



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Memo to the Planning Commission

HEARING DATE: JULY 8, 2010

Date: July 1, 2010
Case No.: 2009.1043U
Northeast Embarcadero Study
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Recommendation: **Request the Planning Commission to urge the Port of San Francisco to consider the principles and recommendations proposed in the Northeast Embarcadero Study when considering proposals for new development in the study area and when considering public infrastructure improvements in the study area.**

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OVERVIEW

In February 2009, Supervisor David Chiu urged the Port of San Francisco to engage the Planning Department to lead a planning analysis of the Port's surface parking lots north of Market Street. The Port Commission funded a focused study, managed by the Planning Department, to foster community consensus on the future of Port SWL 351 and at other seawall lot properties on the northern waterfront. This work, entitled the Northeast Embarcadero Study, began in May 2009 and was completed in May 2010.

The study area is approximately 40 acres and is roughly located on the west side of The Embarcadero between Market and North Point streets. The study focuses on Port properties between Washington and North Point Streets currently in use as parking lots. It considers appropriate areas beyond these immediate sites in order to more fully understand the context and the role the Port properties can play on The Embarcadero and in the larger city fabric.

The Northeast Embarcadero Study presents public realm improvements and urban design guidelines for new development consistent with eight design principles established during the Department's analysis. The principles and accompanying design guidelines address issues of land use, topography and views, city street pattern, quality, and connections, open space, height and bulk, and building context.

The Planning Department conducted extensive public outreach connected to three phases of work: listening to the community, presenting preliminary recommendations and receiving comments on them, and presenting the final recommendations for review and comment. The Planning Department received hundreds of comments from interested individuals and organizations. Public opinions were strong and diverse, making the effort to reach a consensus impossible, particularly for Port SWL 351.

Although a consensus view did not emerge during the public dialogue, the recommendations in the Northeast Embarcadero Study give full consideration to the great variety of public comments gathered during Department-sponsored workshops and in writing. In the end, the recommendations

reflect the Planning Department’s fundamental principles of good urban planning and design drawn from public comment, the Port’s Waterfront Land Use Plan and Design and Access Element, the City’s General Plan, from the City itself, and from the best practices of cities across the continent and around the world.

STUDY GOALS

The intent of the Northeast Embarcadero Study is to guide the development of properties along the west side of The Embarcadero, from Washington Street to North Point Street, in a common direction. The study also aims to create a pleasing public realm that connects the city to the waterfront and strengthens the linear promenade on the west side of The Embarcadero. More specifically, recommendations are meant to:

1. Create a unique waterfront experience commensurate with The Embarcadero’s prominent civic role in San Francisco,
2. Ensure strong connections to the neighborhoods to the west and across The Embarcadero to the Bay,
3. Establish guidelines for site design, massing, articulation and quality materials that reinforce the pedestrian realm and create a distinct place unique to the Northeast Embarcadero,
4. Enhance the open space network by strengthening connections between open spaces and recommending opportunities for new open spaces in the study area,
5. Set forth appropriate streetscape guidelines to provide attractive, safe and inviting sidewalks and pedestrian paths,
6. Ensure new development respects the context established by historic buildings.

USE OF THE STUDY

The Northeast Embarcadero Study documents the Planning Department staff recommendations for consideration by the public, the Planning Commission, the Port Commission, and the Board of Supervisors. They consider the comments heard at public meetings and those received in writing. The Planning Department sought to identify prevailing ideas and comments expressed by the public to assist in shaping its recommendations. In the final analysis, however, this report represents the Planning Department’s professional judgment on the optimal course for the Northeast Embarcadero.

It is the Planning Department’s intention that the recommendations and guidelines in this report serve as an additional guide to development in the city’s Northeast Embarcadero, further articulating the policies and guidelines of the Port’s Waterfront Land Use Plan and Design and Access Element, and the City’s General Plan and Planning Code.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Planning Department led an open public discussion with the intention of creating the broadest possible shared vision for the Northeast Embarcadero Waterfront, and continued this discussion throughout the course of the study. The public dialogue had three main phases, or rounds. Each phase consisted of a public workshop(s) with stakeholders, merchants, property owners, community members, neighborhood groups, and elected officials. The summary of comments from earlier phases have been made public and posted on the web for clarity.

The public outreach effort was substantial; notification for each workshop included emails, mailings, and web updates. The mailing list included property owners and occupants in the area, local businesses and neighborhood organizations, and attendees of all former community meetings held regarding the Northeast Embarcadero Study. Over the course of the study's outreach effort, more than 10,000 postcards were printed and mailed. Additionally, over 600 emails were sent each time a workshop, or project up-date was announced. These emails were sent to local business organizations, Port tenants, Ferry Building merchants, attendees of previous community meetings, and other interested citizens.

The Planning Department hosted five community meetings throughout the course of the study. These meetings were always well attended, often hosting more than 100 people at each meeting. In addition to local residents and residents from other parts of the city who are interested in the northeastern waterfront area, many attendees represented a diverse range of businesses and organizations. The Planning Department also attended six meetings with the Northeast Waterfront Advisory Group.

The Planning Department received hundreds of comments from interested individuals and organizations. While public opinions were strong and diverse, many comments included concern regarding the specific issues of the Golden Gateway Tennis and Swim Club, open space, parking, views, height, historical character, and the public trust. The appendix in the study provides a summary of public comment according to each round of the study.

REQUIRED COMMISSION ACTION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission:

1. Acknowledges the work of staff in completing the Northeast Embarcadero Study and recognizes the design principles and recommendations of the study for public realm improvements and new development in the area,
2. Urge the Port of San Francisco to consider the principles and recommendations proposed in the Northeast Embarcadero Study when considering proposals for new development in the study area and when considering public infrastructure improvements in the study area.

ATTACHMENTS:

Planning Commission Draft Resolution
Northeast Embarcadero Study