

# SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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**TO:** All Design Review Board Members

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**SUBJECT: Embarcadero Design Standards Study - The Embarcadero Promenade**  
(For Board consideration on March 9, 2009)

## Project Summary

**Permittee:**

**Project Representatives:** Dan Hodapp

**Overview.** The Embarcadero Design Standards is a Port sponsored project to evaluate and improve The Embarcadero Promenade/ Herb Caen Way as a pedestrian circulation corridor and access way to Port facilities, and to further respond to the Port's mission of attracting people to the waterfront. The Design and Access Element of the Waterfront Land Use Plan provides context for the Embarcadero Design Standards (Standards), which are intended to provide more specific guidance to direct public improvements, and design criteria to guide Port tenant improvements within the Promenade. The Standards will be developed through a public process and proposals will be presented to the Port Commission, the Waterfront Design Advisory Committee, and in public workshops prior to seeking Port Commission endorsement.

**Background.** The Embarcadero Promenade/ Herb Caen Way is the walkway on the waterside of The Embarcadero Roadway that currently extends from AT&T Ballpark at China Basin Channel to Pier 39 in the north. The completion of the Pier 43 Bay Trail Promenade project, one of the waterfront open space projects funded by Proposition A, February 2008, will effectively extend the Promenade into Fisherman's Wharf, to Pier 45. At almost three miles long and providing more than 15 acres of public space, The Promenade is the spine that connects all northern waterfront parks and destinations and the place where many form their impressions of the waterfront.

The Embarcadero Promenade was designed as part of the transformation of The Embarcadero from an industrial service road serving the piers, to a grand urban boulevard. Planning began in the mid-80's, and improvements were constructed from 1993 through 2000. Previously, the waterfront was largely inaccessible to pedestrians, cut off by the elevated freeway and numerous rail tracks, and there was little reason for many to cross The Embarcadero. Today the Promenade is a heavily used public space and its use is expected to grow substantially as the Port continues to develop waterfront projects. As the only access to the Port's piers, The Promenade is not designated as a City sidewalk for exclusive pedestrian use; it must still accommodate maritime access and allow for bicycles. Thus, The Promenade is a multiuse pathway where during peak times conflicts may exist between many users as they compete for space. Currently, the useable



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circulation of The Promenade is reduced due to the varied placement of light poles, signs, litter receptacles, bike racks and public art. One of the key purposes of the Standards is to evaluate and recommend modifications to the location and installation of fixtures and street furniture to maximize public circulation and access along The Embarcadero Promenade.

Since the Promenade's completion, many Port tenants and Port partner developers have proposed to add various site furnishings such as benches, café enclosures, awnings to bulkhead buildings, street trees and planters. For the most part the Port has not authorized these installations due to a lack of having consistent standards. The Design and Access Element of the Waterfront Land Use Plan sets a framework for design of public improvements along The Embarcadero, recognizing the importance of achieving a cohesive appearance for this important public space. The intent of the Standards is to provide more specific definition on the types and conditions under which such tenant improvements of public space should be allowed, and adopt standards for other publicly supplied street furnishings. The Standards also will be developed with an understanding of the relationship between such installations and the need to be compatible with the Embarcadero Waterfront National Register Historic District.

Thus, the purpose of the Standards project will be to develop policies and design criteria to:

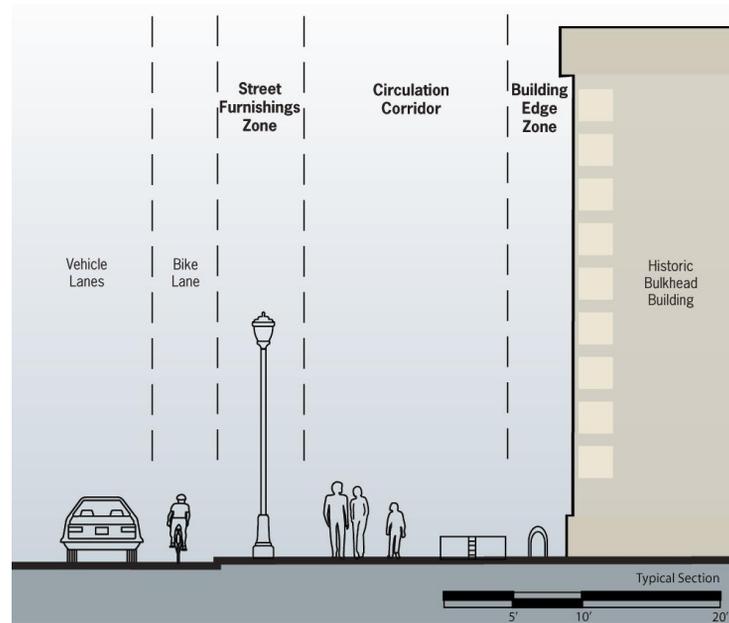
1. Enhance value of Port facilities with a well designed Promenade that is functional and aesthetically complementary to the waterfront environment;
2. Develop clear design direction for public-serving improvements along The Embarcadero for use by tenants, developers, staff, the Waterfront Design Advisory Committee and BCDC's Design Review Board, and the Port and BCDC Commissions;
3. Define and simplify the design review of public space installations and ensure they are consistent with the character of the Embarcadero Historic District; and
4. Continue Port efforts to provide responsible stewardship of The Embarcadero.

**Study Analysis.** The Standards study will rely on established policies, principles and design criteria adopted in the Waterfront Design & Access Element. In particular, the Waterfront Design & Access Element contains a policy to prepare design criteria consistent with the Public Access and Open Space policy "Character" in the Waterfront Design & Access Element, which states open spaces are to be designed as "an architectural backdrop to the waterfront's spectacular natural and built features". This policy shall direct the architectural character of design criteria for site furnishings.

Staff is proposing that the Standards design goals be to:

1. Enhance The Promenade as a linear public open space and pedestrian environment while meeting the access needs of waterfront uses; and
2. Guide future improvements to respect and complement the history and character of the waterfront and Bay.

The Embarcadero shares a layout and function common to the great boulevards of the world: it has a central circulation space, a building edge zone to offer identity to tenants and facilitate building entry, and a curb zone where there are street lights, signs and other street furnishings.



The Promenade will be analyzed in these three zones and the Standards is expected to lead to amendments to the Waterfront Design & Access Element and possibly other Port codes to include:

1. Identification of changes to improve the circulation function of The Promenade and access to Port businesses on the piers, including consideration of removing certain elevated segments of the Art Ribbon;
2. Criteria for adding sidewalk café furnishings adjacent to bulkhead buildings (e.g. planters, sidewalk cafés, and awnings and canopies on bulkhead buildings);
3. Standards for adding site furnishings (e.g. benches, bike racks, litter receptacles, bollards) along The Promenade to further its visual identity and enhance the pedestrian experience of visiting the waterfront; and
4. Standards for adding signage, public art, event banners, and other improvements that contribute to the quality of the waterfront.

At the Committee's meeting on March 9, staff will make a presentation of existing Promenade conditions, and proposals for improvements. Staff will outline a proposal to develop the selection of publicly identified standard site furnishings and design criteria for tenant added site furnishings, and an explanation of how such improvements will maintain consistency with the historic district, and further the cohesive appearance of The Embarcadero Roadway and Promenade.

**Ferry Building Area.** It is anticipated that the Standards study will include a tailored address of design standards specific to the Ferry Building frontage along The Embarcadero. Design criteria for the Ferry Building area will be different from The Promenade to reflect the special architectural and civic character of this waterfront location. Ferry Building design criteria will be prepared to address café furnishing improvements requested by Embarcadero facing tenants that include overhead weather protection, café railings, wind screens, planters, signage and lighting.

**Summary of Design Review Comments from November 7, 2005. Currently.** Port staff and the WDAC review developer proposals and provide design guidance on a case-by-case basis. However, at past DRB/ WDAC meetings the two Committees expressed the need to have design standards developed before further improvements along the Promenade would be approved. An

informational powerpoint presentation on the Embarcadero Design Standards study was presented at the joint meeting of the WDAC and DRB on November 7, 2005 and the Board and Committee comments were as follows:

1. Acceptance of the importance of the Promenade's Circulation Zone and modifications that could be made to improve the Circulation Zone.
2. Suggested that other improvements could be divided into two categories: furnishings that should be consistent throughout the length of the Promenade, or furnishings that could vary from place to place.
3. Need to define the public process for the project.

**Community Outreach.** Staff has conducted a detailed review of the existing conditions along The Promenade, as context for developing the Standards project, and have researched many other waterfronts internationally. Following the Waterfront Design Advisory Committee and BCDC's Design Review Board presentation on March 9, 2009 the Port will hold public workshops beginning this spring. The Port will solicit public comments and inputs for Standards proposals, which will be further reviewed at public meetings of these design review boards and presented to the Port Commission later this year, prior to seeking endorsement and approval.

The Standards proposal also will be presented for comment and discussion to the Embarcadero Transportation Task Force. This Task Force was formed to examine how The Embarcadero could best serve the changing land uses and transportation demands, including pedestrian circulation along The Embarcadero Promenade. The Standards are intended to address the shared use pedestrian area on the bay side of The Embarcadero Roadway consistent with the goals of the Task Force. Port staff also will coordinate with the San Francisco Planning Department to craft the Standards so that it provides design guidelines consistent with the Better Streets Program currently underway at the Planning Department.

**Committee Review.** The Waterfront Design Advisory Committee should consider making recommendations to ensure that the Standards are developed consistent with policies and design criteria set forth in the Waterfront Land Use Plan's Waterfront Design & Access Element. Further reviews of the Standards will address relevant policies and criteria of the Design and Access Element. At this time staff requests comment from the Design Advisory Committee regarding the following:

Does the Committee support the analysis and design direction of the following:

1. Changes to improve the circulation function of The Promenade, which may be accomplished by modifying the Art Ribbon and organizing other site furnishings and signage?
2. Development of design criteria for tenant added improvements such as sidewalk café furnishings, planters, and awnings on bulkhead buildings?
3. Selection of standard publicly identified site furnishings along The Promenade in non-tenant spaces for benches, bike racks, and litter receptacles?
4. That the character of site furnishings fixtures shall take direction from the Waterfront Design & Access Element, which states open spaces are to be designed as "an architectural backdrop to the waterfront's spectacular natural and built features"?
5. That the fixtures in the Ferry Building area shall adopt a character that acknowledges its historic and civic importance, and are unique to that Building and area?