

# San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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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)) and Ashley Tomerlin, Senior Bay Dev. Design Analyst (415/352-3657; [ashley.tomerlin@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:ashley.tomerlin@bcdc.ca.gov))

**SUBJECT: Draft Summary of the May 8, 2023 BCDC Design Review Board Meeting**

1. **Call to Order and Meeting Procedure Review.** Design Review Board (DRB) Chair Jacinta McCann called the hybrid meeting to order on Zoom, at approximately 5:00 p.m.

BCDC Board Members in attendance included Board Chair Jacinta McCann, Board Vice Chair Gary Strang and Board Members Bob Battalio, Kristen Hall, Stephan Pellegrini.

BCDC staff in attendance included Ashley Tomerlin, Yuriko Jewett, Shruti Sinha, and Katharine Pan.

B9 Island Parkway Project Team: Ethan Warsh, BioMed Realty; Marcel Wilson, Bionic Landscape Architects; Ellie Knecht, WRA; Geoff Smick, WRA; and Cecily Barclay, Perkins Coie

2. **Staff Update.** Ashley Tomerlin provided an update to the Board Member Recruitment and announced the selection committee's recommendations for appointment, Leo Chow for the Architect Board Member, Patricia Fonseca Flores, for the Landscape Architect Alternate, Guneet Anand for the Urban Design Alternate, and Cody Anderson for the Engineer Alternate.

3. **B9 Island Parkway Life Sciences Development Project, City of Belmont, San Mateo County (First Pre-Application Review).** The first pre-application review of the proposal by BioMed Realty Properties to develop a new life sciences campus at a mostly vacant 12.67-acre site at 300, 400, and 301 Island Parkway and 800 Clipper Drive with three 9 to 13-level office buildings and a new 12-story parking garage. The project would make improvements to the O'Neill Slough Trail and create a publicly accessible plaza with public art installations, diverse seating areas, and native gardens, and provide public shore parking spaces.

a. **Staff Presentation.** Shruti Sinha provided a staff introduction to the project site and context.

b. **Project Presentation.** Ethan Warsh and Marcel Wilson provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of project goals, background, local context, existing site conditions, and a detailed description of the proposed project.



c. **Public Comment.** Gita Dev, Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter. Submitted a letter in addition to calling in. The comments included concern for the site proximity to the Redwood Shores Nature Preserve; the facades seem very glossy so please apply bird safe design, and minimize night lighting from building and exterior lighting as it's adjacent to the slough. Additionally, she expressed concerns with the bio safety levels of the development and wanted to make sure the building is not up to a level 3. She also stated she understood the large plate design needs, but in light of OneShoreline and other requirements, it's important to respect the 100' setback and have a gentler slope like 20:1.

d. **Board Clarifying Questions from Project Presentation**

- (1) Clarification on intensity of site development between existing authorizations and proposed project.
- (2) Clarification on risk levels and applicable building code requirements related to bio safety levels.
- (3) Clarification on site vehicular circulation including loading access, passenger drop offs, and parking.
- (4) Clarification on location of lobbies in relation to the roundabout and ground floor uses where adjacent to public access areas.
- (5) Clarification on the public access space required by the City and if there is distinction between green/gray spaces and does it include/exclude emergency vehicle access route.
- (6) Clarification on TMA/TDM requirements.
- (7) Clarification on existing flooding conditions on site.
- (8) Clarification on requirements for an emergency access plan related to flooding.
- (9) Clarification on designed life of project and buildings.
- (10) Clarification on extent of improvements along Concourse and Island Parkway; existing bicycle circulation and access from Oracle bridge.
- (11) Clarification on whether developer will hold or sell site.
- (12) Clarification on food and beverage services and tenants.
- (13) Clarification on phasing of development and when public access is constructed.

e. **Board Discussion.** The Board discussed how the project addresses the seven objectives for public access found in the Public Access Design Guidelines, provided feedback on the proposed public access improvements with respect to the Commission's policies on sea level rise, and environmental justice and social equity, and addressed the staff questions listed below.

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 roadways and bike/pedestrian networks to draw users into and through the site to the O'Neill Slough Trail and shoreline?

f. **Summary of Key Issues**

(1) **Site Design**

- i. The site is located in a particularly ecologically interesting place with the nearby nature preserve and existing habitat value. It is hard to reconcile a much-loved recreation complex, the ecological significance, and the proposed massing and paving of the project immediately adjacent to those uses.
- ii. There is so much building on site that the vehicular circulation doubles as the public walkways. The Board questioned whether this would truly feel like a public space. The 25' foot path is really adjacent to the building face. There needs to be a greater horizontal buffer and mediation between building mass and the public access area at the ground plane – use bigger trees to lower perception of adjacent buildings.

- iii. The project should be consistent with larger regional goals and ecological wellbeing of the area. The site is tight and developing a site so heavily doesn't leave room for adaptation and creates a situation that will demand a future levee and there are already so many levees.
- iv. The Board understands the pressures, complexity, and numbers for development but it's the DRB's job to push back to maximize public benefit. Board recommends pulling Building 2 away from the shoreline to relieve the pinch point, provide greater buffer for public spaces and habitat, and provide greater capacity for future adaptation for sea level rise. Consider shifting building towards the road or changing configuration of drop off to create space. Until you have an adaptation strategy, maintain the space and capacity for future adaptation.

Public Comment letter: Understand needs for large plate design, but in consideration of the OneShoreline and other requirements - it's important to respect the 100' setback and have a gentler slope like 20:1.

- v. There is a lot of parking, it seems that there is 1 spot per employee (400 SF/employee). Explore opportunities to reduce number of parking spaces and define shared needs between Campus and City uses. Parking demands for the Campus and City uses don't seem incompatible and could be better coordinated. For example, can more City parking be accommodated within the garage outside of business hours?
- vi. The Public Access seems to be encroaching into the marsh where typically we want to give more buffer to sensitive areas.
- vii. Buildings
  - The public frontage along the promenade needs animation and an active ground floor use seems unlikely as shown. Explore a layered approach or give more attention to ground plane and the building edges: create seating areas, explore articulation of façade to provide depth, and enhance areas of landscaping to make it a more interesting experience. A more permeable design could benefit the project in terms of complementary ground floor uses (cafes etc.) that may benefit the overall project.
  - The height of the buildings compared to what is immediately adjacent is concerning. What is happening with shadows and public space? There is good southern/western exposure, but what happens with the wind? It is necessary to understand and design with the microclimates of public access areas.

- Public Comment Letter: The facades seem very glossy. This site is adjacent to the Redwood Shores Nature Preserve; maintain bird safe design, and minimize night lighting from building and exterior lighting as it's adjacent to the slough.

(2) **Circulation.** The introduction of more connectivity along slough is welcome. This is not the Bay Trail but it directly connects into the trail network and is well used even as an unimproved trail.

(3) **Site Arrival**

- i. The scale of the north vehicle drop off is not necessary and should not be used as the placemaking feature of the site. Central entry/drop off should be minimized.
- ii. When driving to the site from Island Parkway, the first entry you encounter is the entry into the parking structure and it doesn't feel like an entry experience. With the size of the garage and the assumption that employees will be driving themselves, explore reducing the size of the north drop off area and enhancing the south arrival point. There is a lot of current use at the existing surface lot; explore enhancing this arrival point.

(4) **Onsite Circulation**

- I. Explore the opportunities of reducing the surface lot and shrinking the north drop off to create more significant public spaces, improve connections, and allow for a softer slope at the shoreline. The city-owned parking lot should be a more significant connection to the Bay Trail at the south. The public access terminates at the garage.
- II. There's a clear opportunity with a 12-story garage to reduce the need for surface parking; project needs to identify the needs for all the site use. Explore reducing the size of the surface lot in order to provide better connections with the trail network and the Bay Trail.
- III. It is strange to see a public walkway turn into the loading dock of buildings. Board questioned if approaching from the street, does someone really want to cross the loading areas.

(5) **Street Circulation**

- I. The Board questioned why Island Parkway was so wide.
- II. The Board noted the potential for conflict where cycle tracks cross vehicular areas, explore moving track or going with conventional lanes on north side of Concourse.

**(6) Shoreline Protection**

- I. A slope of 2:1 for a living shoreline is not something you would consider as a natural geomorphic slope for an edge and will limit ecological value. With sea level rise, the higher marsh plants may migrate up, but the lower portions may not facilitate lower marsh migration.
- II. The plant palette does not seem to be native or appropriate for marsh.
- III. The Board wanted clarification on whether the elevations shown accounted for settlement.
- IV. The Board recommends consideration of other flooding sources beyond shoreline overtopping, ensure higher water levels are being studied.
- V. The Board stated it is important to frame plans in the context of bigger adaptation strategies for the sloughs.
- VI. The Board wants to see the plans and sections. Water comes in from all directions.

**(7) Public Access**

- I. The Board supported the opportunity of creating a more open and welcoming public access along the slough. There are a lot of amenities and opportunity for a good landscape.
- II. The Plan is generally consistent with BCDC guidelines albeit scrunched up and tight. Ensure adaptive capacity.
- III. The Board requested clarification on whether the Master Plan envisioned an EVA counting toward public access.
- IV. The deck is an effective focal point/terminus. As the frame/bird blind comes to life, explore additional uses/animations to provide more justification. The precedent image of the bird blind is interesting, but question whether the design is appropriate to this project.

- (8) Community Engagement.** No environmental groups listed on interested parties; since the Sierra Club wrote a letter, we encourage reaching out to them.

The Design Review board directed the project to come back for a second review.

4. **Meeting Adjournment.** Vice Chair Strand made a motion to adjourn the meeting. It was seconded by Member Hall. Meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:30 PM.