

**Benicia Urban Waterfront Enhancement & Master Plan
Community Advisory Committee #3
Sept. 26, 2013
Draft Meeting Summary**

Present

Community Advisory Committee (CAC):

Bonnie Silveria - Benicia Main Street
Larry Lamoreux - Community Sustainability Commission
Sue Wickham - California Native Plant Society
Nancy Lund - Solano Transportation Authority's Bicycle Advisory Committee
Susan Cohen Grossman –Planning Commission
Jon Van Landschoot – Historic Preservation Review Commission
Tim Rose- Benicia Yacht Club (New representative)

City Staff:

Rick Knight, Parks Superintendent
Michael Dotson, Parks & Community Services Director
Diane Smikahl, Library Director
Vic Randall, Management Analyst
Debra Bray, Administrative Clerk

The Planning Center/DC&E:

Isabelle Minn, Project Manager

Excused:

Kimberly Funk - Parks, Recreation and Cemetery Commission
Elaine Eisner - Arts and Culture Commission
Pete Turner - Solano Transportation Authority's Pedestrian Advisory Committee
Economic Development Board, vacant position

Introductions

Isabelle Minn reviewed the agenda and began introductions.

The Committee accepted the summary of the July 25 CAC meeting as presented.

Review Project Goals and Opportunities & Constraints

Isabelle Minn briefly reviewed the project goals as defined in the Coastal Conservancy Grant Agreement, as well as the project schedule. She then reviewed the Opportunities & Constraints, with particular emphasis on potential jurisdictional wetlands and projected flood elevations.

Review Alternative Site Plans

Isabelle Minn briefly described the three alternative concepts for site development that The Planning Center/DC&E had drafted.

Alternative A

The key feature of this draft alternative concept is that the seasonal wetland adjacent to 1st Street is filled and becomes a part of the green. This wetland conversion would be mitigated primarily by creating a new bioswale in the northeast part of the site. Other features include:

Trails/Boardwalk: around outer perimeter of expanded green and new bioswale

Plaza Entrance: entry plaza with linear path extending to viewing platform

Community Green Space: expanded green includes existing wetland area

Restroom: at eastern plaza

Special Event Vehicular Access: cuts through Depot parking lot

Stormwater: rain gardens and bioswale area mitigate stormwater runoff

Parking: diagonal parking on B Street

Non-motorized-Boat Launch: eastern side with large steps and boat ramp

Public Art: integrated throughout site but emphasized along the Art Walk

Enhanced/Expanded Wetland Area: removal of non-native species and expanded on the eastern edge

Historic Depot: proposed plaza south of the Depot

1st St Promenade: new palms mirror existing palms

Bay Trail: separated multi-use trail parallel to B Street

Nancy Lund asked how visitors would get from the B Street parking lot to the green.

Answer: There would be pedestrian paths from the B Street parking lot between sections of the rain gardens.

Bonnie Silveria asked for clarification regarding vehicular access to the green for special events, expressing concern about the need to accommodate large trucks to and on the green for set up and break down.

Rick Knight concurred that we will need to plan accordingly.

Nancy Lund would like to see an environmentally sensitive surface to drive on, not asphalt.

Alternative B

This draft alternative concept includes a boardwalk along the former railroad alignment and a linear green along the length of B Street, while expanding the existing wetland near the Depot. Other features include:

Trails/Boardwalk: boardwalk along majority historic railroad alignment, multi-use trail between green and wetland area

Plaza Entrance: incorporates seat wall and public art

Community Green Space: existing green space retains shape, added green space on eastern edge of site

Restroom: no new public restroom

Special Event Vehicular Access: located at the end of E 2nd and B Streets

Stormwater: rain gardens help mitigate stormwater runoff

Parking: parallel parking along B Street

Non-motorized Boat Launch: on existing beach at terminus of 1st Street

Public Art: integrated throughout site, emphasized within the western and eastern plaza

Enhanced/Expanded Wetland Area: existing wetland area north of the depot is reconnected

Historic Depot: proposed plaza south of the Depot

1st St Promenade: widened sidewalk on the east side of 1st Street

Bay Trail: along separate multi-use path along wetland edge with mid walk crossing

Larry Lamoreux asked if the reconnected wetland could be used as an educational resource. Ms. Minn concurred that the reconnected wetland would be an excellent site for educational elements. The boardwalks included in this alternative would have a platform at each end, adjacent to the wetland, which could be used for educational purposes.

Larry Lamoreux asked if the reconnected wetland would fill and empty on a regular basis with the tide. Isabelle Minn stated that it would be subject to tidal influence.

Alternative C

This draft alternative concept is very similar to Alternative B, with three exceptions:

1. the boardwalk would be continuous through the wetland
2. the Bay Trail alignment would be in B Street
3. a restroom would be sited in or near the entry plaza

Bonnie Silveria asked what permits would be required to develop in the jurisdictional waters.

Isabelle Minn said Army Corp of Engineers, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Bay Conservation and Development Commission permits would likely be required. Others, such as Regional Water Quality Control Board, may also be required.

Bonnie Silveria asked why permitting would be different now than it was when the TrainWalk boardwalk was first planned.

Rick Knight stated that regulations have changed a lot since the 1970's. If we had done constructed the boardwalk then, we may have had an easier time getting permits.

Bonnie Silveria thinks it would be worth the effort to get the boardwalk along the train route.

Nancy Lund stated that wetland area where the boardwalk would go currently floods during winter. Isabelle Minn said that would be taken into consideration and that the boardwalk would be built above flood levels. Nancy Lund asked if an elevated boardwalk would affect views of the marina from the street. Staff responded that the boardwalk would not be expected to impact views from B Street.

Isabelle Minn provided a short review of Community Workshop # 2 and the site plans that were developed by workshop participants based on the three draft alternative site concepts.

Isabelle Minn presented the Elements of Draft Preferred Alternative as identified during the second Community Workshop. These include:

- Entry plaza at the corner of 1st and B Streets, with seat wall and public art
- Expanded, raised green area next to the plaza without the center pathway
- Bioswale in the northeast of the site, along B Street
- Secondary plaza at eastern edge with seating and public art or recreation focus
- Perimeter walkway around the green and bioswale made of decomposed granite or boardwalk
- Diagonal parking along B Street
- Bay Trail alignment within the park parallel to B Street
- Stormwater rain gardens between B Street parking and trail
- Boardwalk in alignment with historic railroad with viewing platforms
- Formalized non-motorized boat launch, though no location was agreed upon

There were also several issues that were not clearly resolved at the Community Workshop, including:

- Extension of 1st St. Promenade: widened sidewalks on east side of street and/or palm trees on east side
- Location of small craft/non-motorized boat launch
- Location of restroom
- Boardwalks through bioswale in addition to alone perimeter
- Monumental stairs in expanded green

General Discussion

Bonnie Silveria asked if the monumental stairs would be used by skateboarders. Staff noted that skate stoppers would likely be installed on the stairs.

Nancy Lund stated that she thinks the monumental stairs should be parallel to 1st Street because of the wind factor.

Larry Lamoreux stated that he likes the stairs L shaped, as shown in Alternative A.

Nancy Lund asked what will happen to A Street if we use Alternative A and fill in the green. Rick Knight said if we went with Alternative A, we would likely consider filling A

Street at the same time. Nancy Lund recommended using the A Street ROW as an extension of the green on an interim basis, until a commercial use is developed.

Bonnie Silveria stated that she believes that one auto access point would not be sufficient for trucks or emergency personnel, and that it seems unsafe to only have one way in/out of the green in a crowded situation.

Larry Lamoreux agreed that there should be at least two auto access points.

Elements of the Draft Preferred Alternative

Isabelle Minn gave an overview of the elements of the draft site alternatives that generated the broadest support at the second Community Workshop.

Mr. Lamoreux stated that we should build to the line of sight of the former train right of way. Even if a boardwalk could not be built through the marsh, it would be valuable to place the overlooks in that line of sight.

Sue Wickham stated a preference for natural, rounded edges, particularly around the bioswale.

Bonnie Silveria noted that there is already a restroom at the end of the pier, and questioned the need for another here. If one was built, it would need to be closed or City staff would need to service it several times per day during special events.

Mike Dotson noted that most City park restrooms are prefabricated, but a restroom at this site would likely need to be constructed on site, similar to the restroom on the pier, which would increase costs. He noted that portable toilets would still be needed for special events, and that City staff do currently service the portable toilets several times per day during special events.

Nancy Lund said a restroom would impact views, and that if one is built it should be on the east side by the Marina.

Larry Lamoreux does not think we need a new restroom.

Tim Rose thought we should clarify that a restroom would be needed, and figure out where it will go later if it becomes clear that it is needed.

Non-motorized Boat Launch

Tim Rose and Larry Lamoreux both are concerned that a non-motorized boat launch near the marina could be dangerous.

Susan Cohen Grossman thinks that the end of B Street is the best location for a launch. If the non-motorized boat launch is developed there, a restroom should probably also go in that area.

Jon Van Landschoot asked if the pilings at the foot of 1st Street could be touched. Staff responded that if the non-motorized boat launch was sited at the foot of 1st Street, the pilings there would be assessed from a safety perspective.

Bonnie Silveria would like to see the 1st Street site expanded for non-motorized boat access.

Tim Rose noted that non-motorized boating is the fastest growing type of boating. He agrees that the City should be looking at this, but thinks that the marina isn't the safest or best place for a non-motorized boat launch. In particular, he feels that kiteboarders would conflict with boats in the marina channel.

Nancy Lund thinks that we should be talking to the boating community, including Chris Gatewood at Benicia Kite and Paddle.

There was discussion about parking on B Street, but no consensus as to whether it should be diagonal or perpendicular.

Bonnie Silveria and Jon Van Landschoot both feel we should complete the 1st Street Promenade by widening the sidewalk and putting in palms on the east side of First Street.

Sue Wickham expressed concern about managing the invasive palm trees currently growing in the marsh and hoped that marsh maintenance plans would account for impacts that might be caused by the species planted on 1st Street. It was noted that the palms that were planted on 1st Street are a different species than the invasive palm trees growing in the marsh.

Public discussion

John Ash from Benicia Harbor Corporation stated that this is an industrial shoreline. He discussed the plans developed for the tidal marshland by Dr. Ralph Carter in the 1970's, and the seawall on west side at marina.

Larnie Fox of Arts Benicia expressed concern about the lack of integration of artwork throughout the project area. Mr. Fox recommended that the City distribute an RFQ (Request For Qualifications) soon to find one or more public artists to support design that integrates art throughout the site. He wants the community to seize this opportunity to utilize artists to make this project something that people will want to come and see because of the art work. Many in audience agree were in agreement.

Steve Mckee suggested that perpendicular parking might be the best arrangement on B Street. Mr. Mckee said that the raised boardwalk would be interesting for tourists to walk, but he thinks there should be a payoff at end of walk, such as artwork. He suggested mirroring the Arneson sculpture/bench on the other side of the marina channel. He feels that retaining the current soft edge of the green would be ok. It would save money if it was kept really natural. He thinks it's important to get boating community involved in these waterway decisions. He also agrees that artwork throughout the site would be beneficial.

An audience member stated that we should consider traffic issues at the roundabout if we plan a 1st Street boat launch.

Mary Kelly Frances Poh asked if we considering removing the pilings at end of First Street. She feels they are dangerous and we should either remove them or put something back on top of the pilings. She also thinks we need to remove non-native invasive vegetation and expand the beach.

An audience member said that we need a clearer idea how much things will cost. He thinks removing the pilings would make sense since boating is so popular. He also feels we need to do things that bring people to 1st Street.

Closing Comments

Sue Wickham, Jon Van Landschoot, and Nancy Lund all expressed their support for Larnie Fox's comments regarding integrating art throughout the site.

Tim Rose said he likes the idea of the art community involvement early in process. He expressed concern that there was no discussion about incorporating an educational component in the project, and an interest in youth education opportunities.

Rick Knight noted that there are lots of areas for art & education, but that there are limits to the level of detail that can be presented in the current schematics. There has been talk of incorporating art and educational elements throughout the site, and this can be further defined as we design the site details.

Isabelle Minn said the next meeting will be a Review Meeting with the Parks, Recreation and Cemetery Commission meeting on Oct. 9. It will be in Room 2 of the Community Center at 6:30 PM.

The meeting was ended at 8:50p.m.