

SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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TO: All Design Review Board Members

FROM: Will Travis, Executive Director [415/352-3653 travis@bcdc.ca.gov]
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**SUBJECT: Cooley Landing Improvements, in the City of East Palo, San Mateo County;
Pre-Application Review**
(For Board consideration on May 10, 2010)

Project Summary

Project Sponsor: City of East Palo Alto, San Mateo County.

Project Representatives. Callendar Associates Landscape Architecture Inc., and Lily Lee, Cooley Landing Project Manager.

Project Site and Ownership. Cooley Landing is an approximately nine-acre peninsula located at the terminus of Bay Road, in the City of East Palo Alto, San Mateo County. An approximately 3.8-acre, east-west oriented parcel occupying the center of the site is owned by the City of East Palo Alto. Two parcels located to the north and south of the City's property are owned by the Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District. (Exhibit 1)

Site History and Existing Conditions. In 1849, a port was established at the site and operated for several decades. Later, the site was used for various enterprises, including dairy and poultry operations, boat repairs, and a landfill. The site is no longer used for commercial operations, and most of the remnant infrastructure (e.g., an approximately 3,000-square-foot building, a boat launch, and a pedestrian bridge) is in a state of disrepair and/or unused. A gravel parking lot at the site serves the adjacent Ravenswood Open Space Preserve, the Baylands Nature Preserve, and the San Francisco Bay Trail directly to the north and south. The site is relatively flat with slightly higher elevations at perimeter areas and a couple of depressions where earlier commercial activity occurred, e.g., a former dredged material site. (Exhibit 2)

Two east-west oriented, 20-foot-wide jetties exist at the site, which are armored with rock rip-rap and concrete debris—this type of armoring material is found elsewhere along the site's shoreline. Existing vegetation at the upland area consists mostly of non-native grasslands, ruderal habitat, coastal scrub, and trees (e.g., eucalyptus, coast live oak). Seasonal marsh and mudflat exist along the southeast shoreline and at the area between the two jetties. The site serves as an undeveloped link between the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve to the south and the Ravenswood Open Space Preserve to the north, which provide habitat for the special-



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listed California Clapper Rail and Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse. No endangered species or species of concern are known to exist at the project site.

Project Description. The proposed project would involve the creation of a public park with recreational and educational facilities. Approximately 5.35 acres of the project proposal are within the Commission's 100-foot shoreline band jurisdiction. A total of 1,860 square feet (0.04 acres) is proposed as Bay fill.

As proposed, the main entrance road (Bay Road) would be improved and the existing gravel parking lot located near the park entrance expanded to accommodate overflow parking. A 12-foot-wide paved pedestrian and bicycle path originating at the park entrance would be developed along with several unpaved five-foot-wide spur trails. Various improvements would occur throughout the project site, including landscaping and earthen berms, lighting, a trash enclosure, seating, bike racks, and interpretive exhibits. At its eastern end, Bay Road would terminate at a turn-around and provide visitor parking and drop-off space, including for buses. The turn-around would be located directly adjacent to a large gathering area. The site would accommodate a total of 77 parked vehicles. (Exhibit 3)

At the southeastern end of the peninsula, a 425-square-foot, 14-foot-high public restroom would be constructed with an adjacent picnic area and an amphitheatre-style outdoor classroom. On the southwestern side of the site, a pile-supported viewing pier would be constructed above a restored marsh area and adjacent to a restored boathouse accommodating classrooms, meetings, a kitchen, and boat and equipment storage, and an interpretive outdoor exhibit. (Exhibit 4) Other features at the eastern end of the peninsula include a potential kayak launch ramp and a fishing pier. (Exhibit 5) As proposed, the restored boathouse would measure approximately 24 feet at the highest point and approximately 18.5 feet high at the remainder of the structure. (Exhibit 6).

Exhibits 7 through 9 provide the visitor's perspective of the site at the gathering/entry plaza, at the outdoor interpretive exhibit area, and at the outdoor classroom. Proposed in phases, the project would be constructed as follows: Phase I, involving site preparation and the development of the 12-foot-wide paved trail; Phase II, involving improvements to Bay Road; Phase III, involving construction of the Bay Road turn-around area, adjacent gathering plaza, and the restored boathouse; Phase IV, involving development of the outdoor classroom; Phase V, involving installation of the interpretive areas and trail spurs; and Phase VI, involving construction of the viewing pier, kayak boat launch, and fishing pier. (Exhibit 10)

San Francisco Bay Plan Policies. The Bay Plan **Public Access** policies state, in part, that "a proposed fill project should increase public access to the Bay to the maximum extent feasible." Further, these policies state that access should be designed "to encourage diverse Bay-related activities and movement to and along the shoreline," be conveniently located near parking and public transit, "permit barrier free access for the physically handicapped...and include an ongoing maintenance program." Additionally, these policies state in part that "public access should be sited, designed and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife." The Bay Plan **Appearance, Design and Scenic Views** policies state in part that "all bayfront development should be designed to enhance the pleasure of the user or viewer of the Bay." The Bay Plan **Transportation** policies state partly that shoreline projects "should include pedestrian and bicycle paths that will either be a part of the Bay Trail or connect the Bay Trail with other regional and community trails." Finally, the Bay Plan **Recreation** policies state in part that

development “should include public amenities, such as viewing areas, restrooms,...non-motorized small boat launching facilities, [and] public parking....”

Issues Raised. The proposed project involves the establishment of a public recreation and educational facility with various amenities including pedestrian and bicycle pathways, a restored boathouse for lecture and meeting purposes, an amphitheatre-style outdoor classroom, interpretive exhibits, picnic areas, landscaping, a public restroom, a viewing platform adjacent to a restored marsh, a fishing pier, a kayak boat launch ramp, parking for up to 77 vehicles, and a visitor drop-off area for vehicles including buses. The project, whose main building is a restored boathouse, would leave existing Bay and shoreline views mostly unobstructed. Additionally, the site is located adjacent to existing Bay Trail connections and open space areas.

Overall, as proposed, the project appears to raise few issues in conflict with the above-cited Bay Plan policies. However, the Board’s advice is sought on the appearance and design of the project, particularly as the proposed project affects visual and physical access to the Bay and shoreline.