

# San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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March 2, 2023

**TO:** Design Review Board Members

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**SUBJECT:** **Office/Research Development at 620 Airport Boulevard, City of Burlingame;  
First Pre-Application Review**  
(For Design Review Board consideration on March 13, 2023)

## Project Summary

### Project Proponents

Vassar Properties, Inc. (developer) and Boca Lake Office, Inc. (property owner)

### Project Representatives

Jeremy Lui (Vassar Properties, Inc.), Justin Aff (CMG Landscape Architecture), Leticia Moore (Holland and Knight), and Karin Kuklin (DGA Architecture)

### Project Location (Exhibits 2, 4 and 5)

The project comprises two properties located on the Anza Peninsula in the City of Burlingame, San Mateo County. The approximately 3.7-acre site, located at 620 Airport Boulevard, is owned by Boca Lake Office, Incorporated. The adjacent 1.4-acre shoreline site is owned by the State Lands Commission (SLC) and includes a portion of the Bay Trail. The project site is bounded by the Anza Lagoon to the north and west, a hotel to the east, and Airport Boulevard to the south.

### Project Overview

The project proposes to redevelop an existing airport off-site parking lot with two 8-story office buildings, a public plaza, and shoreline public access improvements. The project proposes to elevate the site for sea level rise adaptation.



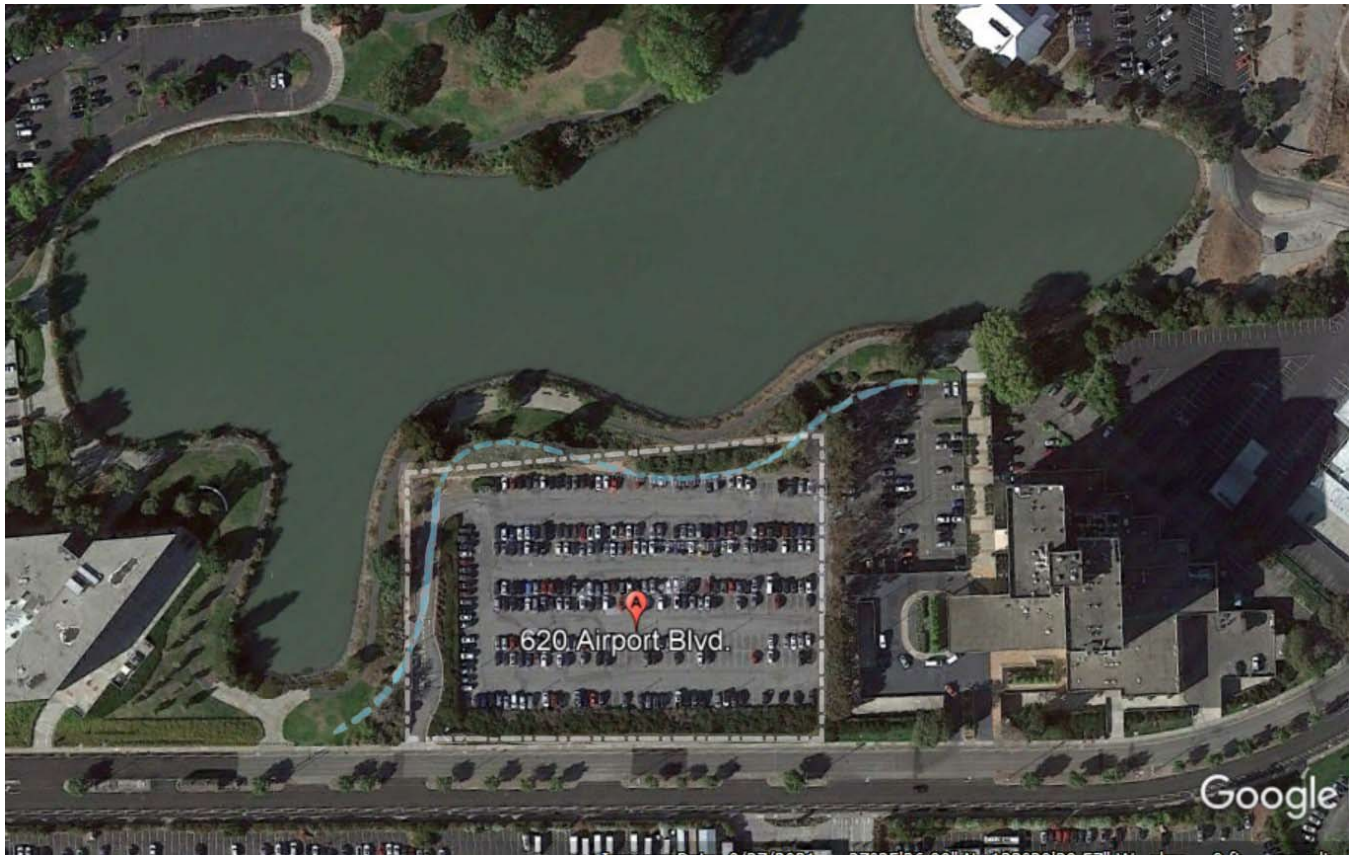


Figure 1. Aerial image of existing site at 620 Airport Boulevard in the City of Burlingame.

## Project Site

### Site History (Exhibit 3)

The majority of the land at this site was once water and historic tidal flats, located near Ssalson, the traditional indigenous homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone. The site was filled in the mid- to late 1960s by the Anza-Pacific Corporation out of illegal fill that was placed into the Bay. Concrete debris and slabs from the original San Mateo Bridge created the perimeter wave break of the Anza peninsula and additional fill materials were placed to create the interior of the 146-acre peninsula. As part of a settlement agreement in July 1972 between the Anza-Pacific Corporation and the State Lands Commission (SLC), the State was given 46 acres of the Anza Peninsula, including 9.4 acres at the project site, to create a peninsula-wide shoreline public access system. Public Trust lands are required to be held in trust for all Californians, and they are required to serve statewide and regional goals.

The Anza Peninsula in Burlingame has specific public access guidelines that were adopted by the BCDC Commission on January 21, 1982. Prior to their adoption, these guidelines were revised based upon input from the Design Review Board at a public hearing on December 17, 1981. A description of relevant guidelines is found in the policy section titled "Burlingame Bayfront Specific Area Plan."

### **Existing Conditions (Exhibit 6)**

On the 3.7-acre site at 620 Airport Boulevard, approximately 2.7 acres is currently a surface parking lot with 344-spaces. Based on historical Google Earth aerial photos, the parking lot is fully utilized, possibly because the parking lot offers long-term airport parking and shuttle service to and from the San Francisco International Airport (SFO). Planting around the parking lot accounts for another 0.9 acres, and a driveway into the site the final 0.1 acres. The site is zoned as Bayfront Commercial.

### **Existing Public Access (Exhibit 6)**

The 1.4-acre parcel located between the Anza Lagoon and the north and west sides of 620 Airport Boulevard is a BCDC required public access area owned by the State Lands Commission (SLC). The area includes a 10-foot-wide Bay Trail segment and two shoreline seating areas. In 1999, BCDC assigned responsibility of this 1.4-acre public access area to the owner of the 620 Airport Boulevard property, Boca Lakes Inc. The owners of 620 Airport Boulevard are currently working with the SLC to obtain a lease for this 1.4-acre area, where much of proposed project's public access improvements would occur. The lease would further clarify the 620 Airport Boulevard owner's interest in and responsibility for the shoreline public access.

### **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 1,401 people) associated with "lowest contamination vulnerability" and "low social vulnerability." The low social vulnerability indicator is mainly based on a single vulnerability indicator -- a high concentration of renters in the census area. It is worth noting that while almost 80 percent of all households are renters, 16 percent are cost-burdened, compared to high social vulnerability areas, where almost 30 percent of all renters are cost-burdened. The Anza Peninsula comprises commercial uses and community parks, which are both community and regional assets.

## **Proposed Project**

### **Updates Since June 2022 DRB Meeting (Exhibit 19)**

The Design Review Board first reviewed the project proposal at the August 4, 2022 meeting. The proposed project has been updated in response to the comments received in that review. Among these updates, the project has cut back the northern side of both buildings by approximately 25 feet and added waterfront plazas in the freed-up spaces, softened the northwest shoreline with a living shoreline for climate change adaptation and shifted the Bay Trail upland 50 feet, reduced surface parking from 25 spaces to 14 (while still proposing 5 public access parking spaces), shortened the fire

lane, added nine pedestrian access paths between the plaza, Bay Trail, and side walk, enlarged plaza planters to better support healthy plants and trees, enlarged fitness area, and added a café, bike parking, and shade trees on the lagoon side of the project site.

### **Office/R&D Development with Public Access Improvements (Exhibits 7 - 18)**

The project proposes to redevelop a surface parking lot on a 3.7-acre parcel into two eight-story office/R&D buildings with public access amenities through the center of the site and around the 1.4 acres of the shoreline. The project proposes to elevate the shoreline and the site to address future sea level rise.

Building A, the westmost proposed building, would contain approximately 239,400 total square feet. The footprint is approximately 30,000 square feet, with 5 square feet of the footprint located within the shoreline band. Building B, the easternmost proposed building, would be approximately 243,980 total square feet. The footprint would also be approximately 30,000 square feet and completely outside the shoreline band. Each building would be approximately 137 feet tall, with the average top of curb located at +11 feet NAVD88. The buildings entry level plaza is proposed at +17 feet NAVD88. A partially underground parking podium would span almost the entirety of the private parcel with 13,830 square feet of the parking podium located within the shoreline band.

1. **Access and Parking.** There are two transit shuttle stops at 600 Airport Boulevard and 700 Airport Boulevard, which are next to 620 Airport Boulevard. Operated by the San Mateo County Transportation Demand Management Agency (“Commute.Org”), the shuttle provides access to the Millbrae BART Station in a 14-minute trip. In addition to the nearby shuttle stops, the project site is served by Class II Bicycle Lanes that run along Airport Boulevard. The Burlingame 2020 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan recommends upgrading this segment to a Class IV Separated Bikeway, although no specific timetable or funds have been identified to accomplish this recommendation. In addition to the bicycle lanes on Airport Boulevard in front of the project, there is also the Bay Trail on the side of the project along the shoreline, which is also a designated Class I Shared-Use Path. Bicyclists and pedestrians can access the project site using the Bay Trail, which meets Airport Boulevard immediately west of the site and connects through the hotel parcel to the east of the site. Pedestrians approaching the site from Airport Boulevard would access the elevated plaza via ramp. Vehicle access would be provided to the project site via three proposed driveways along Airport Boulevard. The western driveway would provide access to approximately 14 surface parking spaces which includes 5 public shore parking spaces and building services. The central driveway would provide access to the below-grade parking and plaza level drop-off between the two proposed buildings. The eastern driveway would provide access to loading and the parking podium. The project would provide a total of approximately 860 vehicle parking spaces, including 38 motorcycle parking spaces.
2. **Landscape Plantings.** The project would remove approximately 44 existing trees, 8 of which require a City permit, and plant approximately 208 new trees. Plantings would be provided throughout the project site, including in the Public Plaza area, along the Bay Trail, and around the perimeters of the proposed buildings and surface parking lot. The proposed planting area would total approximately 105,625 square feet with approximately 70,000 square feet of planting around the shoreline.

3. **Public Access Features.** The project proposes a number of public access amenities within and outside of the shoreline band. The project proposes to include approximately 3,400 linear feet of public access paths, of which approximately 1,390 linear feet would be within BCDC jurisdiction. The project proposes a project total of 2.3 acres of public open space with 1.6 acres in the shoreline band.
  - a. **Elevated Public Plaza with Stroll Gardens and Outdoor Rooms:** The Public Plaza and Stroll Gardens would be elevated to +17 feet NAVD88, providing a vista to the Bay Trail, the Anza Lagoon, and the Bay beyond the lagoon. The approximately 26,200 square-foot Public Plaza would be located in between the two buildings and includes a vehicle drop-off area for the building entrances. A "Stroll Garden" is proposed at the northern edge of the plaza with intersecting paths, seating nooks, shade trees, and drought-tolerant native and climate-adapted planting. Additional "Outdoor Rooms" are proposed to provide seating areas along the edge of each building.
  - b. **Bay Trail:** The project would widen approximately 954 linear feet of the existing Bay Trail from 10 feet to 18 feet. The improved trail would include a 12-foot-wide path and two 3-foot-wide decorative-paved shoulders. The path would be elevated from +11 feet NAVD88 to approximately +13.3 feet NAVD88.
  - c. **Seating Areas along the Bay Trail:** The project proposes to refresh the two seating areas along the bayside of the Bay Trail. Two seating areas would replace the current seating area on the northwest corner of the 1.24-acre parcel. A third seating area would be on the opposite side of the Bay Trail where the Art Feature is located.
  - d. **Terraced Seating Area:** An approximately 3,200-square-foot terraced wooden seating area with stairs would provide a transition from the Stroll Gardens at elevation +17 feet down to the Bay Trail at elevation +13.3 feet. The seating faces the lagoon for Bay nature viewing opportunities.
  - e. **Native Garden Pathways and Picnic Area:** A series of accessible pathways and stairs connect the elevated plaza to the shoreline. Approximately 10,900 square feet of native planting would be located between the connecting pathways. Adjacent to the Bay Trail, the project proposes several picnic table areas measuring approximately 900 square feet.
  - f. **Fitness Station Area:** The project proposes an approximately 1,540-square-foot outdoor fitness area adjacent to the upland of the Bay Trail at the east end of the project site. Approximately 4,500 square feet of native planting would separate the Fitness Station Area from the adjacent property's parking lot.
  - g. **Publicly Accessible Café and Outdoor Seating Plaza:** At the Bay side of the east building (Building B), the project proposed a café open to the public. Doors to the café will open onto a plaza with outdoor seating, open to the public. The outdoor seating area is approximately 2,080 square feet in size and is accessible from the Bay Trail by stairs and accessible sloped walkways. The café and plaza are also accessible from the plaza between the two buildings.

- h. **Interactive Art Feature:** In the grassy area at the western-most edge of the Bay Trail, the project proposes to set-aside an approximately 1,600-square-foot area for an interactive art feature or sea-level rise interpretive art. The project team has not yet considered the specifics for the type of art but intends to work with local artists to produce something that is interesting, interactive, and informative.
- i. **Bicycle Parking:** The project would include 31 public bike racks for a total of 62 bike parking spots for public use. Of this total number of public bike parking spots, 38 spots would be available at the lobby plazas, 8 spots at the café plaza, 8 spots at the picnic area/seating area, and 8 spots at the west edge seating area/art area. Inside the buildings, the project would place 42 bicycle racks available only to tenants with key card access.
- j. **View Corridors:** The project would include three view corridors through the project site from Airport Boulevard, including a 160-foot-wide view corridor through the center of the project site. Immediately west of the westernmost building, the project would designate a 60-foot-wide view corridor; and, to the east of the easternmost building, there would be a 30-foot-wide view corridor to the Bay. Due to the elevation of the site, the view corridors would be obstructed from Airport Boulevard, but would enable views from locations further upland.

### **Sea Level Rise (Exhibit 19 - 24)**

The City of Burlingame completed a comprehensive update of their zoning ordinance in 2021. The new zoning code provides regulations for the Bayfront, including guidelines for new development to be resilient to sea level rise. For reference, the ordinance establishes minimum finished floor elevations of buildings at +13 feet NAVD88 and the shoreline protection for this area would be required to be built to elevation +17 feet NAVD88.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”), current 100-year base flood elevation (BFE) for the project site is +10 feet NAVD88. The project proposes to elevate the public access from +11.1 feet to +13.3 feet NAVD88. The office/R&D buildings would be elevated from +11 feet to a minimum of +17 feet 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 and development are not expected to flood in extreme storm events in 2050, with the public access remaining 1.09 feet above expected flood levels in a 100-year storm. The location within the Anza Lagoon provides certain protection from Bay wave action. Staff have analyzed the public access under the medium-high risk scenario because the public access area would be permanently guaranteed for the life of the project and there is not sufficient room to adapt in place without significant modifications.

By year 2100, under the 2018 State Guidance’s “high emissions” scenario for medium-high risk aversion, the public access areas would be anticipated to flood almost daily at Mean Higher High Water and all flood events. The proposed development at elevation +17 feet would experience minimal flooding during a 100-year storm event at the end of the century.

The proposed project is sufficiently elevated to avoid severe flooding under current (+10.31 feet) and projected mid-century (+12.21 feet) 100-year flood event conditions. To address future flooding events beyond mid-century levels, such as the projected end of century 100-year flood event (+16.01 feet), the project team has considered raising much of the Bay Trail through the project to 16- to 17-feet, as well as raising the Terraced Seating Area, the Fitness Area, the Picnic Area, and the shoreline along the northwest corner of the project as necessary to meet Bay Trail elevations.

The adaptation stage of the project would raise the shoreline revetment and/or the Bay Trail to a minimum elevation of 17 feet (NAVD 88) in the future as required by sea level rise, in conformance with the City's recent Sea Level Rise Ordinance that establishes minimum crest height elevations for the shoreline. The project proponents have prepared plan and section diagrams illustrating how the proposed project shoreline and Bay Trail may be adapted to a 17-foot minimum elevation.

### **Shoreline Protection**

The project proposes to raise approximately 750 linear feet of embankment at the Anza Lagoon and install new riprap-armored shoreline to enhance long-term shoreline sea level rise resiliency. New riprap will be installed along the entire project shoreline to an elevation of +9.7' NAVD88.

The project proposes to create a living shoreline zone at the northwest corner of the site along Anza Lagoon between the Bay Trail and the Shoreline. This area would be graded to have areas lower than the raised Bay Trail in order to accommodate future sea level rise and upland migration of the shoreline. This zone will be planted with native, salt tolerant upland coastal scrub and upland marsh species. Over time, with sea level rise and periodic inundation, it is expected that the plant communities will adapt and change with changes to sea level and frequency of inundation.

### **Community Engagement**

The project team has engaged with local community members to present the project and solicit feedback. The bulk of this engagement occurred in 2021, as the project team wished to prioritize engagements in order to identify and address the major design issues. The team reached out to 20 businesses (e.g. Hilton Hotel and Double Tree Hotel), business groups (e.g. Burlingame/SFO Chamber of Commerce, Broadway Burlingame Improvement District), non-profit organizations (e.g. Audubon Society and Sphere Institute) and community groups (e.g. Silicon Valley Bike Coalition and Shoreview Neighborhood Association). As reported to staff for the first DRB review, the project team made the following changes to the design in response to the community feedback:

1. **View Corridor:** The project was originally contemplated as one building and has been modified to be split into two to create a central view corridor.
2. **Bicycle Parking:** Publicly accessible bike parking will be provided on site.
3. **Creation of Public Plaza and Improvements:** The project proposes significant improvements to the Bay Trail and the creation of an elevated plaza to benefit public use and access to the shoreline.
4. **Bird Safe Design:** With input from the Audubon Society, the project includes certain design features such as non-reflective glass and setbacks to prevent bird strikes.

5. **Outdoor Programming:** The outdoor area would include fitness amenities as well as trash receptacles for community use.
6. **Public cafe:** The project proposes space for a cafe that is accessible to the public.
7. **Lighting:** Soft outdoor lighting would contribute to accessibility to the site in the evenings minimizing impacts to local habitat.

The project team reports that while it has continued to maintain some community engagements and discussions since the project's first DRB review, it has done so mainly to keep those relationships.

## Approval and Construction Timeline

The project team is in the process of obtaining a lease from the State Lands Commission (SLC) to allow them to implement the range of public access improvements in the 1.24-acre off-site area between the lagoon and the applicants' privately-owned parcel. This process is occurring concurrently with the project's CEQA review, which began in May 2022. The applicant expects to obtain the SLC lease if and when the project is granted a Special Use Permit by the City of Burlingame Planning Commission Hearing in May 2023. The project has already completed the City's Design Review process and obtained the required Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approval. This is the project's second review by the DRB in preparation for its official BCDC permit application, which the project team expects to submit in April 2023 and heard at a Commission meeting in October 2023. If approved by the Commission, the project team plans to develop construction documents over the following eight months and start construction by September 2024.

## 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, Recreation, Appearance, Design and Scenic Views, Shoreline Protection, Climate Change, Environmental Justice, and Public Trust.

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."

Public Access Policy No. 6 states, "Public access should be sited, designed, managed and maintained to avoid significant adverse impacts from sea level rise and shoreline flooding." Policy No. 7 states, in part, that "access should be permanently guaranteed" and "remain viable in the event of future sea level rise or flooding." Bay Plan Climate Change Policy 3 states, "To protect public safety and ecosystem



services, within areas that a risk assessment determines are vulnerable to future shoreline flooding that threatens public safety, all projects—other than repairs of existing facilities, small projects that do not increase risks to public safety, interim projects and infill projects within existing urbanized areas—should be designed to be resilient to a mid-century sea level rise projection."

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 natural areas and where habitat or species may be impacted by public access, Public Access Policy No. 4 states, in part, that "[p]ublic access should be sited, designed and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife..." and that "[s]iting, design and management strategies should be employed to avoid or minimize adverse effects on wildlife."

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.

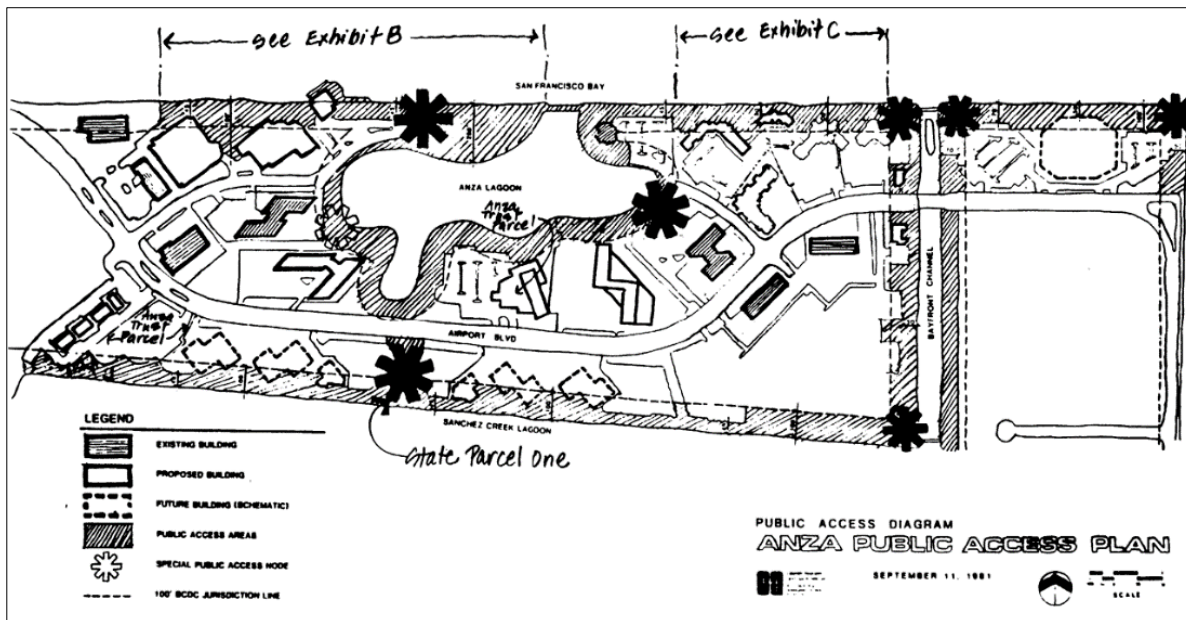
The Bay Plan Appearance, Design and Scenic Views policies state, in part, that "all bayfront development should be designed to enhance the pleasure of the user or viewer of the Bay" and that "maximum efforts should be made to provide, enhance, or preserve views of the Bay and shoreline, especially from public areas..." (Policy No. 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" (Policy No. 8). Policy No. 4 states, in part: "Structures and facilities that do not take advantage of or visually complement the Bay should be located and designed so as not to impact visually on the Bay and shoreline." Parking areas, for example, should be located away from the shoreline, except for small parking areas for fishing access or Bay viewing.

Bay Plan Shoreline Protection policies state, in part, that, "all shoreline protection projects should evaluate the use of natural and nature-based features such as marsh vegetation, levees with transitional ecotone habitat, mudflats, beaches, and oyster reefs, and should incorporate these features to the greatest extent practicable... Suitability and sustainability of proposed shoreline protection and restoration strategies at the project site should be determined using the best available science on shoreline adaptation and restoration." The policies also state, in part, that "adverse impacts to natural resources and public access from new shoreline protection should be avoided. When feasible, shoreline protection projects should include components to retain safe and convenient water access, for activities such as fishing, swimming, and boating, especially in communities lacking such access. Where significant impacts cannot be avoided, mitigation or alternative public access should be provided."

The project site is located on land owned by the State of California and subject to the Public Trust Doctrine. In regard to the use of the project site, the Bay Plan policies on Public Trust state that “when the Commission takes any action affecting lands subject to the public trust, it should assure that the action is consistent with the public trust needs for the area and, in case of lands subject to legislative grants, should also assure that the terms of the grant are satisfied and the project is in furtherance of statewide purposes.”

### **Burlingame Bayfront Specific Area Plan**

The Burlingame Bayfront Specific Area Plan adopted by the Commission on January 21, 1982 contains a number of general policies related to the development of the Anza Peninsula in Burlingame that require maximum feasible public access on the Anza Peninsula. Additionally, there are specific policies and public access requirements related to the development of different portions of the Anza Peninsula. For this project, the Anza Lagoon and General policies are relevant to this site. These policies state, in part, that “the last vacant parcel with shoreline frontage only on Anza Lagoon may be developed with high density uses provided most of the shoreline band is devoted to public access and any tall buildings are sited away from the southern-most portion of the Lagoon as shown on Exhibit A.” They also state, “buildings and improvements should be designed to encourage use of the adjacent public access areas by the public, and parking and service facilities should be integrated with any development they serve, located so as not to interfere with or detract from public access to and along the shoreline, and landscaped to minimize visual impacts.”



BCDC Public Access Guidelines for the Anza Area Exhibit A, Burlingame adopted by the Commission January 21, 1982. This exhibit identifies the 620 Airport Boulevard parcel as the last Anza Lagoon parcel .

### **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 public access improvements considering the proposed development project. The Board may wish to refer to the public access objectives found in the Commission's Public Access Design Guidelines. Additionally, please provide feedback on the proposed public access improvements with respect to the Commission's policies on sea level rise, and environmental justice and social equity.

The seven objectives for public access are:

1. Make public access **PUBLIC**.
2. Make public access **USABLE**.
3. Provide, maintain, and enhance **VISUAL ACCESS** to the Bay and shoreline.
4. Maintain and enhance the **VISUAL QUALITY** of the Bay, shoreline, and adjacent developments.
5. Provide **CONNECTIONS** to and **CONTINUITY** along the shoreline.
6. Take advantage of the **BAY SETTING**.
7. Ensure that public access is **COMPATIBLE WITH WILDLIFE** through siting, design, and management strategies.

Staff also has the following specific questions for the Board's consideration:

1. How does the project proposal result in public spaces that "feel public," and does the project proposal allow for the shoreline to be enjoyed by the greatest number of people?
2. What additional improvements would improve the public access experience to and along the shoreline?
3. Are the public access areas appropriately designed to be resilient and adaptive to sea level rise in balance with ensuring high-quality public access opportunities?
4. Does the design provide legible connections from the adjacent roadway that will draw users into and through the site to the Bay Trail?