



## AGENDA MEMORANDUM

*Natural Resources  
Department*

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**City Council Regular Meeting Date: March 31, 2026**

**To:** City Council  
**From:** Joel Caouette, Environmental Biologist  
**Date:** March 6, 2026

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**SUBJECT:** Approval of Contract with EarthBalance Corporation for Island-Wide Beach Erosion Control (City Parks) ITB-NR-1-2026/BS

**BACKGROUND:** In September 2022, Sanibel Island and its beaches were devastated by an approximately 13-foot storm surge from Hurricane Ian. Storm surge from Ian heavily impacted the City's beach parks and dune systems and killed much of the native dune vegetation due to ebb-surge scouring and salt-kill from prolonged saltwater inundation.

Generally, FEMA does not provide funding to replace vegetation. However, the City was able to provide detailed documentation of its annual dune plantings at the City's beach parks to control coastal erosion (typically funded by the Lee County Tourism Development Council). As a result, FEMA Project 715098 obligated funding for the replacement of this critical vegetation to restore the beach facilities (dunes) back to pre-disaster conditions. Based on the estimated plant costs provided by the City, FEMA determined a total project cost of \$236,230 for the replacement of 37,731 native dune plants (representing nine species) at the following beach parks: Blind Pass Park, Bowman's Beach Park, Fulgur Street Beach Access, Gulfside City Park, Lighthouse Beach Park, Nerita Street Beach Access, Northern Sanibel (by the road protection wall), Seagrape Lane (bayside), and Turner Beach. The total project cost is further broken down to 90% Federal Share (\$212,607) and 10% Non-Federal Share (\$23,623).

The City issued a request for bids in October of 2025, posted locally and on DemandStar. While the City received questions/request for additional information from two companies prior to the bid due date, only a single bid was ultimately received. The sole lump sum bid was received from EarthBalance Corporation in the amount of \$397,494. At staff's request, EarthBalance provided the following breakdown of the lump sum cost:

<b>Subtask</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Plant Cost	\$177,740
Delivery Fees	\$14,850
Installation	\$149,500
Gel Pack	\$8,958
Watering	\$46,446
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$397,494</b>

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Staff met with the City’s FEMA consultants at Tidal Basin to determine the best path forward given that the City received only a single bid and that the bid exceeds the total project cost by \$184,887.13. Upon comparing the breakdown of the Earth Balance Bid and the FEMA project report, it was apparent that the EarthBalance Bid included additional tasks that were not properly included in the FEMA scope of work. The total project cost determined by FEMA was based solely on the City’s estimates of plant costs only and did not include other customary and necessary tasks like delivery and installation. Tidal Basin has advised that there is a process by which the City can document these “omissions” for review by FEMA, with high likelihood that these tasks will be deemed eligible for funding. The table below also demonstrates that when comparing the costs of plant material only, the bid price is actually \$58,489 below the FEMA cost.

<b>Subtask</b>	<b>Bid</b>	<b>FEMA Project Cost</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Plant Cost	\$177,740	\$236,229	(\$58,489)
Delivery Fees	\$14,850	Omission	\$14,850
Installation	\$149,500	Omission	\$149,500
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$342,090</b>	<b>\$236,229</b>	<b>(\$105,861)</b>

Additional tasks that have not been obligated and are likely to fall outside of the FEMA scope are shown in the table below. However, given the current timing for plant installation (Spring 2026), staff has determined that for small plant material, the gel packs will provide sufficient moisture for the establishment period and that supplemental watering is only necessary for the larger plant material. A revised bid cost for this task is provided. Without FEMA obligation, these costs would be born by the City but could be eligible for reimbursement through the City’s annual TDC funding for beach park plantings.

<b>Not Currently Obligated</b>		
<b>Subtask</b>	<b>Bid</b>	<b>Revised Bid</b>
Gel Pack	\$8,958	\$8,958
Watering	\$46,446	\$9,800
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$55,404</b>	<b>\$18,758</b>

In addition to the above evaluation of obligated and bid costs, consideration was also given to rebidding the project. The City likely did not receive bids from other local contractors because generally, these companies cannot source the specialized native dune plant material in the quantities and sizes specified by FEMA and/or conduct such a large-scale installation in a cost-effective manner. When the City sought quotes earlier in 2025 to plant 27,000 plants at Lighthouse Beach Park, a response of “no bid” was received from all our local contractors who have historically performed this work for the City on much smaller-scale projects.

However, EarthBalance (headquartered in Noth Port, FL) is one of the largest coastal restoration companies in the Southeastern United States and has completed myriad erosion control projects in Southwest Florida including Captiva Erosion Prevention District’s (CEPD) island-wide Captiva Beach renourishment (dune plantings) and erosion control plantings along the Collier County coast (<1,000,000 plants) as part of the County’s Category B berm installation. EarthBalance was the sole bidder on Collier County’s erosion control project and

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has been the subcontractor on the last two CEPD projects (2021 & 2025) as well. EarthBalance was likely the sole bidder for Collier County and subcontracted for the CEPD projects because they have the resources (e.g. multiple nurseries that specialize in native dune plants) throughout Florida and the ability to conduct large-scale dune restoration projects.

Recognizing that rebidding would likely result in the same outcome based on the reasons described above, Tidal Basin has advised that the City would have a strong justification with FEMA to proceed with awarding the contract to the sole bidder (EarthBalance) as a non-competitive/sole-source bid under the "Inadequate Competition" provision of the FEMA procurement policy. Additionally, there are sufficient means to address and minimize the deficit between the FEMA project cost and the bid amount to proceed with awarding the contract.

**FUNDING SOURCE:** FEMA PA allocation in the amount of \$212,607, plus the Non-Federal Share in the amount of \$23,623 provided by FDEM. It is expected that FEMA will also authorize funding for the delivery (\$14,850) and installation (\$149,500) tasks as omissions from the initial project report. The remaining \$18,759 for gel packs and watering is available in the FY25/26 TDC beach park planting budget (\$40,000 included in operating budget for the [Natural Resources Beach Parking department](#)) if deemed ineligible by FEMA.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Staff recommends that City Council award Sanibel's Island-wide Beach Erosion Control Contract ITB-NR-1-2026/BS to EarthBalance Corporation in the amount of \$397,494 and authorize the City Manager to execute the agreement.

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