

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

January 12, 2018

TO: Design Review Board Members

FROM: Lawrence J. Goldzband, Executive Director (415/352-3653; larry.goldzband@bcdc.ca.gov)
Andrea Gaffney, Bay Design Analyst (415/352-3643; andrea.gaffney@bcdc.ca.gov)
Ethan Lavine, Principal Permit Analyst (415/352-3618; ethan.lavine@bcdc.ca.gov)

SUBJECT: Alcatraz Landing at Port of San Francisco Piers 31, 31½, and 33; Pre-Application (Fourth Review ¹; Joint Review Port of San Francisco Waterfront Design Advisory Committee (For Design Review Board consideration on January 22, 2018)

Project Summary

Project Proponents and Property Owners. National Park Service (“NPS”), Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (“Conservancy”), and Port of San Francisco (“Port,” Sole Property Owner)

Project Representatives. Brian Aviles (NPS, Project Proponent); Ming Yeung and Dan Hodapp (Port, Property Owner); Cathie Barner (Conservancy, Project Proponent); Jennifer Devlin (EHDD, Architect), Scott Catafa (CMG, Landscape Architect); Dr. Joshua Burnam (Anchor QEA, Engineer)

Project Site. The project site is located at Piers 31, 31½, and 33, at the San Francisco waterfront, near the intersection of Bay Street, Francisco Street, and The Embarcadero, in the City and County of San Francisco (Exhibit 3). The site consists of the pier deck located between Pier 31 and Pier 33 (known as Pier 31½) and portions of the Pier 31 and Pier 33 bulkhead and shed buildings. The project site is within the Northeast Waterfront planning area of the Commission’s San Francisco Waterfront Special Area Plan (“SAP”).

Existing Conditions. The project site is currently used as a terminal for a ferry service that transports passengers between San Francisco and Alcatraz Island, which is part of NPS’ Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The terminal includes a portable ticket booth at the Pier 31½ pier deck, two temporary canopies, passenger queuing areas, interpretive exhibits, limited parking for NPS vehicles, benches, and water stations. A gangway and one float that accommodates two berthed ferries extend off Pier 31½. The Pier 33 shed building includes a restroom and operational space, and within the Pier 33 bulkhead building is the privately-operated Alcatraz Café and Grill. The Pier 31 bulkhead building is vacant. The project site is within the Port of San Francisco’s Embarcadero Historic District.

¹ Previous reviews on October 18, 2010, September 28, 2012 and August 7, 2017.

Visitors may reach the project site via public transit (bus, streetcar, or BART), taxi and ride-share, bicycle, personal vehicle, or walking. There is an ADA-accessible tour bus and drop-off area along The Embarcadero adjacent to the Pier 33 bulkhead building. A 2012 Visitor Flow Survey conducted by NPS found that most visitors arrive by public transportation (35 percent), walk (35 percent), or carpool (28 percent). Various paid parking lots are located in the vicinity of the project site.

From The Embarcadero, visitors enter the project site between the Pier 31 and Pier 33 bulkhead buildings, approaching first the ticket booth, circulating through existing interpretive exhibits, and entering a covered queuing area. A separate pre-boarding area adjacent to the gangway offers seating for passengers with disabilities.

In 2016, the Pier 31½ facility served 1.76 million visitors. There were 7,007 annual trips to Alcatraz Island from Pier 31 ½, which includes service to both Alcatraz Island and Angel Island (the “Alcatraz Plus Angel Island Loop”). In addition, during peak season (June to September), the concessionaire operated 133 bay cruises from the site that were not associated with NPS operations. The number of visitors to Alcatraz Island is restricted by the NPS’ General Management Plan guidelines that limit service levels to provide a high quality experience and protect nesting seabird populations. Ferries run from Pier 31 ½ every 30 minutes between 8:30 am and 3:30 pm, seven days a week. In addition, there are two evening departures to the island (6 pm and 6:30 pm). A typical visit to the island is approximately two hours, however visitors may remain at the island as long as they like and return on any available vessel. Although the total number of passengers per visit fluctuates throughout the day based on guest flow, the total number of visitors per scheduled departure is limited to approximately 300 passengers.²

Proposed Project. *Revisions to the proposed design since the Board’s last review on August 7, 2017 are italicized.*

The proposed revised project would renovate an outdoor space on the Pier 31½ pier deck, as well as interior space in the Pier 31 and Pier 33 bulkhead and shed buildings, to provide expanded ferry service, better utilize the space, and orient and guide visitors through the terminal (Exhibits 2 and 4). The project would also involve the construction of space for administrative and operational functions in the Pier 31 and Pier 33 bulkhead and shed buildings. The proposed boarding ramps and floats would support the berthing of up to three ferry boats at a time. In addition to its current ferry routes, the improved terminal would provide limited ferry service for interpretive cruises of the Bay, and a new route between Pier 31 ½ and Fort Baker, which is under consideration for such use and operation in a separate NPS proposal. Overall, visitor demand is expected to grow in line with a general growth in tourism in the City and County of San Francisco. NPS modeling forecasts show that in 2018, 7,790 visitors could visit the primary ferry embarkation site per day, or 1.9 million visitors per year.

² For diagrams illustrating usage patterns at the terminal as it exists today, please see page 2-023 of the exhibits submitted for the Board’s August 7, 2017 review. <http://www.bcdc.ca.gov/drb/2017/0807AlcatrazEmbarkation.pdf>

The proposed project would remove the existing nonhistoric canopy structure, parking area, queuing and ticketing area, and interpretive exhibits at Pier 31½. The existing floating dock and gangway would be removed to accommodate two additional floating docks and gangways. Existing uses within portions of the Pier 31 and Pier 33 bulkhead and shed buildings, including the Alcatraz Café and Grill, would cease, and the buildings would be reconfigured and renovated. All work would rehabilitate existing historic elements at the project site, consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings.

In the Commission’s Bay jurisdiction, the following improvements are proposed:

1. **Expanded Berthing Facilities.** An existing floating dock and gangway would be replaced with two individual docking facilities, each with an ADA-accessible gangway, float, and guide piles, to berth a total of three ferry vessels.

Conceptually, the landside of the proposed project is characterized by the Project Proponents in three zones: Embarkation, Civic Plaza, and Disembarkation (Exhibit 2).

At the Pier 31½ pier deck, the following improvements are proposed:

2. **Ticketing Area.** The queuing area for ticket purchases would be reorganized and new ticket windows constructed at the east façade of the Pier 33 bulkhead building (Exhibit 10). An interpretive exhibit area, including benches, would be created at the plaza area bound by the ticket window area, the primary queuing area, and the public restrooms in the Pier 33 shed building.
3. **Primary Queuing Area.** A “welcome station” visitor information desk would be installed near the entryway to the queuing area for ticketed passengers adjacent to the Pier 33 shed building (Exhibits 12 and 13). The queuing area would be reorganized from its current configuration, and the existing fabric and steel canopy structure would be replaced by a thinner profile concrete canopy structure (Exhibits 11 and 17). Benches and glass panels would be used in places to delineate the queuing area. The glass panels would serve as a wind break and would include semi-transparent overlays with interpretive information (Exhibits 6 and 7).

Since the Board’s last review in August, a new design has been developed for the welcome center/information desk at the entrance to the primary queuing area. The new information desk design no longer includes the rock sculpture shown in the previous design, but in its place includes a tactile map display of Alcatraz Island. New directional and informational signage is provided above the information desk and at the entrance to the queue. Interpretive elements have been further refined, including illustrative designs of the etched glass panels, and etched castings on the understory of the concrete canopy. The design of the canopy structure itself is largely the same, but additional detail on the canopy and supporting steel columns and concrete sheer walls has been provided (Exhibits 12 and 13).

4. **Entryway and Civic Plaza.** A public plaza would be created at the center of Pier 31 ½, extending from the sidewalk at Herb Caen Way to the edge of the pier deck, allowing for Bay views that are now partially obstructed (Exhibit 1). Multi-level seating would be installed at opposite corners of the plaza to provide seating and help organize site circulation (Exhibits 22 and 23). A monument sign similar in design to those found at the Exploratorium (Piers 15/17) and the cruise terminal (Pier 27) would be installed at the Embarcadero entrance (Exhibit 10). Pedestrian-scale light poles would line the perimeter of the plaza (Exhibit 18). The plaza paving would be distinct from the remainder of the deck to define the space, along with the seating and lighting elements.

Since the Board's last review, the monument sign adjacent to the Embarcadero has been reworked to include text identifying the location as "Piers 31/33: Alcatraz Embarcation." The sign has a cutout of the NPS logo a few feet off the ground to create an element of play for children (Exhibit 10). Directional signage shows the location of various site elements—including the ticketing and queuing areas, the bookstore, and restrooms—has been added along the exterior of the bulkhead buildings at the entrance to the site (Exhibit 10). The design for the sculptural seating elements at either end of the plaza has been refined (Exhibits 22 and 23). The seating area closer to the Embarcadero now allows for visitors to face either the street or the Bay, and at the seating area closer to the Bay includes a wide bench for eating and group gathering. Around the edges of the plaza, new planters are incorporated which feature timber benches on either side. The planters contain either native and ornamental species found at Alcatraz Island's historic gardens, or native species found around the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (Exhibit 27). Movable coated metal tables and chairs will also be provided near the edge of the plaza.

5. **Secondary Queuing Area and Café.** A secondary queuing area would be provided adjacent to the Pier 31 shed building at the Bay edge (Exhibits 14 and 15). This area would incorporate seating and glass panel elements as described for the primary queuing area. The secondary queuing area would primarily serve the ferry berth used for Bay cruises and proposed service to Fort Baker. An enclosed café with food stalls and seating would be built adjacent to the secondary queue. Both the secondary queuing area and the café would be covered by a single concrete canopy structure, replacing the existing fabric canopy (Exhibit 11).

Since the Board's last review, the canopy covering the secondary queuing area and café has been reduced in size in order to avoid a joint where the marginal wharf and infill wharf structures meet. Informational signage identifying the entrance to the queue and the next departure time have been incorporated into one of the concrete sheer walls, and conceptual depictions of the interpretive glass panels have been included to give a sense of how they might look at the site.

At the Pier 33 bulkhead and shed buildings, the following improvements are proposed:

6. **East Façade Improvements.** New ticket windows would be installed along the east façade, and the façade would be restored, including the historic windows and removal of post-1949 additions.

7. **Interior Renovations.** The bulkhead building interior would be renovated to accommodate exhibits, retail, and a ticket office (Exhibit 8). The nonhistoric second floor would be mostly demolished except for a small area for offices and a mechanical platform. Portions of the shed would be renovated for public restrooms, storage, and site operations.

Concepts for the interpretive elements within the retail space have been further developed since the previous design (Exhibit 7). The bulkhead building will become a part of the Bayside History Walk and explore the history of the pier as a waterfront industrial structure. For instance, the path of the historic rail lines that ran through the bulkhead building and back along the apron from the Belt Railroad may be included as an interpretive element (Exhibit 8). Other concepts are shown on Exhibit 7.

At the Pier 31 bulkhead and shed buildings, the following improvements are proposed:

8. **Interior Renovations.** A café would be constructed within a portion of the bulkhead building. Portions of the shed would be renovated to include public restrooms, public bicycle parking, disabled visitor parking (3 spaces), staff parking (10 spaces), and site operations. Parking spaces would be accessed through the main arch of Pier 31.

Additional bicycle racks have been located adjacent to the shed and the bathrooms where rain barrels were previously proposed. Additional café seating has been located along the Embarcadero (Exhibit 27).

The project area would be jointly managed and maintained by the Conservancy, the food service operator selected to run the café at Pier 31, and the concessionaire for the ferry service. A final Environmental Impact Statement was released by NPS in January 2017, and a July 2016 Memorandum of Understanding between NPS and the Port outlines lease terms for a future ferry concessioner and the Conservancy.

Resilience and Adaptation to Rising Sea Level. As proposed, the elevation of the Pier 31 ½ deck and adjoining piers (+12 NAVD88) at the project site would remain unchanged. The existing Mean Higher High Water (MHHW) line is +6 NAVD88, and FEMA’s Base Flood Elevation (BFE), roughly representative of the 1 percent chance of annual flooding, is +9 NAVD88. The Project Proponents plan for 3 feet of sea level rise over the 50-year lifespan of the proposed terminal, which would result in the MHHW of +9 NAVD88 and the BFE of +12 NAVD88. The proposed flooding adaptation response would include the construction of a 1-foot cast-in-place concrete curb along the bayward edge of the pier deck to protect against flooding and storm surge to an elevation of +13 NAVD88. The proposed floating elements, such as the gangway and float, would be designed to accommodate changes in sea level (Exhibit 30).

Prior Review. The Board and the Port of San Francisco’s Waterfront Design Advisory Committee (WDAC) have jointly reviewed the proposed project on three prior occasions. The first two design proposals, reviewed on October 18, 2010 and September 28, 2012, were ultimately abandoned by the project proponents. On August 7, 2017, the Board and WDAC reviewed the previous iteration of the design proposal at issue in this report, and provided a detailed set of comments summarized on Exhibit 32. The project proponents have considered and incorporated these comments. Exhibit 32 references the relevant exhibit numbers and/or provide a narrative description of how the project has changed to reflect the Board and WDAC’s feedback from the August meeting.

Commission Findings, Policies & Guidelines

Public Access. The San Francisco Waterfront Special Area Plan (“SAP”) states: “The McAteer-Petris Act requires that projects provide the maximum feasible public access, consistent with the project. The Commission strives to provide continuous pedestrian access to and along the shoreline of San Francisco Bay. Public access required by the Commission may accommodate uses, such as bicycling, fishing, picnicking, nature education, etc. Visual access to the Bay is a critical part of public access. Bay views from the San Francisco waterfront and views back to the City from the piers are especially unique, and highly valued by the public.”

The SAP contains policies specific to San Francisco’s Northeast Waterfront, which extends from Pier 35 to China Basin. In the area of the Northeast Waterfront adjacent to the base of Telegraph Hill, where the project site is located, the SAP identifies improving access on each pier as an opportunity to be pursued through development projects. There is a relatively continuous façade of historic bulkhead buildings in this area, which the SAP identifies as a challenge that limits visual and physical access in the area. Opportunities to open views in the area are limited by historic preservation goals.

Within San Francisco’s Northeast Waterfront, the SAP states that “public access should be provided free of charge to the public and should provide direct connections to the Bay, both physical and visual.” The SAP further states that “[p]articular attention should be given to the provision of perimeter public access along the platform edge.” Uses other than public access along the platform edge are permitted if they enhance the total design of the project and do not divert the public way along more than 20 percent of the total platform edge.

Public Access Siting and Design. On San Francisco’s Northeast Waterfront, SAP policies require waterfront structures to “[t]ake advantage of the Bay as a design asset by encouraging transparent buildings and other design treatments.” “Building height and bulk should generally be low scale in order to preserve views to the Bay, minimize shading of on-pier public access areas and reflect the historic character of the waterfront.” On-pier public access is to take advantage of wind protection and solar access. At ferry and excursion terminals, queues are to “be managed so that continuous shoreline public access is maintained and no permanent or semi-permanent structures prevent access to the shoreline.”

The Public Access Design Guidelines encourage design for a wide range of users, but recognize that “[w]hile some shoreline areas are best suited for quiet and contemplative public spaces, other lend themselves to be used for large public gatherings, such as festivals, outdoor markets or exhibits.” A project can provide usable public access by, among other things, “[p]roviding opportunities to get close to the water;” “[m]aximizing user comfort by designing for the weather,” including through shade structures where appropriate; “[p]roviding interpretation of historical, cultural or natural attributes of the site;” and “[p]roviding basic public amenities, such as trails, benches, play opportunities, trash containers, drinking fountains, lighting and restrooms....”

Historic Preservation and Cultural Expression. The SAP states that “[h]istoric structures should be showcased as an important amenity in the design of public access areas,” and that waterfront projects “should incorporate unique and special amenities that draw the public to them, including cultural expression (e.g., public art, event programming or unique views).” The Public Access Design Guidelines identify “each site’s historical, cultural and natural attributes” as “opportunities for creating projects with a ‘sense of place’ and a unique identity.”

Scenic Views. The SAP requires that the existing Bay view corridor between the Pier 31 and Pier 33 bulkhead buildings be preserved. Within the Northeast Waterfront, the SAP requires that “[o]n-pier public access should be located to take advantage of...views of the Bay and its shoreline, [and] views back to the City....”

To provide, maintain, and enhance visual access to the Bay and shoreline, the Public Access Design Guidelines encourage “[l]ocating buildings, structures, parking lots and landscaping of new shoreline projects such that they enhance and dramatize views of the Bay and shoreline from public thoroughfares and other public spaces,” and “[o]rganizing shoreline development to allow Bay views and access between buildings.” The guidelines also detail methods of maintaining and enhancing the visual quality of shoreline development, including through use of “...forms, materials, colors and textures that are compatible with the Bay and adjacent development.”

The proposed design has clustered certain project elements, principally the queuing areas and outdoor dining, behind the bulkhead buildings in order to enhance a view corridor to the Bay from The Embarcadero. The proposed shape of the concrete canopies also respect views out to the Bay from the surrounding context through minimal thickness in shape, and form that draws the eye up and out to the water.

Transportation and Parking. SAP policies for the Northeast Waterfront require that any “[p]arking on piers will be planned to minimize adverse impacts on public access through such measures as...limiting vehicle access on pier aprons to maintenance, service and emergency vehicles; and using special paving, signing and other design treatments at crosswalks and other pedestrian-vehicle interfaces to identify the joint use and ensure a pedestrian-friendly environment.”

Limited parking for employees and operations would be provided as part of the proposed project, however, it is within the Pier 31 shed building rather than its current location on the Pier 31 ½ pier deck. The parking would be accessed from the driveway at Pier 31.

Sea Level Rise and Flooding. The Bay Plan policies provide that “[p]ublic access should be sited, designed, managed, and maintained to avoid significant adverse impacts from sea level rise and shoreline flooding....” If existing or future flooding presents a risk to public safety, a project “...should be designed to be resilient to a mid-century sea level rise projection. If it is likely the project will remain in place longer than mid-century, an adaptive management plan should be developed to address the long-term impacts that will arise based on a risk assessment using the best available science-based projection for sea level rise at the end of the century.”

Board Questions

The Board's advice and recommendations are sought on the following issues:

1. Will the proposed improvements encourage movement to and along the shoreline, and provide for effective circulation through the site?
 - a. Has the entry way to the site been designed to feel inviting to the public and provide a clear connection to the site from Herb Caen Way and The Embarcadero? Does the design provide a sense of arrival and a unique sense of place?
 - b. Is the proposed design and wayfinding sufficient for navigating to the public amenities such as public restrooms, bicycle parking and ADA parking?
 - c. Are the proposed queuing areas designed such that continuous shoreline public access will be maintained, both now and in the future?
 - d. Given that the public access along the Pier 33 shed is disconnected from the Civic Plaza waterfront due to limited access area for ferry boarding, are there design considerations for this space that would make it more inviting to the public?
2. Does the proposed project utilize forms, materials, colors and textures that are compatible with the Bay and adjacent development?
 - a. Do the concrete canopies, enclosed on-deck café, and the glass panels in the queuing areas strike the correct balance between maximizing user comfort by designing for the wind and weather? Additionally do the canopies provide adequate solar access to the public access and minimize shading of on-pier public access areas?
 - b. Has the project appropriately incorporated lighting and planting into the site?
3. Does the proposed design preserve and enhance the view corridor to the Bay between the Pier 31 and Pier 33 bulkhead buildings and otherwise maximize views to the Bay?
 - a. Have the seating areas on the Civic Plaza been designed and sited to minimize the potential adverse impacts to Bay views?
 - b. Are proposed improvements such as the on-deck café and queuing areas sufficiently transparent and appropriate in terms of height and bulk to minimize potential adverse impacts to Bay views?
4. Does the proposed design incorporate features that adequately interpret the unique historical and cultural aspects of the pier structures, and the story of Alcatraz Island?