewed and confirmed to be reasonable and within the anticipated budget. Therefore, staff recommends approving a professional services agreement with MTS for the Newport Harbor Shallow-Water Eelgrass Survey.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The adopted Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget includes sufficient funding for this agreement. Professional services will be expensed to the Eelgrass Survey project account in the CIP budget, 10001-980000-27H11, which is comprised of Tidelands Funding. Tidelands funds are generated from the operation of the City Tidelands including rents from moorings, piers, and leases, as well as income from parking lots.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the City Council find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the City Council considers the item).

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment A – Professional Services Agreement