

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: Potrero Hills Landfill, Phase II Expansion, Suisun Marsh, Solano County; First Review
(For Board consideration on December 7, 2009)

Project Summary

Project Sponsor: Potrero Hills Landfill, Inc. (PHLF)

Project Representatives: Jim Dunbar, Waste Connections, Inc.; William Roach, Jr., the HLA Group; and Steve Peterson, Environmental Stewardship & Planning, Inc.

Project Site. The project site is located on a 65-acre parcel in central Solano County approximately 1.3 miles southeast of Suisun City, near Fairfield and Highway 12 at the site of the former Solano Garbage Company Landfill, which was closed in 1988 (see Exhibit 1). The site is bounded by Kildeer Road to the north, Potrero Hills Lane to the east, and an existing service road to the west. The Commission's Suisun Marsh Protection Plan delineates two management areas within the Suisun Marsh: a primary management area comprised of tidal marshes, seasonal marshes, managed wetlands and lowland grasslands; and a secondary management area comprised of upland grasslands and cultivated lands which serve as significant buffers to the Suisun Marsh. The project site is located in the primary management area but is located in an upland area (created by the capped landfill) adjacent to Union Creek and Hills Slough on the lower reaches of an alluvial plain extending northward from the Potrero Hills and the northeast edge of the Suisun Marsh.

Project Background. The Solano Garbage Company landfill facility began waste disposal operations in 1956 at the project site and received wastes until the site was finally closed and capped in 1988. Landfill operations were taken over by the Potrero Hills Landfill (PHLF) and moved in 1986 to the existing 320-acre Phase I site inside the Potrero Hills (see Exhibit 1). PHLF is proposing to expand the existing landfill into the approximately 210-acre Phase II site within the secondary management area of the Suisun Marsh. The marsh development permit for the project, issued by Solano County, has been appealed to BCDC. PHLF is proposing various public access improvements near the landfill site as part of BCDC's appeal process for the marsh development permit.

Proposed Public Access. The proposed public access involves developing a 57,000-square-foot overlook on the former Solano Garbage Company landfill site that would provide viewpoints of the Suisun Marsh, air traffic departing from Travis Air Force Base (AFB) and the adjacent Potrero Hills (see Exhibits 4 and 5). The goal of the overlook would be the development and use of an educational rest area that serves as a new public access point for the Suisun Marsh.



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The proposed overlook would be accessed where Kildeer Road intersects with Potrero Hills Lane, just off of Highway 12 (see Exhibit 5). A 6,000-square-foot parking lot would be developed in the northeast corner of the proposed project area and contain six parking spaces, one of which would be reserved for ADA access. The parking area would include new signage, a bicycle rack to accommodate four bicycles, a trashcan, and pipe bollards to prevent vehicles from driving to the overlook area. Two trails would be created to connect the parking lot with the overlook – a longer meandering vista trail, approximately 1,950 feet long, six feet wide, with a grade to meet ADA accessibility requirements, and a shorter access trail, approximately 240 feet long, connecting the parking lot to the overlook with a set of improved steps. A bench would be located halfway up the trail to provide a resting spot.

At the top of the overlook, a circular pathway would connect two designated vista points to provide five distinct views (see Exhibits 2 and 3). Each viewing station would consist of a widened area off the main path with a partially shaded seating area and interpretive signage (see Exhibit 6). Each shade structure would be constructed of steel, approximately eight feet high and six feet wide and would be integrated with the sign bases, secured atop the overlook by wide, gabion basket bases. At each vista point, two seating benches, also constructed of an 18-inch-high gabion base, would be provided. Interpretive signage for each of the five views could describe various conditions at and adjacent to the project site, including but not limited to landfill operations, waste energy, site history, protected habitats and the Suisun Marsh (see Exhibit 7). An additional, more intimate seating area is proposed between the two designated vista points. The entire overlook area would be surrounded by boulders, which would serve to define the limits of the overlook area, discourage public access into protected habitats, and provide additional seating at the overlook site.

In addition to the proposed overlook, PHLF would dedicate easements along the Southern Hills of the Potrero Hills Landfill site to provide for possible future connections to other public access areas near the site, and would provide an in-lieu fee to Rush Ranch, a public access site located southwest of the project site, to help promote their public access program. The details of these two public access components are still being finalized and are not the subject of this design review. At this time, the staff is seeking input from the Board only on the design of the proposed public access overlook.

Suisun Marsh Protection Plan Findings and Policies. The Recreation and Access findings of the Suisun Marsh Protection Plan state that “the Suisun Marsh is a major open-space resource of the San Francisco Bay region, and recreation is the major human use in the Suisun Marsh,” “a major attraction of the Marsh for recreational use is its undisturbed open-space character” and that “the demand for existing recreational uses of the Suisun Marsh is presently high and will probably increase in the future.” The policies in this section state that, “...land should be acquired within the Suisun Marsh to provide for increased public recreational use” and that “land should also be purchased for public recreation and access to the Marsh for such uses as...nature study.” The policies go on to state, “recreational activities that could result in adverse impacts to the environment or aesthetic qualities of the Suisun Marsh should not be permitted. Levels of use should also be monitored to insure that their intensity is compatible with other recreation activities and with protection of the Marsh environment.”

Board’s Review. Staff is seeking the Board’s input and advice on whether the proposed public access overlook is appropriately designed and scaled, whether it provides adequate seating and appropriate views of the Marsh and the surrounding environment, and whether it encourages recreational activities that would not result in adverse impacts to the environment or aesthetic qualities of the Marsh.