



REGIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION ¹ NEWSLETTER

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RPA Board Members

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NEW HORIZONS BECKON

Two exciting new park and open space facilities are now being planned here in the East Bay, the the RPA Board was privileged to hear from advocataes Sandy Threlfall and Jessica Hamberger at our June 5 board meeting. (RPA members are always welcome, you know!)

The projects could hardly be more different. One is urban, relatively small, and right on the edge of the Bay. The other is relatively large and includes hills, valleys, and creeks that run to the Delta. One is in Alameda County; the other is in Contra Costa County. One is to be developed on bay fill; the other involves a natural landscape that is essentially unspoiled. Taken together, however, these two projects open up an exciting new phase of park acquisition and development for the East Bay region during the 21st century.

The City of Oakland's "Oak to Ninth Avenue" project is located about one mile south of Jack London Square directly adjacent to the channel that connects Lake Merritt to the Bay. A total of 64 acres are involved—most of it public trust land. The current proposal calls for a mix of housing and public park space. An important segment of the Bay Trail is promised for the shoreline of San Francisco Bay.

If done well, this project could be a major contribution to the revitalization of Oakland. Other cities across the nation have invested in beautifully landscaped

and useable public parks and open spaces as the keystone to successful revitalization programs. The Oak to Ninth project is a grand opportunity for Oakland to invest in that kind of revitalization.

The City seems reluctant, however, to spend enough money to ensure the development of a visionary project that would really revitalize the whole community.

On the other hand, the developer brought in by the Port of Oakland to implement the Oak to Ninth project, simply wants to make the project pay for itself and perhaps produce a profit. That's why the developer is proposing to reduce the amount of parkland from 35 acres to just 21 acres while increasing the number of housing units from 1,700 to 3,100! Unfortunately, the developer's current plan for the area would also minimize public visibility and public use of the waterfront parkland. One obvious symptom of this is that the plan does not include any free-of-charge automobile parking. A limited amount of metered parking is provided instead.

Moreover, the current plan does not take advantage of the site's historic value even though Oakland's proud heritage of maritime activity could certainly be a prime attraction of the project. The historic Ninth Avenue Terminal, for example, is well worth saving as a whole or in some part.

A segment of the Bay Trail is proposed for the project shoreline, but the

fact is that only about one-fifth of the trail segment is included in the project's first phase. Other parts of the trail could remain undeveloped for up to twenty years and might never be built.

Oakland's decision-makers need to know that citizens want the whole shoreline trail segment to be developed during phase one, and that the project as a whole should be designed to benefit of the community at large and not just those individuals who decide to buy a condominium on the site. Public response deadlines are fast approaching! This is not just an Oakland issue, so please let the Oakland City Council know your concerns before their June 20 Council meetings. Write, email or call them.

For further information contact Sandy Threlfell at :Sandy@waterfrontaction.org or phone 510- 336- 1824.

In Contra Costa County the situation is very different. There, two planning processes are just getting underway. The big question for both planning efforts is how best to reuse the sprawling 5,000-acre inland portion of the Concord Naval Weapons Station now that those acres have been declared surplus to the nation's defense needs.

The City of Concord has been designated as the official "local reuse authority" and is charged with developing recommendations for conversion of the Weapons Station land to civilian uses. To assist this process, a citizens advisory committee is being formed in order to ensure adequate community involvement. The community will come up with recommendations for civilian reuse of the base, and the Concord City Council will then adopt a final plan for presentation to the U.S. Navy.

Meanwhile, the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District has

launched a comprehensive planning process for the whole 23,846-acre watershed of Mount Diablo Creek. That creek runs right through the middle of the Concord Naval Weapons Station. In addition to federal land in the former Weapons Station the watershed includes land in Concord, Clayton, and a portion of Mount Diablo State Park. Once a watershed plan has been drawn up, a watershed council will be created that will strive over the long term to preserve and restore natural habitat values in the creek's riparian corridor and throughout the watershed.

It should be noted that the Mount Diablo Creek watershed is one of the most unspoiled watersheds in Contra Costa County. Less than 25 percent of the land has been developed and less than 10 percent of the creek itself has been culverted or channelized. As a result, the creek and its tributaries enjoy some of the best water quality in the county and there are many areas of unspoiled natural habitat.

The current Resource Conservation District planning process, including liaison with the planning effort for civilian reuse of the Concord Naval Weapons Station, offers a unique opportunity to work with a priceless natural resource that can become a model for water quality and creek restoration for the whole region. The Regional Parks Association hopes that everyone involved will fully recognize the regional significance of the former Naval Weapons Station land. RPA weighed in on this issue with a letter to the *Contra Costa Times* on June 10.

For further information contact Jessica Hamburger, watershed coordinator for the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District. E-mail: jessica.hamburger@nacdnet.net or telephone: 925/672- 6522, extension 118.

IN THE RPA FAMILY.....

We offer our deepest sympathy to former RPA and EBRPD board member Harlan Kessel in the death of his wife Esther, July 10, 2006.

And to long-time RPA member and Bay Area environmentalist *par excellence* **Sylvia McLaughlin**, heartiest congratulations for the honors bestowed upon her at a July EBRPD meeting, honoring her work and soon-to-happen-very-significant-birthday!

VARGAS PLATEAU PROPOSAL RAISES ACCESS ISSUES

A letter to EBRPD by Alison Chaiken

(Alison is RPA's valued webmaster. We urge RPA members in southern Alameda County to weigh in on this issue. A Land Use Plan is due out for public comment November-December.)

I was excited to hear about your plan for the Vargas Plateau...Your envisioned park combining ranch roads, new narrower hiking trails, picnic areas, and campgrounds along with resource conservation is a fitting use of the property. But, like other Fremont area residents, I am concerned about road access to the new park. An approach to the proposed park via Morrison Canyon Road or Vargas Road is of questionable safety given their narrowness. A recent attempt to visit the property via these routes showed that the City of Fremont has blocked them off with sawhorses due to fire danger...At the same time, access to the proposed park from its northwest corner has several advantages. Most notably, Old Canyon Road and Canyon Heights Road are easily reachable from Mission Boulevard.

In addition, the Park District has a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on the proximity of the Alameda Creek Trail

to the new park. Since the Vargas Plateau is expected to host the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Park District could link the Ridge Trail to the Bay Trail if the Alameda Creek Trail and side trails into Vargas Plateau meet...I understand that access to the Vargas Plateau from the northwest corner would require negotiation or even purchase of a new right-of-way. While the difficulty of that arrangement should not be minimized, the reward for linking the various trails will be great...I urge the Board to pursue access from the northwest corner of the Park ...

SPLENDID ANNUAL MEETING

Middle Harbor Shoreline Park on the Oakland shoresite of RPA's 2006 Annual Meeting, is a marvel of thoughtful planning and persistence in the face of many hurdles. There is no doubt that it is an urban park (lots of turf and concrete and an excellent view of the cargo cranes that look like gigantic horses.) But it is also clear that restoration plans along the shoreline will result in more near-shore and shallow water habitat for many bay bird and aquatic species.



April 30, RPA members breakfasted in the park, while hearing from Jim Mc Grath, retired environmental planner with the Port of Oakland and key creator of the park, about how the miracle was achieved. It was clear that it took a lot of dedication, patience and listening to effect this synergy from the many and often competing interests involved in the process.

Also addressing the group was EBRPD Park Supervisor Nigel Harald, who reported on future plans for revegetation of the tidal flats that were created with dredging spoils.

It was one of those not- so-common clear, bright , fogless mornings: afterwards most of us explored the park in little groups. It was time well spent, and inspiring to experience this dramatic improvement over the junky deep- water channel the park replaces.

EBRPD ISSUES OF NOTE

Various RPA board members try to cover all the EBRPD committees meetings to keep track Park issues. Of note in the near future:

An EIR will be done on the 'Wildland Fire Hazard Reduction Plan, interfacing along the Oakland Berkeley hills – watch for scoping meetings this fall, and a DEIR available for public comment first of 2007. (RPA is VERY glad to see EIR will be done!)