

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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TO: Design Review Board Members

FROM: Lawrence J. Goldzband, Executive Director (415/352-3653; larry.goldzband@bcdca.gov)
Ellen Miramontes, Bay Design Analyst (415/352-3643; ellen.miramontes@bcdca.gov)
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SUBJECT: Approved Minutes of December 7, 2015 BCDC Design Review Board Meeting

1. **Call to Order and Attendance.** Board Vice Chair Steve Thompson called the meeting to order at approximately 5:40 p.m. Other Design Review Board (DRB or Board) members in attendance included Karen Alschuler, Ephraim Hirsch, Tom Leader and Gary Strang. BCDC staff in attendance included Jhon Arbelaez, Bob Batha, Brad McCrea, Jaime Michaels, Ellen Miramontes, Matthew Trujillo and Marc Zeppetello.

2. **Approval of Draft Minutes for the September 14, 2015 Meeting.** The Board approved these minutes with no revisions.

3. **Oracle Educational Facility, Redwood City (1st Pre-Application Review).** The Board conducted a first pre-application review on a proposal to construct a two-story, 64,000-square-foot high school building, an associated parking lot, and associated public access improvements at a 4.28-acre undeveloped parcel at Oracle Parkway adjacent to Belmont Slough, in the City of Redwood City, San Mateo County. The proposed public access facilities include improvements to the San Francisco Bay Trail, landscaping, seating, parking, and bicycle racks. The Board's review focused on issues concerning the design and adequacy of proposed public access, potential project impacts on public views, and project resiliency to future sea level rise.

a. **Staff Presentation.** Jaime Michaels introduced the project and the issues identified in the staff report, which included whether: the proposed public access would accommodate site use and facilitate diverse activities; the public access area would be designed to minimize wildlife impacts at Belmont Slough; the parking lot and exterior patios would facilitate maximum public use during non school hours; the access areas are be designed to avoid impacts of sea level rise; and the project would affect public views of the Bay from Oracle Parkway.

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Ms. Michaels made note of a letter received from the Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge and distributed this to the Board. The Committee asked the Board to consider, among other things, the proposed project's compatibility with natural resources located in adjacent Belmont Slough.

b. **Project Presentation.** Tom Gilman with DES Architects + Engineers introduced Colleen Cassidy with Oracle Education Foundation who described the proposed school and the process that has taken place to date for its design and planning. Mr. Gilman briefly described the existing site context and conditions before providing a detailed description of the proposed project.

c. **Board Questions.** Following the presentation, the Board asked several questions.

Mr. Leader asked questions to better understand the proposed project elevations in relation to projected sea level rise. The project representatives explained that the FEMA requirement for the finished floor elevation (FFE) of the building is 10 feet in elevation and that Redwood City requires the project be one foot higher than the FEMA requirement so the proposed FFE is 11 feet in elevation.

Mr. Hirsch noted the soil in this area is prone to settlement and wondered whether the building would be set on piles, which the project representatives confirmed. He also asked what one would see through the central transparent entry. It was explained that one would see a landscaped slope reaching up to the top of the levee where the Bay Trail would sit but not the slough since it sits at a lower elevation behind the levee. Mr. Hirsch also asked about the various heights of the building and sought to better understand why some areas are lower. It was explained that the two lower areas of the building are for the administrative area and the cafeteria and that the Redwood City Architectural Advisory Committee had requested some portions of the building to be lower.

Mr. Strang asked whether BCDC's laws and policies put any restrictions on the proposed buildings. Ms. Miramontes explained that BCDC does not restrict heights or uses of proposed structures within its 100-foot shoreline band jurisdiction and can only seek maximum feasible public access, consistent with the project. He also asked whether a landscape architect was involved in the project. Mr. Gilman answered that an in-house landscape architect at DES Architects + Engineers was working on the project.

Ms. Alschuler asked whether the proposed school would be public, how many students the school would have, why the school does not have a permanent home now and why it is desirable to have the school at this proposed location. It was stated that the school would be public and have 550 total students. Ms. Cassidy with Oracle Education Foundation explained that this proposed location was a piece of undeveloped land that Oracle had available and that the proximity of the school to the high-tech Oracle campus would be advantageous for the school.

Mr. Strang asked how the school would keep the public out of school areas when it is in session. Mr. Leader commented that fences would be undesirable. The project representatives explained that the school has a “closed campus” policy so students are not allowed to leave the campus unaccompanied and when they are in outdoor school areas they would always have visual supervision.

Mr. Hirsch asked how many access points there would be connecting to the Bay Trail. The various connections to the trail were pointed out.

Mr. Thompson asked whether the school requires tuition and also how students were selected. It was stated that no tuition is required and that there would be a blind lottery if applications exceeded the number of spaces available for each grade.

Mr. Hirsch asked for clarification on what services and products Oracle offers. Ms. Cassidy explained that Oracle provides hardware and software designed to run large enterprises.

Ms. Alschuler asked where the proposed decorative asphalt finishes would occur within the project site. Mr. Gilman explained that it was envisioned that the students would be involved in an art project to design asphalt finish patterns to be used in the school parking lot.

Mr. Thompson commented that pet control in areas with sensitive habitat has been a long-standing problem and asked how the project applicant would address this issue. A project representative stated that low woven wire fences could assist in controlling pets and that litter would be contained in receptacles provided. The project representative suggested that the students could form a group to help oversee the protection of this sensitive wildlife habitat.

Mr. Strang asked why the building is located exactly in this proposed location. It was explained that, as a school, the building is required to be located a certain minimum distance away from the power lines located along the western end of the site.

d. **Public Hearing.** One member of the public commented on the project. Carole Wong, a resident of Redwood Shores for more than 20 years, explained that she participates as a member of the Redwood Shores Owners Association and also as a task force member on the Inner Harbor Task Force. She stated that her main concern was that the public would still be able to use the Bay Trail when school is in session. She also read a letter provided to her by a local architect with concerns regarding the project. The architect was concerned how the project was prepared to address sea level rise in the future and was also confused by the various tidal datums that had been referenced in project materials.

e. **Board Discussion.** The Board members discussed the following:

Mr. Strang commented that it is interesting the proposed FFE is so low compared to the trail elevation. Ms. Miramontes clarified BCDC policies regarding climate change by explaining that while the Commission may require for the public access to be resilient through 2050 and to be viable for the life of the project, the Commission cannot require the proposed project use it is authorizing to be viable for a certain length of time.

Mr. Strang noted that the parking lot design could be much improved by possibly adding permeable paving and/or more trees.

Mr. Leader noted that the patio areas adjacent to the school will be set down low compared to the trail height and that in order to “flush out” undesired activities in these lower areas, it would be beneficial to have additional access points connecting to the trail. He also mentioned that he wished the building elevation could be higher than was proposed to create a better relationship between the school and the trail. The Board discussed that it would be very important for there be defined hours of public use for the outdoor areas surrounding the school.

Mr. Strang noted that it would be desirable to keep all path connections to less than 5 percent in slope in order to avoid the requirement for handrails.

Mr. Leader noted that the sidewalk connection between the parking lot and the school appeared very narrow and should be widened.

Ms. Alschuler drew the Board’s attention to the list of staff questions posed in the summary. She acknowledged that the proposed project would represent an intensification of use along the shoreline and stated that it is important for the Bay Trail to continue to function without hindrance. She observed that the design indicated that the Bay Trail Plaza would cross the Bay Trail and noted that the school should not try to take over the trail but rather respect and enhance the passage of the trail in front of it. Ms. Alschuler noted that the proposed landscaping should be closely related to the adjacent slough.

Mr. Strang noted that it was unfortunate that the parking lot occupies the widest portion of the site. He stated that the parking lot design could be made to be more courtyard-like so that it would be more flexible for other uses when not occupied with cars. He noted that softer paving surfaces in some areas and more definition around the perimeter would help the parking lot design.

The central entry was discussed in more detail and the Board commented that they would like for the public to be able to pass through this portion of the building through an open-air corridor. It was also mentioned that there could be fewer columns in front of the building and they could be repositioned in order to improve these views towards the slough.

The proximity of the project to habitat was discussed and the need to provide measures that would assist in protecting the adjacent wildlife areas.

Mr. Thompson stated a desire to see more details on the public access amenities including lighting, trash receptacles and more opportunities for student bike parking.

f. **Applicant Response.** The project applicants were offered the opportunity to provide comments in response to the Board’s discussion. Dawn Jenkins with DES Architects + Engineers made the following comments:

She explained that the central corridor portion of the school is designed to serve as a multi-use space for gathering and also to provide connectivity throughout the school. The front door would be unlocked and a receptionist would sit in this area to greet visitors. This area is designed to be very open visually but it would be difficult for the school if it were physically open as the school would no longer have a large gathering space and the fabrication lab would be exposed as well.

She agreed with the comment that the Bay Trail should be kept dominant over the school and it would be better to continue the use of asphalt paving in front of the school.

Regarding the proposed project elevations, Ms. Jenkins believes the school and its outdoor areas will feel visually connected to the Bay Trail and the slough because the area between would be a shallow landscaped slope. She agreed the landscaping choices should work to connect the school with its outer environment.

Ms. Jenkins stated that the hours for public use of the outdoor school areas would be dependent on public transportation schedules for the students. She mentioned that more access points between the school and the trail could be incorporated. And finally, she noted that the design team will look into the proposed column arrangement in order to maximize views to the slough.

g. **Board Summary and Conclusions.** The Board made the following summary and conclusions:

(1) **Increase connectivity to the Bay Trail.** The Board discussed several ways to improve and make additional connections to the Bay Trail, including the following:

(a) In order to improve views and a sense of openness through the center of the building, the Board recommended that the building be redesigned so that the central entry space serves as an open-air breezeway through which the public could pass when the school is not in use. Additionally, one member suggested that the columns supporting the overhead entryway facing Oracle Parkway be relocated in order to maximize views towards the slough.

(b) The Board stated that the narrow sidewalk connection between the proposed parking lot and the school building should be widened and designed to be more obvious as a public access connection to the Bay Trail.

(c) The Board discussed that there should be more small pathway connections to the outdoor patios, which would be available for public use during non-school hours. In particular, the Board suggested that there be a paved path connection to the patio space located at the far eastern end of the building.

(d) One Board member recommended that all path connections be designed to slope less than 5 percent in order to avoid the need for handrails.

(2) **Design the “Bay Trail Plaza” to appear as part of the Bay Trail rather than as part of the school.** The Board discussed that it is important for this plaza space to feel public and not appear as an encroachment by the school. They suggested this could be accomplished by reconsidering the paving choices in this area.

(3) **Plant choices should be closely related to the site's location adjacent to Belmont Slough.** While the Board noted the presentation indicated that the landscaping would be drought tolerant, they would like for the plant choices to be carefully selected in consideration of the adjacent marsh.

(4) **Improve parking lot design.** The Board suggested that the design of the parking lot be more interesting. They suggested incorporating more trees, possibly permeable paving and redesigning the layout so that it could be usable for other functions when not used as a parking lot.

(5) **Defined schedule for public use of outdoor patios and parking lot.** The Board stated that the hours for when the school's outdoor areas would be available for the public should be clearly set forth in the permit.

(6) **Design public access areas to be compatible with adjacent wildlife habitat.** Given the project's close proximity to wildlife habitat, the Board suggested that measures be taken to address any concerns regarding compatibility of the public access with the habitat.

(7) **More information needed on sea level rise adaptations.** The Board wanted to better understand how the project may adapt to sea level rise over time.

4. **Adjournment.** Mr. Thompson adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

ELLEN MIRAMONTES
Bay Design Analyst

Approved, with no corrections at the
Design Review Board Meeting of January 11, 2016.