

# SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

50 California Street • Suite 2600 • San Francisco, California 94111 • (415) 352-3600 • Fax: (415) 352-3606 • www.bcdc.ca.gov

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**TO:** Commissioners and Alternates

**FROM:** Will Travis, Executive Director (415/352-3653 [travis@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:travis@bcdc.ca.gov))  
Brad McCrea, Regulatory Program Director (415/352-3615 [bradm@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:bradm@bcdc.ca.gov))

**SUBJECT: Briefing on Wayfinding to Bay Access Points**  
(For Commission consideration on June 16, 2011)

## Summary and Recommendations

To achieve objectives in the Commission's strategic plan, the Commission's guidance is sought on the best methods to improve wayfinding to Bay access areas from major thoroughfares.

## Staff Report

**Background.** The Commission's strategic plan includes the following objective: "By June 30, 2011, the staff will recommend to the Commission the best methods to improve wayfinding to Bay access points from major thoroughfares." For the purposes of this report, the term "wayfinding" refers to the manner in which people orient themselves and navigate from place to place, particularly to and along the shoreline of the Bay.

**Policy Framework.** The *San Francisco Bay Plan Public Access Policy No. 8* states that, "[a]ccess to and along the waterfront should be provided by walkways, trails, or other appropriate means and connect to the nearest public thoroughfare where convenient parking or public transportation may be available." Additionally, *Public Access Policy No. 10* states that, "[f]ederal, state, regional, and local jurisdictions, special districts, and the Commission should cooperate to provide appropriately sited, designed and managed public access, especially to link the entire series of shoreline parks, regional trail systems (such as the San Francisco Bay Trail) and existing public access areas to the extent feasible...."

The Commission's Public Access Design Guidelines also provide guidance on the topic of wayfinding within the context of site planning. For example, Objective No. 5 suggests connecting shoreline public access with local park and open space systems, public buildings, shopping districts and other public spaces. Further, the public access design guidelines suggest that shoreline access be coordinated with local municipalities to provide for connections, and that the local public street network be used to inform shoreline site design and to extend the public realm to the Bay.

**Current BCDC Practice.** As part of its permit process, the Commission regularly requires that projects located on large sites include a comprehensive public access sign program designed to promote wayfinding to the Bay. Such a condition of approval requires permittees to provide a variety of sign types, such as directional signs, area maps, and informational signs. Additionally, permittees are occasionally required to work with local governments to place shoreline signs along



major thoroughfares near the project site, outside of the Commission's jurisdiction. To assist permit applicants in developing comprehensive sign programs, in 2005, the Commission prepared a set of design guidelines entitled, *Shoreline Signs – Public Access Signage Guidelines*. This document provides detailed suggestions for the design and installation of signs to assist Commission permit holders in meeting the signage requirements specified in Commission permits. It should be noted that these permit requirements for off-site public access signage and improvements are often not included for small projects because such a requirement is deemed unreasonable. Therefore, BCDC's permit requirements alone do not go far enough to significantly improve wayfinding to shoreline access areas around the region.

**A Coordinated Regional Approach.** The ability to improve local wayfinding in the urban setting often relies on coordination, collaboration and a regional strategy among various public agencies. These collaborative efforts can be simple or complex depending on the geographic area considered or the required level of agency involvement. For example, the City of San Carlos and the City of Sunnyvale have installed signage for the San Francisco Bay Trail Project in coordination with the staff at the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). The East Bay Regional Park District embarked on a more ambitious effort and received permission from California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to install wayfinding signage on State highways, marking the highway exits for regional parks. Also, in 2009, the City of Oakland created a document entitled, *Design Guidelines for Bicycle Wayfinding Signage*, that promoted sign improvements for Oakland city streets. The City's guidelines were developed with the input of many stakeholders, including local, regional and state agencies.

In each of these examples, one agency or organization achieved its objective of directing the public to its property or facility by working collaboratively with others to improve wayfinding. But in the case of shoreline access points, the situation is somewhat different. Bay shoreline access areas are owned and managed by myriad entities, including public agencies and private developments. Therefore, in some cases it may not be in the property owner's interest to advertise the shoreline access areas. While public agencies may see the benefit in promoting wayfinding to shoreline access points, other shoreline property owners, particularly private property owners, may be reluctant to support the effort.

To date, no entity has taken on the complex regional effort needed to comprehensively sign inland areas in a manner that directs people to the shoreline. Instead, shoreline wayfinding efforts are currently achieved through BCDC permits on a project-by-project basis, by municipalities that provide local signage directing the public to their waterfront parks, and by some organizations that provide assistance in advertising regional recreational systems, such as the San Francisco Bay Trail.

To deal with the issue of wayfinding at a regional scale, a work plan could be developed in collaboration with other regional stakeholders. In undertaking such a task, the purpose and need of the project would be clarified, the project scope defined and target audiences identified. Some questions to be considered include: Who are the target user groups? (Motorists on state highways? Bicyclists on city streets?) What is the purpose of shoreline wayfinding efforts? (To improve non-motorized transportation to the Bay from transit stations? To advertise local recreational opportunities along city streets for motorists?) Should wayfinding efforts address all Bay access points or are there certain locations that have priority?

In addition to signage, opportunities such as social media or other web-based tools could be explored. For example, Google Earth is a service that allows one to travel the world through a virtual globe and view satellite imagery, maps and terrain. In Google Earth, one can search for businesses, as well as open spaces and parks. Although Bay access points are currently not available on Google Earth, the opportunity for utilizing this technology should be encouraged.

Another possibility is to use Facebook or BCDC's website to showcase different public access areas around the region on a weekly basis.

**Summary.** Maximizing wayfinding to Bay access points, including signage, would require a comprehensive and coordinated approach with many regional stakeholders. A commitment of BCDC staff time would be needed to achieve such a regional effort. In addition to providing physical improvements for wayfinding, such as signage, the Internet could be used to raise public awareness about Bay access points and public access areas.