

# San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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**TO:** Design Review Board Members

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**SUBJECT: 56-Unit Townhome Residential Development at 505 East Bayshore Road, City of Redwood City; First Pre-Application Review**  
(For Design Review Board consideration August 9, 2021)

## Project Summary

### Project Proponents

Regis Homes Bay Area, LLC (developer) and the Alan B. Forrest and Adeline Forrest Revocable Trust (property owner)

### Project Representatives

Jeff Smith (Regis Homes Bay Area), Padru Kang (DAHLIN Group, Architect), Paul Lettieri (The Guzzardo Partnership Inc., Landscape Architect).

### Project Location (Exhibits 2 and 5)

The approximately 2.5-acres site at 505 East Bayshore Road, is located in Redwood City, San Mateo County. The land is owned by the Alan B. Forrest and Adeline Forrest Revocable Trust. The site is bounded by East Bayshore Road to the west, a tidal ditch, Smith Slough and the San Francisco Bay Trail to the north, and a Toyota car dealership to the south. To the east is a closed cineplex which is being used as overflow car parking for the nearby car dealerships. At this eastern site at 557 E. Bayshore Road, there is a proposed mixed-use development consisting of almost 500 residential units and 97,100 square feet of commercial space. (BCDC Design Review Board Meeting August 5, 2019-SyRes Project).

### Project Overview

The project proposes to develop 56 for-sale residential townhomes homes, 20 of which are in three buildings facing the bayfront. The remaining 36 units are in six buildings that are perpendicular to the bayfront buildings. The project proposes to provide a variety of improvements that would enhance public access to the Bay. These improvements include a 30-foot-wide public access easement, a new 10-foot-wide shoreline bike/pedestrian boardwalk with overlooks and seating, and a new 6 to 8-foot-wide sidewalk connection to the Bay Trail Trailhead at Bair Island along East Bayshore Road.





Aerial image of existing site at 505 E. Bayshore Road in Redwood City.

## Project Site

**Site History.** Most of the land at this site was once historic tidal marshlands, located near Lamchin, the traditional indigenous homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone. Based on historical topography maps, by the early 1960's the site was filled and the access road to the PG&E pylons was formalized. The line of high-tension electricity pylons is a distinguishing vertical feature of this landscape, which dates to early electrification that ran adjacent to the old Bayshore Highway, which is now known as Highway 101.

### Existing Conditions (Exhibits 3 - 4)

Current use of the 2.54-acre project site includes a light industrial land use by Alan Steel & Supply Company, which employs 3 full-time workers and 1 part-time worker. Zoned as General Commercial, this site comprises several aging and corrugated metal warehouse buildings, as well as several outdoor storage facilities. A vacant 0.6-acre dirt lot with few trees and no notable landscape features is adjacent to the outdoor storage area, both of which, in conjunction with the aging buildings. The project site is also adjacent to a PG&E-owned parcel to the north that contains an 888-foot-long ditch. Immediately north of this ditch is a levee on which the Bair Island Trail is located, which also separates the ditch from Smith Slough (BCDC Permit No. 2012.003.01). The ditch is subject to tidal action through a culvert that runs from Smith Slough beneath the levee. The ditch also contains well-established, healthy marsh vegetation including pickleweed, salt grass, and gumplant, as well as intertidal mudflat.

The levee trail has two formal trailheads where the public can access Bair Island: the one closest to 505 E. Bayshore Road is located to the northwest of the project site, where the Bair Island levee trail intersects with East Bayshore Road, near Whipple Avenue. The project site is bordered on the west by Bayshore Road. The road lacks a sidewalk, street trees, or landscape beds, which creates a 140-foot gap in the pedestrian and bicycle network between the Bair Island Trail Head and the project site.

### **Social and Environmental Context**

The Commission has developed a Community Vulnerability Mapping Tool to help inform its analysis of how socioeconomic indicators and contamination burdens contribute to a community's vulnerability to climate change. The mapping tool collects information at the level of Census block-groups and is used by the Commission Staff to help identify certain Equity Priority Communities. These communities include those disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and hazards that can lead to negative public health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation, and those with higher concentrations of people with socioeconomic characteristics indicative of a higher degree of social vulnerability. According to the mapping tool, the project site is located within a 2020 census block group (estimated population of 3,257 people) associated with "highest contamination vulnerability" and "moderate social vulnerability." The moderate social vulnerability indicator is mainly based upon a high number of single-parent families, persons whose highest educational attainment is a high school diploma, and number of persons who are not U.S. citizens. The highest contamination vulnerability designation is relative to other census tracts in the Bay Area. The census tract in which the project would be located contains disproportionate presence of cleanup sites, groundwater threats, hazardous waste, and solid waste sites.

## **Proposed Project**

### **56-Unit Townhouse Residential Development (Exhibits 6 – 11)**

505 East Bayshore Road is a project proposing to transform an industrial parcel into a site for medium-density waterfront residential development with public access amenities. This project would provide 56 townhouses in 9 clusters, three of which would contain 20 units fronting the bay. The townhouses would consist of three story, wood-framed structures on top of at-grade concrete foundations, with maximum building heights at 39 feet. The units would range from two to four bedrooms with an average of 1,600 square feet. Internal site circulation would include a 26-foot-wide driveway, three drive aisles and three paseos. The front doors of the units facing the shoreline trail have been set in from the face of the buildings to provide a transition space from the public trail to the private realm of the house. These units are also proposed to be elevated approximately six inches above the trail grade to provide a vertical separation between public and private spaces. The upper-level balconies would extend up to two feet beyond the face of the building.

The overall grade of the site would be elevated five to seven feet above the existing grade to raise project above the flood zone elevation. The soil would be held back with a retention wall adjacent to the embankment of the tidal ditch on the north side of the project. The current site plan proposes to keep development outside the Army Corps of Engineers "line of biological importance", including a proposed retention wall, to avoid habitat impacts and permits from the Army Corps of Engineers. The project would also include a dedicated shoreline public access easement, of which the proposed improvements are described below.

**Public Access Features (Exhibits 12, 13, and 15-17).** The project would include a 30-foot-wide dedicated public access easement that covers 13,000 square feet. In addition to the public access easement there are other on-site and offsite public access improvements.

**Resilience and Adaptation to Rising Sea Level (Exhibit 14)**

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”), current 100-year base flood elevation (BFE) for the project site is +10ft NAVD88 (Zone AE 10). As proposed, the project’s public access areas would be raised to approximately elevation 13.2ft NAVD88. The residential buildings would be elevated to levels ranging from 13.2ft to 13.7ft NAVD88.

Under the projections in the 2018 State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance (2018 State Guidance) document for medium-high risk aversion projects in a high-emissions scenario, the proposed public access areas would not be expected to flood in extreme storm events in 2050, and would not be expected to flood under a normal tidal regime. The medium-high risk scenario is appropriate in considering potential future flood risk for the project because the public access area would be required for the life of the project and there is likely not sufficient room to adapt in place without significant modifications.

By year 2100, under the 2018 State Guidance’s “low emissions” scenario for medium-high risk aversion, the public access areas would not be anticipated to flood at Mean Higher High Water, although these areas would flood by approximately 11 inches in a King Tide (1-year storm) event, and 3.2 feet in a 100-year storm event. In the “high emissions” scenario, the trail and residential units would flood with daily tides.

The proposed sea level rise adaptation strategy includes the proposed retaining wall, which would be designed to allow the height of the wall to increase an additional four feet to mitigate sea level impacts to the year 2100. Project proponent notes that the existing Bair Island Trail levee located on the adjacent PG&E parcel is at an elevation of approximately +9.8ft NAVD88, so that the future elevation of this adjacent bay trail could also eventually serve as a barrier making this site more resilient to flood conditions and sea level rise. Raising the elevation of the PG&E levee is not a part of the 505 E. Bayshore Road project.

**Community Engagement**

Based on a review of BCDC’s Environmental Justice Policies website, project proponent has decided to prepare a community engagement strategy based on a format produced by Policy Link, an Oakland-based national non-profit research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity. The project proponent plans to hold two publicly noticed meetings in late August, and will accommodate those who can’t attend these meetings with in-person meetings. With Policy Link’s format in mind, the project proponent indicates they will hold these two meetings in a fashion that centers certain values conducive to fostering the kind of atmosphere where meeting participants feel welcomed and valued. These values would include trust, equity, justice, respect, humility, integrity, reliability, authenticity, inclusiveness, equal access, equal opportunity, and reciprocity. Project proponent is also drawing on Policy Link tactics with respect to encouraging and welcoming participation in up-coming community engagement sessions, including:

- Working through existing networks of community-based organizations that serve and organize in diverse cultural communities to identify the leaders to work with.
- Attending community meetings and cultural events as a participant. Listen to what issues they discuss and how they talk about them. Enter with a sense of humility and awareness of potential power dynamics due to race, ethnic, citizenship, class, or gender differences.
- Developing awareness of the racial and economic disparities in your city or region and why those disparities exist (informed by experienced community leaders and organizations).
- Seeking out relationships with leaders from non-English speaking communities. Work with them to identify the barriers to engagement and ways to bridge the divide into their community.
- Translating materials and provide interpretation at community meetings.
- Engaging faith-based organizations in the community to help bring hard-to-reach residents on board— helping to reach beyond the “usual” voices.
- Building incentives for engagement for each strategy that reduce barriers to participate. Many residents in low-income communities and communities of color are from working families with busy schedules and childcare constraints. Meetings should be held in evenings and on weekends; and, whenever possible, provide childcare, meals, and transit passes.

At the end of the late-August round of community engagement project proponent will compile feedback gathered, and show how it has been incorporated into the 505 E. Bayshore proposal.

## Commission Plans, Policies, and Guidelines

### San Francisco Bay Plan Policies

The *San Francisco Bay Plan* (Bay Plan) contains a number of policy sections relevant to the design of the public access areas for this project, including the sections on Public Access, and Appearance, Design and Scenic Views.

**Public Access** Policy No. 2 states, in part, that “...maximum feasible access to and along the waterfront and on any permitted fills should be provided in and through every new development in the Bay or on the shoreline...” These policies also provide specific details on the locations and types of features that should be included in public access areas. Policy No. 10 states, in part, that “[a]ccess to and along the waterfront should be provided by walkways, trails, or other appropriate means and connect to the nearest public thoroughfare” and Policy No. 8 states, in part, that “...improvements should be designed and built to encourage diverse Bay-related activities and movement to and along the shoreline, should provide barrier free access for persons with disabilities, for people of all income levels, and for people of all cultures to the maximum feasible extent, should include an ongoing maintenance program, and should be identified with appropriate signs – including using appropriate languages or culturally-relevant icon-based signage.” While the above policies speak to public access to and along the shorelines, the Bay Plan supports public access leading to natural areas in the nearby surroundings just beyond the immediate shorelines: Policy 3 states, in part, “[p]ublic access to some natural areas should

be provided to permit study and enjoyment of these areas”, after careful consultation with appropriate agencies. Whether public access features are designed to promote access to or along the shoreline, or natural areas in the nearby surroundings, Policy 7 states, in part, that “access should be permanently guaranteed”, and to “remain viable in the event of future sea level rise or flooding. Moreover, the design and siting of shoreline and public access features should be guided by the Public Access Design Guidelines and the considered expertise of members of the Design Review Board (Public Access Policy 13 and Appearance, Design and Scenic Views Policy 1).

With respect to projects whose physical surroundings constrain public access design and siting, Public Access Policy 9 provides allowances for a “small amount of fill” that is “the minimum absolutely required”.

Related to the community input on the amenities included in public access spaces, Public Access Policy No. 5 states that “[p]ublic access that substantially changes the use or character of the site should be sited, designed, and managed based on meaningful community involvement to create public access that is inclusive and welcoming to all and embraces local multicultural and indigenous history and presence. In particular, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and/or underrepresented communities should be involved.”

In considering public access designs and potential future climate change, Public Access Policy No. 6 states, in part, that “[p]ublic 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.

The Bay Plan **Appearance, Design and Scenic Views (ADSV)** 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 “maximum efforts should be made to provide, enhance, or preserve views of the Bay and shoreline, especially from public areas...” (ADSV Policy 2). These policies also state, in part, that “[s]horeline developments should be built in clusters, leaving open area around them to permit more frequent views of the Bay” (ADSV Policy 8).

### **Public Access Design Guidelines**

The *Public Access Design Guidelines* state that public access should feel public, be designed so that the user is not intimidated nor is the user’s appreciation diminished by structures or incompatible uses, and that there should be visual cues that public access is available for the public’s use by using site furnishings, such as benches, trash containers, lighting, and signage. The *Public Access Design Guidelines* further state that public access areas should be designed for a wide range of users, should maximize user comfort by designing for weather and day and night use, and that each site’s historical, cultural, and natural attributes provide opportunities for creating projects with a “sense of place” and a unique identity. The Bay Plan Public Access policies on these Design Guidelines state “The Design Review Board should encourage diverse public access to meet the needs of a growing and diversifying population. Public access should be well distributed around the Bay and designed or improved to accommodate a broad range of activities for people of all races, cultures, ages, income levels, and abilities.”

## Board Questions

Staff recommends the Board frame its remarks of the proposed project considering the public access objectives found in the Commission's Public Access Design Guidelines. Additionally, please provide feedback on the proposed project with respect to the Commission's policies on sea level rise, and environmental justice and social equity. Staff also has the following specific questions for the Board's consideration:

### **Public, Usable and Bay Setting:**

1. How could the public spaces "feel public" and allow for the shoreline to be enjoyed by the greatest number of people?
2. How could the public access areas provide a unique "sense of place" that would attract all users to the shoreline?

### **Connections and Continuity:**

3. What shoreline trail configuration would encourage diverse Bay-related activities?
4. How could the proposed project provide a clear connection to the adjacent levee Bay Trail and the Bair Island Trail?
5. How could the proposed shoreline trail landing enhance the public invitation to the site from East Bayshore Road?

### **Visual Access and Visual Quality:**

6. How could the design of the paseos maximize views and physical connections to the shoreline?
7. How could the proposed shoreline improvements preserve and enhance views along the waterway?

### **Wildlife compatibility:**

8. How could the proposed shoreline planting and activities respond to the adjacent natural wildlife habitat areas in Smith Slough and Bair Island?
9. How could the proposed amenities allow for and enhance the viewing and study of wildlife?

### **Sea Level Rise:**

10. How could the public access areas be appropriately designed to be resilient and adaptive to sea level rise?