

Bay Conservation and Development Commission
October 5, 2017
Approval of Albany Beach Project
Albany City Council Member Rochelle Nason notes
(Note: Community Development Director Jeff Bond also attended)

The staff and EBRPD staff presentations were in accordance with the documents in the agenda packet, with only minor errata. A remark of note was that the EBRPD's easement over the Golden Gate Fields property will be 'relocatable' to accommodate planned development of the property.

The public speakers on the matter were Pam Young of the Golden Gate Audubon Society (GGAS) and Andrew Sullivan, an Albany resident who kiteboards at the Albany Beach, and myself. It was noted that a letter supporting the project had been submitted by Shirley Dean on behalf of CESP.

Pam Young indicated the GGAS is concerned that the intense recreational use of the Albany Beach is degrading its wildlife habitat and that this will continue as a result of the implementation of this project. She pointed to dog walking, especially off leash dog walking, as particularly harmful to habitat values.

Andrew Sullivan expressed support for the project and appreciation for the changes made to accommodate kiteboarding.

I expressed support for the project and noted there is considerable excitement in the community as we look forward to its implementation. I reminded the Commission of Albany's resolution in May 2017 in favor of consolidating parking for the general public to the extent possible in the Albany right of way, to reduce environmental impacts and avoid the traffic problems associated with visitors seeking 'prime' spaces and having to double back if such spaces are not available. I noted my hope the parking as well as the easement can be considered 'relocatable' and its location may be revisited in the future.

Commissioner Sanjay M. Ranchod, appointed earlier this year by Governor Brown, noted that he is a resident of Albany and visits the beach. Chair Wasserman and Commissioner Nelson both noted that they sometimes visit the Albany Beach as well.

Commissioner Nelson stated that he shares the concerns of the GGAS regarding wildlife. He noted that to the south, the Fleming Point Bluff design protects wildlife, also that this project contemplates the creation of habitat in what is now a parking lot. He asked for clarification on protection for the dune restoration area, and also how the off-leash dog situation has been taken into account. On behalf of EBRPD, Chris Barton responded the dune restoration area includes almost all of the wetlands on the site and that it will be fenced; he further expressed the agency's strong commitment to habitat restoration.

Regarding off-leash dogs, BCDC staff stated this is not an issue that BCDC addresses. On behalf of EBRPD, Chris Barton noted that the State Parks' General Plan for the beach prohibits them, but the prohibition has never been enforced. He stated that even before the General Plan, dating back to the establishment of public access to the beach, the area has served as a de facto off-leash dog area. He stated that the parking lot will make the beach a 'developed area' under the agency's Ordinance 38 which he said "we do our best" to enforce. He noted law enforcement resources of EBRPD are limited and the agency prioritizes crimes involving persons or property over infractions of leash requirements.

The Commission approved the project unanimously, including a requirement that the EBRPD develop a sea-level rise adaptation plan for this portion of the Bay Trail.