

SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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TO: All Design Review Board Members

FROM: Will Travis, Executive Director [415/352-3653 travis@bcdc.ca.gov]
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SUBJECT: Exploratorium Relocation Project – Piers 15 and 17, City and County of San Francisco; Fifth Review
(For Board consideration on November 10, 2008)

Project Summary

Project Applicants: The Port of San Francisco and The Exploratorium

Project Representatives: Tom Rockwell, Director of Exhibits, The Exploratorium; Marc L'Italien, Principal, EHDD Architects; Janice Thacher, Project Executive, and James Suh, Project Manager, Wilson Meany Sullivan.

Meeting Topics. The November 10, 2008 meeting will focus on the project applicants' responses to the Design Review Board's prior comments on the following issues: (1) Observatory building cladding material; (2) courtyard site furnishings, including benches, bike racks, trashcans, and railings; and (3) mechanical enclosure at the southwest apron.

Project Site. The proposed project would be located on Piers 15 and 17, along the San Francisco waterfront, near the intersection of Green Street and the Embarcadero, within the City and County of San Francisco. The site consists of the Pier 15 shed and bulkhead building, the Pier 17 shed, a paved parking area between the two piers known as the "valley", the north, south and east apron areas, a building on the eastern end of the valley that physically connects the two pier sheds known as the "connector building", and an approximately 1,579-square-foot free-standing office building within the western portion of the valley. Piers 15 and 17 are contributing resources to the San Francisco Embarcadero National Register Historic District. Currently, Baydelta Maritime leases space at Pier 15 and berths its tugboats along the southern apron of Pier 15.

Proposed Project. The proposed project involves the relocation of the Exploratorium from the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco to Piers 15 and 17 in two phases. The Exploratorium is seeking authorization only for Phase 1 at this time although aspects of the Phase 2 proposal have been presented for context. Authorization for Phase 2 would require a permit amendment and further review and approval in the future. The proposed project assumes the possible relocation of Baydelta Maritime to Pier 17.



Bay Conservation and Development Commission

Under Phase 1, the project applicants would repair, renovate and seismically upgrade the Pier 15 substructure, shed and bulkhead building to house the Exploratorium's exhibits, restaurant, museum store, classrooms, theatre and administrative offices. The project applicants would remove a small office building within the valley and approximately 34,300 square feet of the 98,350-square-foot pile-supported deck that comprises the valley floor. The remaining valley floor would be re-designed as a "courtyard" for public access with a portion reserved as an outdoor exhibit area for paying customers. The project applicants would also remove the existing 27-foot-tall connector building at the east end of the valley and construct a new 31-foot-tall "Observatory" building that could link Pier 15 and Pier 17 in the future. The Observatory would house additional exhibits, a cafeteria, and be used for multi-purpose events. The project applicants are also proposing various curb pull-outs along the Embarcadero sidewalk in front of Piers 15 and 17 and the use of golf carts along the south side of Pier 17 to shuttle patrons to the east end of the piers.

As part of the seismic upgrade of Pier 15, new piles would be driven adjacent to the pier's south apron on the west and east side, that would allow for a wider apron to accommodate public access. A possible water taxi dock along the south apron may be included as Phase 1 to the project. Ceremonial berthing and temporary berthing of naval vessels by the Port are contemplated to remain along the east apron of Piers 15 and 17. The project applicants would build new warehouse/office space within Pier 17 and repair the substructure and deck of the Pier 17 north apron in order to accommodate the relocation of Baydelta Maritime's tug and tow operations. The Pier 17/Pier 19 water basin would also be dredged to accommodate the berthing of Baydelta Maritime's tugboats along the north apron of Pier 17.

If the Exploratorium decides to undertake Phase 2 of the project, it would expand its museum operations into Pier 17 and conduct a similar rehabilitation of the Pier 17 facility. Under the terms of its most recent agreement with the Port of San Francisco, the Exploratorium is required by the 16th year of its lease to occupy at least two-thirds of Pier 17 as a museum or risk losing the lease on that pier.

Prior Board Review and Comments. The Design Review Board (Board) has reviewed this project at four prior meetings.

1. **First Review.** On January 7, 2008, the Board commented on the Embarcadero curb pull-outs and bus drop-off area, use of trees along the Embarcadero, the design of the courtyard, view impacts, circulation around the project site and the incorporation of boats and research vessels into the public access design.
2. **Second Review.** On March 10, 2008, the applicants responded to the Board's comments on the Embarcadero curb pull-outs and bus drop-off area. The Board made additional comments on this issue and requested that the applicants return with further revisions.
3. **Third Review.** On May 5, 2008, the project applicants presented their responses to the Board's remaining five comments raised at the January 7, 2008 meeting (first review), including the use of trees along the Embarcadero, the courtyard, view impacts, circulation, and the incorporation of boats and research vessels. The Board commented on aspects of the Observatory building (formerly known as the "bridge building"), circulation around the proposed project site, the mooring of ships along the east end of the Pier, the placement of

the seismic joint along Pier 15, and asked for more detail on proposed Phase 2 of the project.

4. **Fourth Review.** On August 28, 2008, the applicants returned to the Board and presented a revised public access plan and design for the “courtyard” based on a renegotiated lease with the Port for Piers 15 and 17 during Phase I. At that meeting, the applicants also presented their responses to the prior Board comments on the Embarcadero curb pull-outs and the issues raised at the May 5, 2008 meeting (third review). The Board requested further detail and revisions on the Embarcadero curb pull-outs, and commented on the Observatory building, the courtyard site furnishings, the mechanical enclosure at the southwest apron, and the mooring of ships along the east apron.

The following are the Board’s prior comments on the Observatory building, the courtyard site furnishings, and the mechanical enclosure, and the project applicants’ response. The applicants will return at a later meeting to present their responses to the Board’s comments on the Embarcadero curb pull-outs and the mooring of ships along the east apron.

Prior Board Comment on the Observatory Building. *The Board questioned the use of corten steel on the Observatory Building based on concerns on the possible water quality impacts from run-off and weathering over time.*

Applicants’ Response: (See pages 4 - 7 of the applicants’ booklet). The applicants have revised the cladding on the Observatory building from large sheets of corten steel to a panelized and colored concrete wall with corten steel “accents” placed as horizontal strips midway and near the top of the building. The applicants believe the concrete will “follow the rhythm and vertical jointing of the adjacent curtain wall” as the east wall is painted and poured-in-place concrete and the north and south walls are unpainted precast concrete panels. The applicants believe that the use of weathering materials are appropriate based on the industrial and maritime character of the site and therefore, have chosen to keep some corten steel for use as an accent to the concrete. They believe that the “weathering that will occur over time will be an honest reflection of the interaction of these two materials.” The applicants will bring both colored concrete and glass samples to the meeting.

Prior Board Comment on the Courtyard Site Furnishings. *The Board asked for more detail on the proposed site furnishings for the courtyard, including the placement of benches, bike racks, trash receptacles, railings, exhibits and signage.*

Applicants’ Response: (See pages 8 - 27 of the applicants’ booklet). The applicants have proposed placing approximately nine concrete and wood benches along the west entrance plaza and several smaller concrete and wood benches along the east apron near the Café outdoor seating area (see page 10). Along the southeast apron, the applicants propose placing approximately eight wood benches (see page 11). A total of 40 Port of San Francisco standard loop bicycle racks are proposed - 16 at the west entrance plaza, eight north of the Observatory building near the Café, eight on the southeast apron, and eight on the southwest apron (see pages 9 and 12). Staff bicycle storage would be located inside Pier 17. Five trash receptacles would be distributed at the site - one at the west entrance plaza, one within the ticketed outdoor area, one on the east apron near the Café, one on the southeast apron and another on the southwest apron.

Guardrails are proposed throughout the site (see pages 13 and 14). According to the applicants, the guardrails would be mounted on the side of the pier edge to help diminish the thickness of the slab edge and have an angled steel top rail that would be comfortable to lean on. Along the

east apron, the guardrails would be inset from the pier's edge to accommodate the mooring cleats needed for ship berthing. These guardrails would be mounted directly into the pier slab and have a heavy vertical steel plate to "mitigate potential 'knocking' by ship ropes".

The applicants are proposing several gates at the site (see page 9). Along the east apron, five “temporary” gates would be placed “to preserve the East Apron for docking and maneuvers”. Two of the gates would be placed along the Pier 17 south apron to “provide Homeland security vehicle entrance and access” (see page 26). The applicants have not provided additional information on the size of these gates or how often they will be in use. Custom operable gates would be located at the two entry points into the ticketed outdoor area – one near the west entrance plaza and the other near the Observatory building (see pages 24-25). According to the applicants, these gates would have an operable steel frame that would allow for a nine-foot clear opening with heavy-duty hinges and wheels to roll the frame into place. Panic hardware and individual doors for emergency egress would be integrated into the steel frame. The material of the gates has not yet been decided and the applicants have indicated that the height of the gate would match the Pier 15 door heights. Two additional gates would be installed – an 11-foot-wide prefabricated gate located at the northwest corner of Pier 17 to allow for Baydelta vehicle service, and a 3’-6”-high guardrail along the Pier 17 east apron to discourage entry onto the Pier 17 apron while allowing exit from Pier 17 into the valley.

Three bridges are proposed within the Exploratorium courtyard: (1) a 12-foot-wide “main pedestrian bridge” located in the center of the courtyard, supported by existing piles and constructed of wood decking with grating at each end; (2) a eight-foot-wide prefabricated aluminum “secondary pedestrian bridge” located just west of the east apron; and (3) the east walkway (bridge) located at the east end of the courtyard, which has been redesigned to preserve a 28-foot-wide section of the existing deck rather than act as a spanning “bridge” (see pages 19-21).

Five types of paving material are proposed at the site: (1) marginal wharf concrete paving to match the Embarcadero paving; (2) custom-patterned concrete for the Exploratorium plaza; (3) wood decking; (4) south and east apron standard concrete paving; and (5) metal grating (see pages 22-23 for location and paving types). Six lighting types are proposed: (1) custom single head pole lights; (2) lights integrated to the proposed guardrails; (3) in-grade accent lighting; (4) submersible deck edge lighting; (5) wall-mounted lights; and (6) sign lighting (see page 27 for location and lighting types).

Prior Board Comment on the Mechanical Enclosure. *The Board asked for more detail on the proposed mechanical enclosure located at the southwest apron.*

Applicants’ Response: (See pages 15-18 of the applicants’ booklet). The mechanical enclosure would house the building’s generator and be approximately 75 feet long and 20 feet wide. The enclosure would be nine feet high and extend into the east apron of Pier 15. The applicants have indicated the clearance required for the generator equipment by red dashed line on the attached plans (see page 15). The front wall facing the Embarcadero would be made of steel plate panels set in a steel frame while the side walls would be made of grating to achieve some transparency. The applicants have suggested incorporating possible perforations or etching designs to break the opacity of the enclosure.

Public Access Issues. The Board’s advice is sought on whether the project applicants’ responses adequately address the Board’s comments. The staff requests that the Board consider the following questions during its review:

1. Does the proposed Observatory building material take advantage of or visually complement the Bay? Are the forms, materials, color and textures compatible with the Bay and adjacent development?

2. Are the proposed site furnishings adequate to accommodate the number of public access users at the site? Do they provide a variety of seating choices and experiences ranging from communal spaces and quiet areas located away from crowds, and allow for intermittent resting spots in between long stretches of the pier? Are they designed to complement and enhance the proposed public access spaces and help create a “sense of place”?
3. Are the proposed site furnishings (specifically the gates and guardrails) and the mechanical enclosure located and designed such that they still provide, maintain and enhance visual access to the Bay and the shoreline? Do they adequately preserve views to the Bay and maximize the public’s enjoyment of the waterfront?
4. Are the proposed courtyard bridges designed to provide adequate circulation around the pier? Are they consistent with the site’s characteristics and overall project design and appropriate for anticipated levels of use?
5. Are the proposed paving materials appropriate in creating delineation between public and paid (private) areas (see page 22)? Are the forms, materials, colors and textures compatible with the Bay and adjacent development? Is there enough lighting to create a sense of safety but designed to control intensity, glare and spillover?
6. Is the proposed mechanical enclosure appropriately screened with fencing or landscaping?