

# SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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**TO:** All Design Review Board Members

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**SUBJECT: Benicia Waterfront Park (First Review)**  
(For Board consideration on May 5, 2014)

## Project Summary

**Applicant:** City of Benicia

**Project Representatives:** Victor Randall, City of Benicia; David Early, Placeworks

**Project Site.** The project site is an approximately 16-acre waterfront park owned by the City of Benicia and located south of B Street, in the City of Benicia, Solano County. The project site is bordered by First Street and the First Street Peninsula Pier to the west, B Street and residential development to the north, the Benicia Marina to the east, and the Carquinez Strait to the south. The park includes trails, a grass lawn ("First Street Green"), tidal and seasonal wetlands, and remnants of a historic railroad alignment through the property. There are two commercial parcels adjacent to the park at the end of First Street; a historic train depot occupies one parcel and the other parcel is currently vacant.

In 2004, a measure was passed by citizen petition to allow only passive recreational uses within the park. The measure called for the preservation of park wetlands and prohibited any permanent sports fields, courts, or equipment. The park currently serves and would continue to serve as a community gathering space for local festivals and other low impact recreational uses. Permanent buildings are also prohibited, except for a public restroom or other similar amenities.

**Proposed Park Enhancements.** The City of Benicia is undergoing a community planning process to inform the design of future park enhancements. The design alternative most favored by the community involves a Bay Trail alignment parallel to B Street, a perimeter trail around the First Street Green, a boardwalk trail over the marsh following the historic railroad alignment, a reconfigured First Street Green, wetland enhancements, and various park amenities such as public art, observation platforms, and seating areas (Exhibit B – "Draft Preferred Alternative"). While the design is conceptual at this stage, it is anticipated that elements of the project may include:

1. An entry plaza at the corner of First Street and B Street with seat walls and public art;
2. A secondary plaza at the eastern end of the site, also incorporating seating and public art;
3. A plaza around the existing depot building;
4. An expanded and elevated First Street Green;
5. A paved, ten-foot-wide trail with two-foot-wide shoulders parallel to B Street;
6. An approximately six- to ten-foot-wide perimeter trail around the First Street Green;



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7. A boardwalk over the marsh composed of wood or composite material following the historic railroad alignment, with designated viewing platforms overlooking the wetlands and the Carquinez Strait;
8. Improved beach access at the foot of First Street, located north of the peninsula and west of First Street;
9. Widened sidewalks and palm trees on the east side of First Street, to mirror the promenade already completed on the west side of First Street; and
10. Diagonal or perpendicular parking along the park edge on the southern side of B Street and improved parking at the east end of B Street.

Various alternative park designs have been considered and are shown in Exhibits O-S. The preferred design (Exhibit B) was chosen from among the alternatives considered, in part, because it would provide more space for recreational use on the First Street Green adjacent to First Street and existing commercial areas. Enhanced wetlands would be located adjacent to B Street, which is a quiet, residential street. Wetland areas adjacent to B Street may also provide some flood protection for the trail and street in the face of future sea level rise. One additional primary reason this preferred alternative was chosen is due to the community's long-standing vision and desire for a boardwalk that would retrace the historic railroad alignment and pass through the area that is now marsh.

**Design Review Issues.** Staff requests that the Board comment on the overall conceptual park design and consider what amenities may be appropriate for the park.

1. **Conceptual Park Design.** The *San Francisco Bay Plan* Public Access policies state: “[i]mprovements should be designed and built to encourage...movement to and along the shoreline...[and] should permit barrier free access for persons with disabilities.” Public access should also “be sited, designed, and managed to prevent adverse effects on wildlife.”

A variety of trails are proposed as part of the park enhancements, including a Bay Trail alignment along B Street, a perimeter trail around the First Street Green, and a boardwalk trail over the marsh following the historic railroad alignment. The proposed design also involves a reconfigured First Street Green, new plazas, and enhanced wetlands.

*The Board should comment on the overall conceptual plan for the park. The Board should respond to the configuration of the proposed trails, the First Street Green, and the plazas. Does the proposed design encourage movement to and along the shoreline within the park? The Board should consider if the proposed boardwalk trail over the marsh is appropriate in light of potential adverse impacts to wildlife and sensitive habitat. Would an alternative boardwalk alignment minimize adverse human and wildlife interactions? The Board may also want to comment on the previous design alternatives considered, and whether any elements of the previous design alternatives should be retained (see Exhibits O-S).*

2. **Park Amenities.** The *Public Access Design Guidelines* state that public access spaces should be “designed and built to encourage diverse, Bay-related activities along the shoreline,” to create a “sense of place,” and be “designed for a wide range of users.” The *Guidelines* further state “view opportunities, shoreline configuration and access points are factors that determine a site’s inherent public access opportunities.”

*At this stage, the park planning process has focused on the conceptual plan for the park with minimal emphasis on the type of amenities that would eventually be provided as part of the park improvements. Therefore, the Board’s advice is sought as to what amenities may be most appropriate for the site. The Board may want to consider seating, parking, landscaping, and the design of the three plaza areas. How can the amenities be optimally sited to encourage diverse, Bay-related activities and to take advantage of viewing opportunities afforded at the site?*