

# 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

October 7, 2011

**TO:** All Design Review Board Members

**FROM:** Ellen Miramontes, Bay Design Analyst [415/352-3643 ellenm@bcdc.ca.gov]  
Ming Yeung, Coastal Program Analyst [415/352-3616 mingy@bcdc.ca.gov]

**SUBJECT: James R. Herman Cruise Terminal Project – Piers 27 - 29, City and County of San Francisco – Second Review**  
(For Board consideration on October 17, 2011)

## Project Summary

**Project Applicants:** Port of San Francisco

**Project Representatives:** Dan Hodapp, Port of San Francisco.

**Project Site.** The proposed project would be located at Pier 27, along the San Francisco waterfront, near the intersection of Greenwich and Lombard Streets with the Embarcadero, within the City and County of San Francisco. Pier 23 lies to the south and Pier 31 lies to the north of the project site. The site currently consists of the Pier 27 shed, a paved parking area between Piers 27 and 29, known as the “valley”, and the historic Beltline building located west of the shed along the Embarcadero promenade.

**Proposed Project.** The proposed project involves demolishing the existing Pier 27 shed and the small office annex building and developing an approximately 84,500-gross-square-foot Cruise Ship Terminal in its place, an approximately 130,000-square-foot (3-acre) Ground Transportation Area in the valley area between Piers 27 and 29 to provide vehicular circulation, and an approximately 95,000-square-foot (2.18-acre) “Northeast Wharf Plaza” along the Embarcadero edge. In addition to the Pier 27 shed, a portion of the Pier 29 shed would also be demolished to address the needs of the 34<sup>th</sup> America’s Cup. The demolition of the end of the Pier 29 shed and the construction of a smaller cruise ship terminal building creates an approximately three-acre space known as the “Tip of Pier 27”. A portion of this space is needed to provision ships about half of the year and could be open for other uses for the remainder of the year. The Port has entered into agreements stating that it would construct the cruise terminal structure in time for the upcoming America’s Cup event scheduled to begin in July 2013 (contingent upon completion of environmental review and permitting). The public space improvements would be built after the America’s Cup event.

**San Francisco Waterfront Special Area Plan.** The project as currently proposed is inconsistent with several policies of the *San Francisco Waterfront Special Area Plan* (SAP). In particular, the SAP requires a “Northeast Wharf Open Water Basin” between Piers 19 and 27, including removal of at least 315 feet of the easternmost portion of the Pier 23 shed, to improve Bay views and provide opportunities for physical access between the Bay and piers. Facilities within the Northeast Wharf Open Water Basin are limited to temporary berthing of ceremonial and visiting ships that do not extend landward of the Pier 27 shed (as partially removed to create the Northeast Wharf Plaza).



*Making San Francisco Bay Better*

The Port has initiated an amendment to the SAP to allow the Cruise Terminal to be located at Piers 27-29, including proposing:

- To retain the easternmost portion of the Pier 23 shed and remove fill or a shed structure from another location along the waterfront;
- To relocate the “Northeast Wharf Open Water Basin” to another unspecified location along the waterfront; and
- To relocate public access and public open space benefits identified in the SAP to another location(s) along the waterfront, including providing views of the Bay that will balance impacts to the views between Piers 27 and 23 that will result from locating a cruise terminal at Pier 27 and retaining the shed at Pier 23.

The Port of San Francisco staff, working with stakeholders and BCDC staff have developed some ideas for alternative public benefits to be considered in the SAP amendment. These are illustrated conceptually on page 8 of the exhibit package and include: (1) the creation of an open water basin between Piers 29 and 33 with the possible removal of the Pier 31 shed and Pier 29½ bulkhead; (2) public access at Pier 29½ and 19½, along the Pier 29 apron, and around Pier 23; (3) limited access at the Tip of Pier 27 and along the Pier 27 apron; (4) the Northeast Wharf Plaza as currently required in the SAP; (5) a Bayside History Walk through Pier 29; and (6) public access benefits at Fisherman’s Wharf near Pier 43, including possibly another limited open water basin and public access plaza at this location.

The outcome of the SAP amendment planning process and the ultimate changes to the SAP policies will shape the final design and public access requirements of the proposed project. The Port seeks feedback from the Board on the conceptual design concept but recognizes that the design of the project may change, depending on the outcome of the SAP amendment process. The Port recognizes that in such a situation, it may need to return to the Board with a revised design that is consistent with any final approved SAP amendment.

**San Francisco Bay Plan Policies.** The *San Francisco Bay Plan’s* policies on Public Access state that “a proposed fill project should increase public access to the Bay to the maximum extent feasible” and that the public access improvements provided as a condition of any approval “should be consistent with the project and the physical environment...” and “...should be designed and built to encourage diverse Bay-related activities and movement to and along the shoreline...” The policies require that the *Public Access Design Guidelines* be used as a guide to siting and designing public access consistent with a proposed project. The *Bay Plan* policies on Appearance, Design and Scenic Views further state that “all bayfront development should be designed to enhance the pleasure of the user or viewer of the Bay” and that “maximum efforts should be made to provide, enhance, or preserve views of the Bay and shoreline, especially from public areas, from the Bay itself, and from the opposite shore.”

**Board Issues.** At its last review of the project on May 9, 2011, the Board requested more information on four specific issues. They are summarized below, followed by the Port’s response to each:

1. **Northeast Wharf Plaza** – The Board was generally supportive of the general layout of the Northeast Wharf Plaza but thought that the construction of a gatehouse near the southwestern corner of the site and the location and spacing of the beltline buildings adjacent to the GTA were inappropriate. They felt that the Northeast Wharf Plaza needed

more definition and recommended that more design and detail be developed, particularly on the access through the plaza and the connection of the plaza to the Embarcadero given the grade changes.

**Applicant Response:** (See Exhibits, pp. 12 - 19). The Port has eliminated the gatehouse from the proposed project and the row of beltline buildings adjacent to the GTA. The GTA would be screened and separated from the Northeast Wharf Plaza by staggered rows of plantings, either parallel to the GTA (Site Plan A) or perpendicular to the GTA (Site Plan B). Two options for accessing the lawn area of the Northeast Wharf Plaza have been provided. Site Plan A shows a zig-zag ramp configuration from the Embarcadero while Site Plan B shows a linear curved ramp onto the lawn area from two points along the Embarcadero. Both site plans also include different treatments for the edges, planters and other minor site elements. The site plans also envision a large piece of climbable art that would serve as a focal point and opportunity for play.

2. **Ground Transportation Area (GTA)** – The Board requested more information on the GTA, particularly on how the space would function during non-cruise days to ensure that the space does not become a parking lot and the open space areas are not taken over by private events and vehicles. The Board also requested more information on the pedestrian access through the GTA. They were unclear on how the sallyport would function and commented that a stronger linkage parallel to the cruise ship terminal and through the GTA is needed to the Tip of Pier 27.

**Applicant Response:** (See Exhibits, pp. 22 - 25). The Port states that the GTA could be used for a variety of purposes on non-cruise days, including for vehicles when the terminal is used for special events and for farmer's markets, as illustrated on page 15. The sallyport would be used for ship provisioning which would occur approximately half the year and would prevent access through the GTA to the Tip of Pier 27. Page 16 illustrates how the sallyport would operate during cruise days; page 17 illustrates the view along the GTA drop-off zone when the sallyport is opened and on days when few vehicles are using the drop-off zone.

3. **Pier 27 Apron** – The Board requested that more design and detail be provided for the fencing along the Pier 27 apron, including how the fencing would appear both during cruise days (when used) and on non-cruise days (when they are put away).

**Applicant Response:** (See Exhibits, pp. 28 - 31). The Port states that the fence would be 10 feet tall with vertical pickets to maximize transparency. The fence would fold open or closed from posts stationed at the light poles that are spaced 48 feet on center. Other options that were studied for the fence design include a sliding system and an overhead garage door style opening. The Port settled on the folding system because it offers generous transparency and is functionally and operationally more likely to be successful on a daily basis. Apron access on Pier 27 would be unavailable when cruise ships and other visiting ships are in berth. On the remaining days, the area would be available for public access however, a permanent gangway would remain in place, as illustrated on pages 22 and 23 of the exhibit package. Public access users would be required to walk under the gangway system to access the Tip of Pier 27. Although the Port has indicated that the apron access would be closed for half the year for cruise ships, it is unclear at this time how much longer the apron would be closed for additional visiting ships and private events.

4. **Tip of Pier 27** – The Board requested more information on the tip of Pier 27, including how the sallyport would function and whether this would still allow the public to access the space, the programming and possible improvements for the space, and whether the space would serve as valuable and usable public access, given its distance from the Embarcadero and the Northeast Wharf Plaza.

**Applicant Response:** (See Exhibits, pp. 32 - 34). The Port proposes to close the Tip of Pier 27 approximately half of the year to provision cruise ships. The other half of the year, access to the Tip would be through the GTA area and sallyport, at times along the Pier 27 apron, and, in the future, along the Pier 29 apron. According to the Port, based on the need of the area for truck provisioning, it has limited the amount of improvements at the site to a row of tall lights at 48 feet on center that delineates the path from the Embarcadero to the furthest point out on the Tip. Ideas for uses on the Tip have included an observation tower, wind shades with public seating, a bandstand structure that also offers protection from the wind, a skateboard facility, and leaving the space open to allow major events to occur. The area was one of three design challenges explored in the “Good Design Competition” sponsored by the San Francisco Chapter of the American Institute of Architects “Architecture in the City Festival”. The ideas developed in that competition included lifting up the pier deck in segments to expose the Bay below and to create a sloped vegetated amphitheatre above. In addition, the design also explored the idea of tucking the truck provisioning and sallyport enclosure against the side of the cruise terminal building and maintaining an open corridor along the Pier 29 shed through the GTA to at least a portion of the Tip of Pier 27 that could be open year-round. Other ideas also explored provisioning the cruise ships by boats rather than trucks, thereby minimizing the need for the sallyport and provisioning area at the Tip of Pier 27.

**Board Feedback.** The Board’s feedback is sought on whether the Port has adequately responded to its concerns on the four specific issues described above. In particular, BCDC staff seeks feedback on the following:

1. Whether the design of the Northeast Wharf Plaza adequately allows for barrier-free access of the space by all users.
  - There is concern about whether universal access to and across the lawn is provided, as well as whether universal access into the plaza and onto the lawn when entering the site from the south along the Embarcadero Promenade is provided.
2. Whether treatment of the edges, landscaping and seating elements are attractive and usable.
  - There is concern that the tall, raised planters proposed adjacent to the GTA may be too large.
  - There is concern that the proposed vine planting pockets along the Embarcadero seatwall may make it unattractive to lean against the wall. The Board’s feedback is sought on other ways to soften and provide ornamentation along this wall.
3. Whether the GTA has been adequately designed to function as a multi-use and pedestrian friendly plaza space during non-cruise days.

- There is concern that the space be appropriately programmed and designed to accommodate other uses besides parking.
4. Whether there are opportunities to design the sallyport or provision cruise ships in a way that still allows use of the Tip of Pier 27 year-round.
    - There is concern that the sallyport structures and periods of extended closure may make the Tip unattractive for public access and discourage public use of the Tip.
  5. Whether the corridors leading through the GTA to the Tip of Pier 27 are designed in a way to provide clear and unimpeded pedestrian access.
    - The paving patterns and light pole structures will help direct the public towards the Tip but there is concern whether public access users will make the effort to go there if public access amenities are not adequately provided due to constraints on the use of the space in relation to provisioning activities.
  6. Whether there are other ideas, uses or design principles that the Port should embrace when programming and designing ideas for the Tip of Pier 27.