

**PARKS, RECREATION & WATERFRONT COMMISSION
REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS TO CITY COUNCIL
REGARDING
BERKELEY WATERFRONT AREA SPECIFIC PLAN**

I. A Vision for the Berkeley Waterfront Area

The Berkeley Waterfront Area is a municipal treasure and regional asset reflecting years of public investment, community initiative, creativity and activism. The contributions and interests of existing Waterfront Area organizations and users to the vitality and existing experience of the Waterfront Area should be celebrated and supported. The Waterfront also lies within a global biodiversity hotspot, and certain areas of the Waterfront have significant ecological value that should be protected and enhanced. The Waterfront Area lies adjacent to a half a million East Bay Residents whose access to the Bay is blocked by I80 and at most points is limited to a narrow strip between the shoreline highway and the Bay. The Waterfront is one of the few areas of Berkeley that extends deep into the Bay that provides a myriad of water and Bayfront experiences.

Notwithstanding its strengths, the Waterfront Area lacks a comprehensive vision, supported by a plan that would enable its recreational, environmental, tourism, and economic development potential for the Berkeley community to be more fully realized. The Waterfront Area is presently comprised of loosely organized stand-alone 'nodes' of activity (Doubletree Hotel; Marina offices; Marine Center/Boat Launch; Cesar Chavez Park; Cal Sailing Club/Cal Adventures; Shorebird Park/Nature Center; Abandoned Pier; Seawall Drive Parking Strip). These nodes of activity don't integrate with one another as they might, and their constituent users are often finds themselves in competition or conflict.

The Parks Recreation and Waterfront Commission believes that a well-crafted Specific Plan could guide the Berkeley Waterfront Area towards the vision of becoming a resource with the broad appeal to the entire community comparable to public recreation areas like Presidio/Tunnel Tops/Crissy Field by focusing on the following objectives:

- Enhance and revitalize the Waterfront Area's current nodes of activity;
- Discover and reveal the synergies between the nodes of activity;
- Link the nodes of activity together (through bike, pedestrian, water taxi, shuttle connections, or new uses); and
- Introduce an array of complementary new uses, services and activities that will make the Waterfront Area not only a destination for discrete stand-alone activates, but also a place where new and diverse users will be attracted, as well as a place where residents, families and visitors will want to spend the entire day (or lodge) exploring and enjoying its multiple dimensions.

A successful Specific Plan should build upon, protect and enhance the best aspects of the existing Waterfront Area experience, acknowledge and correct its weaknesses, and add responsibly planned uses and activities that will invite new and diverse users. In turn this strategy will attract and invite the additional public and private investment that is necessary to maintain and enhance the Waterfront Area's utility, attractiveness and environmental value to the entire Berkeley community, the residents of the East Bay, and visitors to the area.

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Activities and festivals that build upon those strengths will promote broader awareness and appreciation of Waterfront Area as a “place.” For example, the Berkeley Kite Festival is recognized as one of the greatest kite festivals in the United States. It should be strongly supported by the City of Berkeley. The once popular annual Berkeley fishing derby should be restarted. An annual “Superbloom” festival might be created in Cesar Chavez Park. Summertime weekend afternoon lawn concerts should be produced in Shorebird Park. Community businesses and brands (Trumer Pils Beer, Takara Sake, Acme Bread, the Cheese Board) should be encouraged to locate or otherwise be featured throughout the Waterfront Area to reinforce the Waterfront Area’s identity as a Berkeley ‘place’ and to promote Berkeley as a destination and as a wonderful place to live, work and play.

II. Fiscal Recommendations

The Commission is concerned that the Marina Fund concept is unsustainable as it presently exists. It has insufficient operating revenues to meet its operational expenses and inadequate capital funds for capital projects. Revenue from new uses enabled by the Specific Plan will take significant time to arrive and, in any event, will not be sufficient to address even the current fiscal of the Marina needs.

Though it is treated differently, the Waterfront is in effect another business district of the City of Berkeley. It includes 100 acres of parks, miles of public streets & sidewalks and 20 acres of parking lots that are basic public infrastructure and are not Marina-related. In other business districts the costs of maintaining such basic public infrastructure are assigned to Parks Department, Public Works Department and the General Fund budgets. The Marina Fund should not be burdened by non-Marina expenses including street/parking lot/path maintenance, trash collection, the maintenance of Cesar Chavez Park, landscaping throughout the Waterfront, recreational programs charges by other departments for special events that are not charged in other parts of the City.

Non-Marina-related costs should be reassigned to Parks Department, Public Works Department and the General Fund budgets. A life-cycle Asset Management Program including a capital reserve for the Marina assets should be created. Net revenue from Marina commercial uses, slip rentals, and Marina hotel operations (including Transient Occupancy and Sales Taxes) should be dedicated to the Marina Fund and the Asset Management Program.

III. Planning Principles

The Specific Plan Should Be Flexible Administrative Simple to Implement: The Specific Plan should be designed to be flexible and adaptable to community interests and opportunities that emerge or change over time without having to be frequently reopened. In order to attract public and private investment, it should be administratively easy to navigate and implement. Planning and siting guidelines and design standards should ensure the preservation of the Waterfront Area’s scenic and ecological values, but should be sufficiently flexible to enable the attraction of creative proposals that would be evaluated during future site-specific project review.

The Specific Plan Should Prioritize Key Infrastructure Investments: The Specific Plan should recognize key infrastructure fiscal investments that must be prioritized. The Marina

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Harbor entrances and South Sailing Basin must be periodically dredged to be functional. The closed, seismically unsafe, pier must be replaced with a new pier. The roads, sidewalks, bike paths, and parking lots must be paved or suitably surfaced to be functional.

Ecologically Sensitive Planning Should Be Prioritized: Areas of particular ecological value throughout the Waterfront Area should be identified, protected and enhanced. New development should be consistent with the highest design and environmental standards and should complement and actively protect the nearby natural environment. Observation and education stations should be planned at appropriate locations.

More and Diverse Users Should Be Attracted to the Waterfront Area: A broader variety of recreational activities, visitor-serving and hospitality uses that complement the waterfront setting and its natural resources should be encouraged and accommodated. As discussed below, such activities include, but are not limited to, food service and lodging. Access to the water and shoreline should be expanded for members of the general public without boating skills. A family-friendly bike rental facility should be centrally-located to encourage bicycling at the Waterfront Area and can function East Bay focal point of the nearby Bay Trail. A kayak rental and launch facility should also be provided.

The Waterfront Area Should Be a Green and Sustainable Place: The implications of climate change and sea level rise should be considered in designing and implementing the Specific Plan. Opportunities to make the Berkeley Waterfront Area carbon-neutral through solar and wind power should be pursued.

Connectivity and Circulation of the Waterfront Area Should Be Improved: Access to the shoreline area should be maximized with a continuous pedestrian, ADA accessible, and bicycle shoreline trail corridor that is activated with amenities, appropriate uses and opportunities to engage and enjoy the water. As part of this corridor, the dirt pathway along Marina Boulevard should be improved. All areas of the Waterfront Area should be linked in a similar manner, which should extend to facilities east of I-80, including Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program (BORP) and Aquatic Park. Revetment-fronting parking along Seawall Drive should be replaced with a landscaped pedestrian promenade and bikeway extending along Seawall Drive with appropriate visitor-serving uses located close to the Pier. Shuttle service connecting Waterfront Area and nearby facilities and amenities should be explored. A water-taxi or bridge connection across the Marina Harbor channel should be explored.

IV. Cesar Chavez Park

Cesar Chavez Park should be a Centerpiece of the Specific Plan: At approximately 90 acres, Cesar Chavez Park is the City's largest park and is also the most utilized public attraction within the Waterfront Area. Unlike the Waterfront Area's private and semi-public facilities, the enjoyment of Cesar Chavez Park does not require membership in an organization, special equipment or training. Accordingly, it should not be left out of the Specific Plan. Rather, it should be treated as a centerpiece of the Specific Plan; and one that can attract complementary investment and synergistic uses. To this end, Cesar Chavez Park requires and deserves public investment. Accordingly, the Specific Plan should include a comprehensive Master Plan for the

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Park, including a Landscape Plan that will increase the Park's biodiversity, scenic attraction, and the number of sheltered areas. Access to nature is a social-equity issue, and increasing access to, the attractiveness of, and use of Cesar Chavez Park by more and diverse users will promote social-equity. A list of permitted and prohibited activities should be included in the Master Plan.

Maintain and Improve the Off-Leash Area (OLA): The 17-acre Off-Leash Area of Cesar Chavez Park is an important City-wide amenity, and a core use of Cesar Chavez Park. Its boundaries should be appropriately fenced to protect sensitive ecological areas and marked to deter off-leash activity in Park areas not intended for that purpose. Bulletin board improvements, including maps depicting the boundaries of the OLA should be added. A mowing plan and schedule should be adopted for the entirety of Cesar Chavez Park, and a viable and sustainable foxtail management program and reseeding plan should be implemented. The OLA should be dedicated to the memory of Cesar Chavez's dogs, Boycott and Huelga (Strike), with a public artwork memorial. Seating amenities, including boulders, strawbales, and appropriately located seating walls and artwork should be located at hilltops with panoramic view opportunities. The City of Berkeley should not dump wood chips in the OLA, as it makes many areas unusable for dogs and people and covers native burrowing bee habitats.

The Biodiversity of the Park should be Increased: The landscaping biodiversity of the Park should be increased to improve its ecological value, scenic diversity, and attractiveness. The Waterfront Area is biologically rich, with more than 946 unique species documented to date, including 215 species of birds and 151 species of insects. The Waterfront Area is also ecologically connected with nearby Aquatic Park, Eastshore State Park, the Albany Bulb and beyond, and landscape and aquatic connectivity should be a key design principle.

Increasing the biodiversity and ecological value of Cesar Chavez Park is particularly important because North America bird populations have declined 29% since the 1970s, and two-thirds of the remaining birds are at risk of extinction. Several threatened avian species are documented to seasonally frequent the Waterfront Area, including *two* Federally listed Species (Brown Pelican, Least Tern) and *three* Species of Special Concern (White-tail Kites, Northern Harriers, Burrowing Owls). There has also been a 33% decline of butterflies and moth populations since 1999, with an ongoing decline of 2% per year, and global declines of insects up to 75% or more. More biodiverse green spaces are a public health benefit, and deliver greater benefits for children's cognitive development.

To address these issues, the Landscape Plan for Cesar Chavez Park should create unstructured natural spaces filled with native vegetation that reflect California's 30x30 and Biodiversity Initiative guidelines and goals. Observational stations, wayfaring and interpretative signage, such as bird and wildlife identification, as well as panoramic landmark signage should be provided along perimeter trail and elsewhere. Working with the Shorebird Nature Center (and utilizing citizen science platforms like iNaturalist and eBird), identify a list of insect, bird, and amphibian - abundant and declining/disappeared – species to support through the Landscape Plan component of the Park's Master Plan.

Great Design should be a Key Feature of the Park: Cesar Chavez Park's current picnicking areas are not inviting. More and better picnicking and seating amenities – reflecting the best aspects of contemporary park design – should be provided in appropriate locations;

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integrated with landscaping and topography to provide shade and shelter from windy conditions. ADA access to the Park should be improved and new ADA trails should be added. The Park should be enlivened with public art. The land/water edge of the Park should be softened in areas where it is appropriate, and opportunities to engage the water (for example a kayak launch area) should be provided.

Activate the Park with Additional Public Uses and Amenities: As Berkeley's largest public park at approximately 90 acres, Cesar Chavez Park is large enough to preserve existing areas and experiences, while accommodating new ones that increase the Park's attractiveness and utility. In addition to the Berkeley Kite Festival, well-planned festivals and events – for example a “Superbloom” festival – should be authorized by the Specific Plan and considered on a case-by-case basis. The Master Plan for the Park should facilitate uses and amenities (including temporary and pop-up uses and amenities) in or proximate to the Park that complement and support existing uses, and that invite broader use of the Park by a diverse public, including parents and children. For example:

- A public café
- A nature/art/science interpretive and education center akin to the ‘Field Station’ at the Tunnel Tops
- Public bike rental and support facilities
- A kayak rental facility and launch ramp
- An outdoor activity and adventure center for children and teens; perhaps including outdoor camping facilities, and
- Areas for outdoor weddings and celebrations.

Public safety groups, such as the ham radio operators, who provide such a valuable safety service to the City, should be permitted to use certain areas of the Park for their annual practice sessions as they used to do.

V. The Defunct Pier and Seawall Drive

A New Berkeley pier should be a Centerpiece of the Specific Plan: The now-closed and unsafe Berkeley Pier was a key feature of the Waterfront Area since its construction in 1926, and originally extended from University Avenue and Second Street. The pier should be replaced, and revetment-fronting parking along Seawall Drive should be replaced with a landscaped and the existing revetment-fronting parking along Seawall Drive should be replaced with a pedestrian promenade and bikeway with appropriate visitor-serving and recreational uses located close to the Pier. A sandy beach accessible to children and swimmers might be created at Shorebird Park, and a dedicated windsurfing launch facility should be developed nearby.

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VI. Waterfront Area Development

The Parks Recreation and Waterfront Commission is concerned that the Specific Plan process has become confused and the object of public anxiety because the role of adding commercial/retail uses to the Waterfront Area has not been properly communicated. The Market Study prepared by Keyser Marston and its conclusion that the Waterfront Area could foreseeably support up to 200 new hotel rooms and 12,000 square feet of cafes has been misunderstood as a rationale or vision for the Specific Plan, while it should not be. Rather, the Keyser Marston report should be understood for just what it is – a market study of the foreseeable demand for only two types of uses that might be added to the Waterfront Area and the revenue they might produce; not more than that. Specific Planning should not revolve around the Keyser Marston study.

The Role of New Commercial Uses within the Waterfront Area should be to Support Realizing the Vision of the Specific Plan: While additional uses may provide new net revenue to the Marina Fund, development for the sake of new net revenue should not be an objective of the Specific Plan or drive development within the Waterfront Area. Rather, the role of new commercial uses within the Waterfront Area should be to further the realization of the Specific Plan’s vision for the Waterfront Area.

The overall quantity of commercial development should be appropriately limited, but a broad variety of well-planned visitor-serving uses that would complement and enhance the Waterfront Area experience should be permitted. According to its website, the DoubleTree Hotel is comprised of 378 hotel rooms, 24 meeting rooms and 14,000 square feet of event space, with capacity for 850 guests. Other existing development (public, privately operated, marine servicing, and non-profit association) needs to be accurately quantified to establish a baseline so that a reasonable amount of new development, sufficient to support the Specific Plan vision, can be evaluated for CEQA purposes and authorized by the Specific Plan.¹

Besides food service and lodging, these include outdoor-activity rental and sale (kite shop/bike rental/kayak); wellness facilities (yoga, pilates, gymnasium); nature, book and art studios/stores; museums; marine equipment and services; waterside cafes, beer gardens and entertainment; as well as other creative uses that would broaden and enhance public enjoyment of the Waterfront Area. Berkeley businesses, brands and arts should be encouraged to locate in the Waterfront Area so that they can play a central role in promoting the Waterfront Area’s identity as an expression of the Berkeley community.

Use proposals, their siting and the structures that house them should be consistent with the Planning Principles set forth in Section II, above, and should complement the Specific Plan vision by:

- Enhancing and/or revitalizing the Waterfront Area’s current nodes of activity;
- Creating synergies with current nodes of activity;

¹ The existing consultant reports do not accurately quantify existing uses and the square footage of buildings in the Waterfront Area, or present the information in a simple table format.

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- Helping to link the nodes of activity together; and
- Attracting new and diverse users and helping to make the Waterfront Area a place where residents, families and visitors will want to spend the entire day (or lodge) exploring and enjoying its multiple dimensions.

Individual use proposals, their siting outside of park areas, and proposed design should be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Planning Commission to evaluate how they would contribute to the enhancement of the Waterfront Area and its enjoyment by the public. Siting in areas that are subject to BCDC jurisdiction should not be excluded provided that the use is consistent with the existing Bay Plan. A limited amount of sensitively planned food service, educational retail, and recreational uses in Cesar Chavez Park and other park areas should be permissible subject to the review and approval of the Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission.

Planning and siting guidelines and design standards should ensure the preservation of the Waterfront Area's scenic and ecological values, but should be sufficiently flexible to attract and enable creative design proposals. The Specific Plan should establish appropriate height limit zones to guide future site-specific proposals. Until permanent commercial services are established, pop-up rentals and food-trucks should be authorized pursuant to Use Permit.

Existing leases should not be prematurely terminated. Marine services (boatyard, chandlery, fuel dock) should be optimized for more efficient use of land area and retained. Long term leases for areas that may be the subject of redevelopment should not be entered into or extended.

VIII. Marina Docks and Berthing Slips

The Berkeley Marina has 15 publicly owned docks with more than 1000 slips. But the Berkeley Marine Center leases A Dock, with its 44 slips, from the city. Recreational vessels in California and Alameda have decreased by 20%. Berkeley Marina's slips are generally smaller, and 48% of them are less than 30 ft in length. The market trend is towards larger vessels. Accordingly, the Parks Recreation and Waterfront Commission recommends that as docks reach the end of their useful life, that the slips be reconfigured to address this market demand for boats greater than 35 ft in length. As discussed earlier, an asset management plan, as well as a Marina Area 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan, should be created.

VII. Parking & Circulation

Regrettably, after the 90 acres of Cesar Chavez Park, surface parking lots are the biggest consumer of land area in the Waterfront Area. Consistent with the City's climate and transportation demand management goals, parking as a land use should not predominate a significant percentage of the Waterfront Area, and over time the amount of parking provided at the Waterfront Area should be reduced. In the meantime, existing parking should be used more efficiently by implementing a shared parking strategy as recommended by Nelson/Nygaard. Though free parking in the closest and most convenient location is viewed as a 'personal right' by many, if not most, of the Waterfront Area's current users, Nelson/Nygaard also argues that

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paid parking would better support the City's equity and sustainability goals; that it better reflects the true public cost of parking in the Waterfront Area; and that it can create a revenue stream which can be used to fund multimodal investments and rebalance the local transportation network.

TDM strategies recommended in Nelson/Nygaard report should be pursued including: Free transfers with AC Transit bus service; secure and well-designed bicycle parking throughout the waterfront; a circulator shuttle connecting waterfront destinations and parking locations; shared mobility services such as car share, bike share, and e-scooters; and pick-up/drop-off locations in central locations near activity centers. Establishing a pedestrian and bicycle ferry or water taxi across the 100-yard wide Marina Harbor Channel would link the Pier to Cesar Chavez Park and create a popular public attraction in the process.

VIII. Specific Plan Procedures

The Specific Plan should become the primary land use regulatory document and 'zoning' for the Waterfront Area. To attract and guide its implementation, it should be transparent and easy to navigate. The layering of approvals by different administrative bodies should be avoided. Uses authorized by the Specific Plan outside of park areas should be subject to site-specific review and approval by the Planning Commission, with lease review by the City Council. New public recreation uses and amenities within park areas should be subject to review and approval by the Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Commission, with lease review by the City Council. Temporary activities, events and concerts in park areas should be subject to review and approval by the Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Commission.