

# San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

455 Golden Gate Avenue, Suite 10600, San Francisco, California 94102 tel 415 352 3600 fax 415 352 3606

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**TO:** Design Review Board Members

**FROM:** Lawrence J. Goldzband, Executive Director (415/352-3653 [larry.goldzband@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:larry.goldzband@bcdc.ca.gov))  
Andrea Gaffney, Bay Design Analyst (415/352-3643 [andrea.gaffney@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:andrea.gaffney@bcdc.ca.gov))  
Hanna Miller, Coastal Program Analyst (415/352-3616 [hanna.miller@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:hanna.miller@bcdc.ca.gov))

**SUBJECT: Albany Beach Restoration and Public Access Project; First Pre-Application Review**  
(For Design Review Board consideration on April 17, 2017)

## Project Summary

**Project Sponsor.** East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD)

**Project Representatives.** Chris Barton (East Bay Regional Park District); Patrick Miller (2M Associates); Carl Nelson (Questa Engineering); Jeff Peters (Questa)

**Project Site.** The proposed Albany Beach Restoration and Public Access Project is located in the City of Albany, Alameda County, between the termini of Buchanan Street (north) and Gilman Street (south), and within EBRPD's Albany Bulb, Neck, and Plateau area, and west of the Golden Gate Fields Racetrack in the City of Berkeley, Alameda County. (Figures 1 and 2)

**Property Ownership.** The northern section of the project site (Albany Beach) is jointly owned by the EBRPD and the State of California. The EBRPD also intends to acquire the proposed parking lot area from the MEC Land Holding, Inc., who owns the adjacent Golden Gate Fields racetrack. Additionally, the EBRPD holds a 30-foot-wide easement (from MEC Land Holding, Inc.) over the southern section of the proposed project. (Figure 3)

**Existing Conditions.** The project site was originally constructed with imported fill except for Fleming Point. (Figure 12) The proposed project is part of a multi-phase effort to improve the EBRPD's Albany Beach Park and incorporate it into the McLaughlin Eastshore State Park. Phase 1 (completed) involved the enhancement of public paths, picnic facilities, shoreline improvements, and natural habitat at the park. (Figure 4) The San Francisco Bay Trail (Bay Trail) extends along Buchanan Street to the terminus at the Albany Beach Park. At the beach area, the following facilities are currently available: a portable toilet; 40 vehicle parking spaces with fencing at the parking lot boundary at Buchanan Street; a eucalyptus tree grove; a seasonal wetland; beach dunes; and eelgrass in the Bay along the west and south rip-rapped shorelines. Recreational fishing occurs at the peninsula located at the south end of the beach. Albany Beach is a proposed San Francisco Bay Water Trail location. (Figure 4) The public enters the beach area via an unpaved trail at the terminus of Buchanan Street and through the dunes. The site does not have formal access to the southern shoreline (extending to Gilman Street) of the proposed project area, however people informally access this area from the Golden Gate Fields parking lot adjacent to the beach. Presently, users of the entire site are as follows:

Type of User	Average Daily Users
Walker/Hiker (without dog)	170
Walker/Hiker (with dog)	262
Bicyclist	232
Kitesurfer or Windsurfer	10
Adult with Child or Children Under 5	19
Person with Wheelchair or Walker	4
Scavenger or Homeless Person	39
Other Non-motorized Watercraft User	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>735</b>

Source: Final Environmental Impact Report for the Albany Beach Restoration and Public Access Project (2015)

**Proposed Project.** The project is located within the Commission’s 100-foot shoreline band jurisdiction and a Waterfront Park/Beach Priority Use Area designated in the *San Francisco Bay Plan* (Bay Plan). An upland section of the project is located outside of the Commission’s jurisdiction. The project would be constructed in two concurrent phases and involve the following activities (Figures 5, 6, and 7):

#### **Albany Beach Park (northern section)**

- A vehicular entrance and a 20-foot-wide roadway with a 20-vehicle parking area (three compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards), five temporary vehicle loading spaces, 16 bike parking spaces, a vehicle turn-around, and bio-swales for stormwater management (Figure 5);
- A 36-foot-diameter beach overlook (adjacent to vehicle loading area) with interpretive panels and a seat wall (Figure 6);
- An approximately 735-foot-long Bay Trail section between the terminus of Buchanan Street and the end of the turn around in the entry road, at an elevation of 12 feet (NAVD88), with a 14-foot-wide main path and 2-foot-wide shoulders (Figures 5 and 11);
- Two beach access points from the Bay Trail—a 5-foot-wide spur trail with an accessible beach mat at the terminus (north) and an overlook access that slopes down to a paved landing area with benches (south);
- One vault toilet at the north end of the beach (Figure 7);
- A rain garden, seasonal wetland (existing and unchanged), and dune system (height up to 16 feet NAVD88) with 48-inch-high access control fencing to restrict public access and a two- to three-foot-high vegetated buffer at the dune eastern edge to prevent sand from migrating onto the adjacent Bay Trail. (Figures 5 and 8); and
- A raised and expanded beach, partially on top of the existing asphalt (Figure 5), with a set-up area for kite boarders at the southern end of the beach with a sand wall to prevent drifts on to the trail.

### San Francisco Bay Trail Extension (southern section)

- An approximately 4,000-foot-long (0.75-mile) Bay Trail segment, connected to the southern end of the proposed trail at Albany Beach and terminating at Gilman Street. (Figure 16) and with a 12-foot-wide main pathway throughout and varying shoulder widths and slopes. The pathway would be striped with a 4-foot-wide pedestrian path on the bayward side and an 8-foot-wide bicycle path on the landward side. A 48-inch-tall railing with a handrail would be installed when the grade would be greater than 4.5% to protect both pedestrians and cyclists. As proposed, the trail would be constructed partly on land and on a 200-foot-long bridge structure along the shoreline adjacent to the hill at Fleming Point, in order to minimize the trail grade. Trail sections are characterized as “permanent” and “interim” as, at a future date (20 to 25 years from the date of project construction), the adjacent racetrack would likely be converted to a new use at which time more area could become available for expansion of the interim Bay Trail sections (Figure 13).
- An overlook at Fleming Point North Vista (Figure 14) and north of the Jockey parking lot called out as the Fleming Point South Vista (Figure 15).

**Flooding and Sea Level Rise.** The current 100-year flood elevation for this site is 9.2 feet (NAVD88). The project has an anticipated life until 2060. The anticipated 100-year flood levels for 2050, incorporating 16-inches of sea level rise, is 10.53 feet (NAVD88). The anticipated mean higher high water elevation at the beach at 2050 (including 16-inches of sea level rise) would be 7.5 feet (NAVD88) and the 2050 100-year flood elevation with sea level rise would be 10.53 feet (NAVD88). With these elevations, the beach would be inundated and unavailable during large storm events. The majority of the proposed trail would be elevated above anticipated sea levels through 2050, which is considered the end of the life of the project. The northern interim sections (between the southern end of the beach and the fishing peninsula) would be at an elevation of approximately 9 feet (NAVD88) and would be inundated by 2060 (Figures 2 and 3).

### Commission Policies

**San Francisco Bay Plan Policies.** The Bay Plan **Public Access** policies state, in part, that projects “should increase public access to the Bay to the maximum extent feasible.” Further, they state, in part: “Access to and along the waterfront should be provided by walkways, trails, or other appropriate means and connect to the nearest public thoroughfare;” that “diverse and interesting public access experiences should be provided;” and improvements should encourage diverse activities and provide barrier-free access for persons with disabilities. These policies also provide that “public access should be sited, designed, managed, and maintained to avoid significant adverse impacts from sea level rise and shoreline flooding,” and that access should be designed consistent with the physical and natural environment and “be sited, designed, and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife.”

The Bay Plan **Recreation** policies state, in part, that “[d]iverse and accessible water-oriented recreational facilities...should be provided” and that “sandy beaches should be preserved...for recreational use...consistent with wildlife protection.” Further, the policies state that waterfront parks “should emphasize hiking, bicycling, riding trails, picnic facilities, swimming, environmental, historical and cultural education and interpretation, viewpoints, beaches, and fishing facilities.”

Regarding **non-motorized boats**, the Bay Plan Recreation policies state, in part, that “where practicable, access facilities for non-motorized small boats should be incorporated into waterfront parks” and that “access point should be located, improved and managed to avoid significant adverse effects on wildlife and their habitats.” Additionally, parking that accommodates expected use should be provided...” To enhance this use, such areas should include “...launching facilities, restrooms, rigging areas, equipment storage....[and] be accessible...to ensure that boaters can easily launch their watercraft.”

The Bay Plan **Appearance, Design, and Scenic Views** policies state, in part, that “all bayfront development should be designed to enhance the pleasure of the user or viewer of the Bay” and that “[m]aximum efforts should be made to provide, enhance, or preserve views of the Bay and shoreline, especially from public areas...”

The Commission’s **Public Access Design Guidelines** state partly that “public access improvements should be designed for a wide range of users” and that “within every project, public access should be designed to respect all visitors’ experiences of the Bay. Highly active users should always be balanced with opportunities for passive activities...” Additionally, public access should be designed to “provide basic public amenities, such as trails, benches, play opportunities, trash containers, drinking fountains, lighting and restrooms that are designed for different ages, interests and physical abilities.” The guidelines also state that viewing the Bay is the “most widely enjoyed ‘use’” and projects should be designed to “enhance and dramatize views of the Bay.” Since public access may be near sensitive habitat, the guidelines state that development should “employ appropriate siting, design and management strategies (such as buffers or use restrictions) to reduce or prevent adverse human and wildlife interactions.”

### Board Questions

**The Board’s advice and recommendations are sought on the following issues regarding the design of the proposed public access:**

1. Would the Albany Beach Park and Bay Trail encourage diverse activities and create a “sense of place,” which is unique and enjoyable?
2. Are the proposed public amenities at the total project site appropriate for the area and would they be distributed and designed to meet and balance the needs of the public, and natural resources at the beach area and in the water? Given this beach is a planned Water Trail site, are there additional public amenities that would enhance the site?
3. Does the Bay Trail design meet the needs of the expected and varied users of the site? Are the widths of the main Bay Trail path and shoulders adequate? Is the separation of pedestrian and bicycle movement appropriate for the proposed trail width?
4. Are the proposed connections to the beach from the adjacent upland area and from Buchanan Street (leading to the site) designed appropriately? Does the trail provide appropriate connections to the fishing peninsulas, overlooks, Gilman Street, and Golden Gate Fields?

5. Is the proposed parking at the Albany Beach Park adequate to support anticipated visitors, including the temporary loading area for beach users?
6. Given that this is a designated Park Priority Use Area, is it appropriate to restrict public access at a portion of the beach area by expanding and fencing natural areas (e.g., dunes, seasonal wetland, and bio-swales)?
7. Are the plantings appropriate for the beach, dunes, and along the trail in light of their intended uses?
8. Would the public benefit from an accessible beach mat at the overlook on the beach? Should the beach mat at the northern spur trail extend to the water?

**The Board's advice and recommendations are sought on the following considerations regarding flooding and sea level rise effects on proposed public access amenities:**

1. Are the beach and dune areas designed to prevent imported sand from transporting off-site and eroding in the event of future flooding and sea level rise?
2. Is the proposed San Francisco Bay Trail appropriately designed to be resilient by mid-century and adaptable by end of century to future sea level rise and flooding?
3. Is the Bay Trail appropriately designed to allow for drainage and stormwater management at adjacent areas, which presently drain to the Bay, or would the proposed design amplify potential flooding issues that could cause maintenance problems for the public access areas?

**The Board's advice and recommendations are sought on the following considerations regarding project effects on public views:**

1. **Would the height of the following proposed features adversely affect public views of the Bay and shoreline from certain vantage points at the project site. What are possible design modifications to minimize such impacts for the following?**
  - a. The enhanced beach and dunes and associated control fencing at protected areas;
  - b. The 48-inch-tall railing along portions of the Bay Trail; and
  - c. The railings at overlooks located north and south Fleming Point.

**The Board's advice and recommendations are sought on the following considerations regarding public access and wildlife interaction:**

1. Is there an appropriate design proposal in the beach area to educate the public on prevention to harming existing eelgrass beds and the shoreline tidal habitats created in Phase 1?
2. Does the dune protection fence appropriately prevent the public from interfering in the dune enhancement?