

# San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

455 Golden Gate Avenue, Suite 10600, San Francisco, California 94102 tel 415 352 3600 fax 415 352 3606

May 25, 2017

**TO:** Design Review Board Members

**FROM:** Lawrence J. Goldzband, Executive Director (415/352-3653 [larry.goldzband@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:larry.goldzband@bcdc.ca.gov))  
Andrea Gaffney, Bay Design Analyst (415/352-3643 [andrea.gaffney@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:andrea.gaffney@bcdc.ca.gov))  
Hanna Miller, Coastal Program Analyst (415/352-3616 [hanna.miller@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:hanna.miller@bcdc.ca.gov))

**SUBJECT: Albany Beach Restoration and Public Access Project; Second Review**  
(For Design Review Board consideration on June 5, 2017)

## Project Summary

**Project Sponsor.** East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD)

**Project Representatives.** Chris Barton (EBRPD); Karla Cuero (EBRPD); Bob Nesbit (EBRPD); Patrick Miller (2M Associates); Carl Nelson (Questa Engineering); Jeff Peters (Questa); Margaret Henderson (Questa); Tom Hawbaker (Questa)

**Project Site.** The proposed Albany Beach Restoration and Public Access Project is located in the City of Albany, Alameda County, between the termini of Buchanan Street (north) and Gilman Street (south), and within EBRPD's Albany Bulb, Neck, and Plateau area, and west of the Golden Gate Fields Racetrack in the City of Berkeley, Alameda County. (Figures 1 and 2)

**Property Ownership.** The northern section of the project site (Albany Beach) is jointly owned by the EBRPD and the State of California. The EBRPD also intends to acquire the proposed parking lot area from the MEC Land Holding, Inc., who owns the adjacent Golden Gate Fields racetrack. Additionally, the EBRPD holds a 30-foot-wide easement (from MEC Land Holding, Inc.) over the southern section of the proposed project. (Figure 3)

**Existing Conditions.** The project site was originally constructed with imported fill except for Fleming Point. (Figure 12) The proposed project is part of a multi-phase effort to improve the EBRPD's Albany Beach Park and incorporate it into the McLaughlin Eastshore State Park. Phase 1 (completed) involved the enhancement of public paths, picnic facilities, shoreline improvements, and natural habitat at the park. (Figure 4) The San Francisco Bay Trail (Bay Trail) extends along Buchanan Street to the terminus at the Albany Beach Park. At the beach area, the following facilities are currently available: a portable toilet; 40 vehicle parking spaces with fencing at the parking lot boundary at Buchanan Street; a eucalyptus tree grove; a seasonal wetland; beach dunes; and eelgrass in the Bay along the west and south rip-rapped shorelines. Recreational fishing occurs at the peninsulas located at the south end of the beach. Albany Beach is a proposed

San Francisco Bay Water Trail location. (Figure 4) The public enters the beach area via an unpaved trail at the terminus of Buchanan Street and through the dunes. The site does not have formal access to the southern shoreline (extending to Gilman Street) of the proposed project area, however people informally access this area from the Golden Gate Fields parking lot adjacent to the beach. The public is able to park in the Golden Gate Fields parking lot for free if the racetrack is closed and for a small fee if the racetrack is open. Presently, users of the entire site are walkers (with and without dogs), bicyclists, kite surfers, and people with children.

**Proposed Project.** The project is located within the Commission’s 100-foot shoreline band jurisdiction and a Waterfront Park/Beach Priority Use Area designated in the *San Francisco Bay Plan* (Bay Plan). An upland section of the project is located outside of the Commission’s jurisdiction.

EBRPD has submitted an application to the BCDC staff for review. No other governmental or local approvals are required for this project. EBRPD is still in the process of acquiring the property adjacent to the beach area. Construction is anticipated to begin in May, 2018 and be completed in November, 2019.

Since the Board’s first review on April 17, 2017, EBRPD and it’s representatives have met with the members of the public who spoke at the April meeting, held a public meeting with the City of Albany, and have worked with BCDC staff to incorporate the Board’s comments. The updated project now involves:

#### **1. Albany Beach Park (northern section)**

- a. A gated vehicular entrance at Buchanan Street with a 20-foot-wide roadway with a 20-vehicle parking area (three compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards), three temporary vehicle loading spaces, 26 bicycle parking spaces (including 6 spaces for tandem bicycles or bicycles with trailers), a 60-foot diameter vehicle turn-around, a 0.5-acre grass open use area, and 5,924 square feet of bio-swales for stormwater management (Figure 5);
- b. A Bay Trail section approximately 735-foot-long, with a 14-foot-wide main path and 2-foot-wide shoulders starting at the terminus of Buchanan Street and heading south, at an elevation of 12 feet (NAVD88) (Figures 5 and 11);
- c. One vault toilet at the north end of the beach (Figure 7);
- d. One picnic area northwest of the existing eucalyptus grove (Figure 5);
- e. A rain garden, seasonal wetland (existing and unchanged), and dune system (enhanced; height up to 16 feet NAVD88) restricted from public access with 48-inch-high access control fencing with three gates and a two- to three-foot-high vegetated buffer at the dune eastern edge to prevent sand from migrating onto the adjacent Bay Trail. (Figures 5 and 8);
- f. Two beach access points from the Bay Trail—a 5-foot-wide spur trail with an accessible beach mat at the terminus (north) and an overlook access that slopes down to a paved landing area with benches (south);

- g. A 36-foot-diameter beach overlook (adjacent to vehicle loading area) adjusted in form and in location from the previous design, with interpretive panels and a seat wall (Figure 6); and
- h. An 0.5-acre expanded beach with a minimum elevation of 10 feet (NAVD88) with a set-up area that is 100 feet wide for kite boarders at the southern end of the beach with a sand wall to prevent drifts on to the trail. (Figure 5)

## 2. San Francisco Bay Trail Extension (southern section)

- a. An approximately 4,000-foot-long (0.75-mile) Bay Trail segment, connected to the southern end of the proposed trail at Albany Beach and terminating at Gilman Street. (Figure 16) The 12-foot-wide main pathway continues along the entire length with gravel shoulders varying between 1.5 feet and 3 feet wide. No shoulders would be provided where the trail has a guardrail. To reduce the overall grade of the trail between Gilman and Albany Beach, the Bay Trail would be elevated or set below the adjacent existing grade. A 48-inch-tall guardrail with a handrail would be installed when the grade would be greater than 4.5% or 30 inches above adjacent grade. The 48-inch height protects both pedestrians and cyclists. As proposed, the trail would be constructed mostly on land and on a 200-foot-long bridge structure along the shoreline adjacent to the hill at Fleming Point. At various points where the trail intersects other paths, the Bay Trail would be striped with a 4-foot-wide pedestrian path on the bayward side and an 8-foot-wide bicycle path on the landward side to suggest circulation path organization for cyclists and pedestrians. Trail sections are characterized as “permanent” and “interim” as, at a future date (20 to 25 years from the date of project construction), the adjacent racetrack would likely be converted to a new use at which time more area could become available for expansion of the interim Bay Trail sections (Figure 13).
- b. Two overlooks have been incorporated into the Bay Trail: An overlook at Fleming Point North Vista (Figure 14) and at the Fleming Point South Vista at the north end of the Jockey parking lot (Figure 15). Existing trees at the overlook locations will be preserved as much as feasible.
- c. A gentle slope (4:1 grade) from the trail to the fishing peninsula south of the beach area would be provided to allow access to the peninsula from the trail, and possibly from Golden Gate Fields where space in the easement allows. (Section 4)

**First Board Review.** At the first Board review of the project on April 17, 2017, the Board made the followings comments. EBRPD provided a memo to BCDC staff on May 8, 2017 outlining how the Board’s comments have been incorporated into the design, and is summarized below.

1. **The Board recommended creating a better sense of arrival at the Albany Beach site and analyze how the site will be used over time and during events.** The board suggested clustering amenities toward the Buchanan Street entrance. EBRPD has since explained that any improvements along Buchanan Street would be on the City of Albany’s (City) property and would need to be undertaken by the City. The City has created the Albany Neck and Bulb Transition Study that addresses some of the needs to redesign the Buchanan Street interface at the park boundary. A gate has been added at the entrance to the driveway and parking lot so that the parking area may be closed to vehicular access during crowd-gathering and staging during events.

2. **The Board recommended shifting the parking and vehicular access north to allow for additional public open space in the southern beach section.** EBRPD has modified the plans to move the parking and turnaround further north. (Figure 17) The shift north reduces the amount of paving on the site and allows for the addition of an open space area south of the turnaround. EBRPD believes that it is not feasible to relocate the parking lot at the north end of the site. The proposed design also reflects EBRPD's decision to include parking on their property as part of this project. On May 23, 2017 the City of Albany adopted a resolution to provide space for parking to EBRPD outside of the project area on Buchanan Street. However, the City is not a co-permit applicant for this project and the proposed parking on City property is not being considered for this permit application.
3. **The Board recommended changing the bicycle rack type and modifying the trail configuration at Buchanan Street to allow for a better bicycle turning radius.** EBRPD has changed the bicycle racks to the inverted-U rack system. Additionally, EBRPD has created spaces to accommodate oversized bicycles, including those with trailers. The turning radius at Buchanan Street has been increased from 25 feet to a 40-foot radius to allow easier use by oversized bicycles.
4. **The Board recommended revising the kitesurfer layout and launch area.** EBRPD met with the kitesurfer, Andrew Sullivan, who spoke at the April 17, 2017 Board meeting to understand the launching space needs. The open space area south of the turnaround provides additional space for launching kites. The access control railing has been removed from the southern portion of the site lessen the barrier for kitesurfer launching. Based on further public comment, it is unclear whether the proposed design addresses the kitesurfer launching needs.
5. **The Board recommended revising the planting palette and the sand fence for the dune enhancement area.** EBRPD, in consultation with their biologist, landscape architects, and horticulturists, has further revised their planting palette. EBRPD believes that a less porous fence is needed at this location to prevent wind erosion while the dunes are establishing. Temporary wooden slats will be placed along the wire-mesh fence to decrease the porosity during stabilization. Permanent wooden slats would be placed on the access control fence along the Bay Trail to prevent sand from migrating onto the trail. Continued protection against access by humans and dogs is needed to ensure the continued success of the dunes. Additionally, three access gates have been included in the access control fencing to allow access for maintenance, outdoor education classes, and scientific research. The proposed access control fencing around the dunes addresses a conflict between dune habitat and users of the beach.

**Flooding and Sea Level Rise.** The current 100-year flood elevation for this site is 9.2 feet (NAVD88). The project has an anticipated life until 2060. The anticipated 100-year flood levels for 2050, incorporating 16-inches of sea level rise, is 10.53 feet (NAVD88). The anticipated mean higher high water elevation at the beach at 2050 (including 16-inches of sea level rise) would be 7.5 feet (NAVD88) and the 2050 100-year flood elevation with sea level rise would be 10.53 feet (NAVD88). With these elevations, the beach would be almost entirely inundated and unavailable during large storm events by 2050. The majority of the proposed trail would be elevated above anticipated sea levels through 2050. The northern interim sections (between the southern end of the beach and the fishing peninsula) would be at an elevation of approximately 9 feet (NAVD88) and would be inundated by 2060 (Figures 2 and 3).

## Commission Policies

**San Francisco Bay Plan Policies.** The Bay Plan **Public Access** policies state, in part, that projects “should increase public access to the Bay to the maximum extent feasible.” Further, they state, in part: “Access to and along the waterfront should be provided by walkways, trails, or other appropriate means and connect to the nearest public thoroughfare;” that “diverse and interesting public access experiences should be provided.” These policies also provide that “public access should be sited, designed, managed, and maintained to avoid significant adverse impacts from sea level rise and shoreline flooding,” and that access should be designed consistent with the physical and natural environment and “be sited, designed, and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife.”

The Bay Plan **Recreation** policies state, in part, that “[d]iverse and accessible water-oriented recreational facilities...should be provided” and that “sandy beaches should be preserved...for recreational use...consistent with wildlife protection.” Further, the policies state that waterfront parks “should emphasize hiking, bicycling, riding trails, picnic facilities, swimming, environmental, historical and cultural education and interpretation, viewpoints, beaches, and fishing facilities” and that “[s]ites, features or facilities within designated waterfront parks that provide optimal conditions for specific water-oriented recreational uses should be preserved and, where appropriate, enhanced for those uses...” Additionally, “... [p]ublic parking should be provided in a manner that does not diminish the park-like character of the site...”

Regarding **non-motorized boats**, the Bay Plan Recreation policies state, in part, that “where practicable, access facilities for non-motorized small boats should be incorporated into waterfront parks” and that “access point should be located, improved and managed to avoid significant adverse affects on wildlife and their habitats.” To enhance this use, such areas should include “...launching facilities, restrooms, rigging areas, equipment storage....[and] be accessible...to ensure that boaters can easily launch their watercraft.”

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” and that “[m]aximum efforts should be made to provide, enhance, or preserve views of the Bay and shoreline, especially from public areas...”

The Commission’s **Public Access Design Guidelines** state partly that “public access improvements should be designed for a wide range of users” and that “within every project, public access should be designed to respect all visitors’ experiences of the Bay. Highly active users should always be balanced with opportunities for passive activities...” Additionally, public access should be designed to “provide 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.” The guidelines also state that viewing the Bay is the “most widely enjoyed ‘use’” and projects should be designed to “enhance and dramatize views of the Bay.” Since public access may be near sensitive habitat, the guidelines state that development should “employ appropriate siting, design and management strategies (such as buffers or use restrictions) to reduce or prevent adverse human and wildlife interactions.”

## Board Questions

**The Board’s advice and recommendations are sought on the following issues regarding the design of the proposed public access:**

1. Would the Albany Beach Park and Bay Trail maintain the current uses and encourage more diverse activities and create a “sense of place,” which is unique and enjoyable?
2. Are the proposed public amenities at the total project site appropriate for the area and would they be distributed and designed to meet and balance the needs of the public, and natural resources at the beach area and in the water? Given this beach is a planned Water Trail site, are there additional public amenities that would enhance the site?
3. The sandwall will help keep sand off the trail, but also limits access to the beach. Would the public benefit from the addition of a step on the bayward side of the sandwall to facilitate movement from the turnaround and green open space area to the beach?
4. Are the dimensions and paving materials of the Bay Trail path adequate and appropriate for public use and enjoyment? In particular, are the compacted gravel shoulders an appropriate material?
5. There are several areas that are currently accessible from adjacent properties in which access may be limited by the proposed design of the Bay Trail. These areas include the fishing peninsulas and smaller pocket beaches, the existing overlook at Fleming Point North Vista, and general waterfront access from Golden Gate Fields. What or where are the appropriate/adequate connections to adjacent uses along the Bay Trail?
6. Is the proposed parking at the Albany Beach Park adequate to support anticipated visitors and appropriately located?
7. The proposed design limits access to the expanded dunes and wetland/rain garden area. Given that this is a designated Park Priority Use Area, does the proposed design include the appropriate mix of open and closed areas?
8. Are the plantings appropriate for the beach, dunes, and along the trail in light of their intended uses as dune enhancement, wetland planting, and sand buffer along the trail?
9. Would the public benefit from an accessible beach mat at the overlook on the beach? Should the beach mat at the northern spur trail extend to the water?

**The Board’s advice and recommendations are sought on the following considerations regarding flooding and sea level rise effects on proposed public access amenities:**

10. Given the existing beach will likely be inundated by projected sea levels at mid-century, the expanded beach on the acquired parcel adjacent to the existing beach serves as a resilient adaptation for maintaining beach and water access. Is the acquired parcel adjacent to the beach being maximized for recreational use in consideration of rising sea levels?
11. Interim Bay Trail sections will be flooded before the permanent trail sections, disconnecting the trail in sections. Is the proposed San Francisco Bay Trail appropriately designed to be resilient through mid-century to future sea level rise and flooding?
12. Is the Bay Trail appropriately designed to allow for drainage and stormwater management at adjacent areas, which presently drain to the Bay, or would the proposed design amplify potential flooding issues that could cause maintenance problems for the public access areas?