

# SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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**TO:** All Design Review Board Members

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**SUBJECT: Whaler's Point Hotel and Spa (First Review)**  
(For Board consideration on May 9, 2011)

## Project Summary

**Applicant.** Jack Krystal

**Project Representatives.** Don Olsen, AIA and Associates, Architect. Brett T. Long, ASLA, Landscape Architect.

**Site Location.** The proposed project is located at 214 Redwood Highway in an unincorporated portion of Marin County near Sausalito (Exhibit A and B). The site is bounded by Redwood Highway to the south, Parepa Street to the east, Pohono Street and an existing marsh to the west, and Richardson Bay to the north. The upland portion of the site is currently used for storage equipment storage. The portion of the site in the Commission's Bay jurisdiction is largely comprised of marshland.

**Project Proposed and Public Access.** The proposed Whaler's Point Hotel and Spa project would include: (1) a three-story, 72-room hotel, of which approximately 32-rooms would be within the Commission's 100-foot shoreline band jurisdiction; (2) a two-story building and a one-story building for commercial and office space on the Southwest side of Bolinas Street; (3) a swimming pool and pool deck which would be available to hotel guests; (4) a one-story building with a lobby, spa, café, and public restroom; and (5) approximately 137-parking spaces. Proposed public access improvements include an approximately eight-foot-wide trail with landscaping on the upland portion of the site and an eight-foot-wide elevated boardwalk within the adjacent marsh. The project would also include marsh by excavating channels to improve water circulation and possibly expand the marsh by excavating a fringe of a smaller island.

The building containing the lobby, spa, café, and public restroom would be built with a living roof and walls. According to the project proponent, the mounded roof would resemble the rolling hills of Marin, provide wind shelter, and emulate native coastal grassland. Approximately 137-parking spaces are proposed, including: 64-spaces on-site, 73-spaces along



Marin San Francisco Bay Area

Bolinas Street and Parepa Street, 9-ADA-accessible spaces, and 8-spaces public shoreline trail access spaces.

The applicant is proposing an eight-foot-wide, decomposed granite, public access trail with landscaping to connect to the end of Pohono Street along the west side of the site. The project proponents are seeking authorization from the adjacent landowner to connect to the existing public access area Northeast of Pohono Street. Adjacent to the lobby and spa building, the trail would be adjacent to a concrete wall varying in height, up to six feet (Exhibit N). This public path would provide access to the proposed restrooms and the café. The path would then meander to a picnic area at the northeast corner of the site. The proposed trail would then continue on an eight-foot-wide boardwalk over the marsh, raised approximately 4.7 feet above mean high water, to an overlook on a upland island. The raised boardwalk would then continue east and connect to a landscaped area at the end of Parepa Street and an existing public access area at that location. Overall, as proposed, the project would provide approximately 0.68-acres of landscaped public access, and would place approximately 1,870 square feet of fill in the Bay for the raised boardwalk.

The project sponsors are also proposing to enhance approximately 1.07-acres of marsh habitat supporting sparse marsh vegetation and to excavate approximately 5,010 square feet to create new marsh habitat (Exhibit I).

While the Commission may authorize some fill for public access, it may do so only when they can find that there is no alternative to the fill and that the fill is designed to minimize harmful effects to the Bay and its wildlife. With this in mind, the staff believes that the project raises four primary issues for the Board to address in its review of this conceptual plan: (1) whether the proposed project provides useable public access areas; (2) is the public experience provided by the boardwalk and island overlook sufficiently unique to warrant the impact of the Bay fill and the effects of human intrusion into the marsh; (3) whether the proposed project provides, maintains and enhances visual access to and the visual quality of the Bay and the shoreline; and (4) whether the proposed project is adequately designed to address the effect of sea level rise on public access areas.

### **Public Access Issues**

1. **Does the proposed project provide useable public?** The *Public Access Design Guideline* state that, “[s]horeline access areas are most enjoyed when they are designed to encourage diverse, Bay-related activities.” The guidelines further state this may be accomplished by, “providing basic public amenities, such as trails, benches, play opportunities, trash containers, drinking fountains, lighting and restrooms that are designed for different ages, interests and physical abilities,” and that shoreline areas should “maximize comfort” and “take advantage of existing site characteristics.” Further, public access should be designed, “so that, the user is not intimidated nor is the user’s appreciation diminished by large nearby building masses, structures, or incompatible uses.”

The proposed public access includes landscaping and an approximately 8-foot-wide path along the western edge of the project site. Directly adjacent to the one-story building with the living roof and approximately 15-feet from the edge of marsh vegetation, the path would lead to a group of picnic tables and connect to the proposed boardwalk (Exhibit M, Section C and Exhibit N). A portion of this trail traverses an area just slightly wider than the eight-foot-wide trail. Another section of this western trail goes through a wide, oddly

shaped public access area that consists of a mound of no-mow grasses. The remaining section of this western trail abuts the picnic area with tall trees. The proposed 8-foot-wide, 4.7-foot above the marsh plan boardwalk would extend out over the marsh to an island with a small viewing platform. The boardwalk would also connect to the eastside of the site and terminate with a small landscaped area at the end of Parepa Street (Exhibit H).

The project as proposed would provide no access along the Northern upland edge of the site, and the hotel itself would be 13.5-feet from the existing top of bank, which quickly transitions to salt marsh habitat (Exhibit M, Section D). In earlier site plans and discussions, a path was provided along the Northern upland edge of the site. As proposed, the project does not provide any public access along Parepa Street.

The Board's advice is sought on whether the proposed public access areas are: (a) useable; (b) sufficiently wide to be attractive and encourage public use; and (c) have been designed and are at locations that would foster appreciation of the Bay.

2. **Does the Boardwalk provide a unique experience?** The Commission's law and policies discourage public access in sensitive habitat except where such access has been "sited, designed and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife". The *Public Access Design Guidelines* states that access should avoid adverse effects on wildlife, and that projects should, "provide spur trails to reduce informal access into and through more sensitive areas," and that "viewing platforms and overlooks can confine public use while providing visual access."

The Board's advice is sought on whether the boardwalk and island overlook proposed by the project provide sufficient public benefit to warrant intrusion into the marsh. Such a trail would bisect the marsh and introduce people into its middle. Such access through the marsh may degrade the existing habitat. The Board should consider whether the connection and experience that such a trail would provide could be provided by locating the trail on the northern upland edge of the project site. If the trail is relocated along the northern edge, where only a few feet of upland would be available with the hotel's proposed configuration, how far back should the hotel be pulled so that this trail segment is not overwhelmed by the building mass and diminished by its shade?

3. **Does the proposed project provide, maintain and enhance visual access to and visual quality of the Bay and the shoreline?** The Public Access Design Guidelines state that visual access should organize structures to "enhance and dramatize views of the Bay and the shoreline from public thoroughfares and other public spaces," and to "allow Bay views and access between buildings." Further, the Public Access Design Guidelines state that a shoreline development should, "use building footprints to create a diversity of public spaces along the Bay," and "utilize the shoreline for Bay-related land uses as much as possible."

The existing uses of the site block views to the Bay. The proposed view corridors would be down Pohono Street and Parepa Street (Exhibit J). Staff is concerned that both view corridors rely on lands adjacent to the property that are not owned by the project proponent and where parking both exists and is proposed that would significantly block views from Bolinas Street and Redwood Highway. In addition, as shown on Exhibit J and Exhibit O, the preliminarily landscape plans utilize a variety of trees, including the Coast Live Oak and Red Alder, that may significantly impact visual access from Bolinas Street to the shoreline.

The Board should advise the Commission whether the proposed project would maximize views of the Bay from the project location and nearest public road, whether the project would enhance the visual quality to the Bay and shoreline; and whether the view corridors are adequate for the proposed project.

4. **Is the project designed to address the effect of sea level rise on public access areas?** Based on the California Climate Action Team Reports on Climate Change, the expected sea level rise rates are as follows: (1) a low rate of 0.08 inches (2 mm) per year; (2) a medium rate of 0.18 in (4.6 mm) per year; and (3) a higher rate of 0.55 in (14 mm) per year. Using these

numbers, the Commission is currently recommending that bayfront developments consider designing for a 16-inch sea level rise value by mid-century and a 55-inch sea level rise value by end of century above the 100-year high tide.

Based on Exhibit M, the proposed raised boardwalk would be built approximately 12-inches above the 100-year high tide, and the hotel building and pool deck would both be approximately 24-inches above the 100-year high tide. While this project is still in the conceptual phase, the boardwalk in the marsh seems likely susceptible to sea level rise by mid-century. Staff is unsure how the applicant proposes to address future sea level rise and little space is available for on-site adaptation for both the boardwalk and up-land public access and hotel areas.

The Board should evaluate the proposal and advise the Commission whether the proposed project is adequately designed to address the effect of sea level rise on the public access areas.