

Planning Board Meeting – December 9, 2019  
Agenda Item 7-B

To: Planning Board Members  
From: Richard Bangert, Alameda Point Environmental Report  
Re: Site A – Block 11 and Waterfront Park, Alameda Point

Thank you for considering the following three comments on the proposed changes to Block 11 and five comments on the Waterfront Park.

**Comment #1 – Block 11** – The developer cites escalating construction costs and long-term maintenance costs as the reasons for seeking a reduction in size of the residential and commercial structure. Cost figures, however, are not provided to allow for an informed decision. Additionally, the staff report does not contemplate keeping the building the same size and increasing the number of residential units to offset construction costs. Why is this alternative not reviewed, especially since it would mean an increase in housing choices, including affordable?

**Comment #2 – Block 11** – Due to its prominent waterfront location, this block is supposed to be a character-defining structure. The already-approved design from 2016 is clearly the superior design when viewed side by side. The proposed changes make the building look more like “Anywhere USA.” And the smaller size and loss of the bold architectural elements in the 2016 design would likely make it an underwhelming presence at the central focal point of the town center.

**Comment #3 – Block 11** – A side benefit for downsizing the building, suggested by staff, is that it would free up space to build a parking garage. If a parking garage is someday considered necessary in this vicinity, it should be built over the toxic groundwater plume south of West Atlantic Avenue. The possibility (no guarantee) of constructing a parking garage next door to Block 11 lacks merit as a reason to approve the requested change in size.

**Comment #4 – Waterfront Park** – The proposed new look of the terraced portion leading down to the waterfront promenade is strikingly different from, and less desirable than, the already-approved 2016 design.

In 2016, the orientation of the terraces was horizontal. The new design has two diagonal walkways in a “V” shape cutting across the horizontal features and leading to the waterfront. In 2016, the goal was to “minimize the impression of changes in elevation” as part of a sea level rise design strategy. The diagonal walkways have the opposite effect.

The proposed design looks like two boat ramps. If anything, it will accentuate the impression of changes in elevation, especially as sea level rises. Once the promenade at water’s edge is permanently overtopped by water due to sea level rise, the ramps will **not** be leading to a promenade any longer. They will be leading to water. The terraced area will then look like the designer never contemplated sea level rise. The proposed diagonal walkways mar the clean horizontal and timeless look of the original design and should be rejected.

The January 11, 2016 staff report to the Planning Board on the Waterfront Park design addresses the horizontal aspect. Under the subheading of *Addressing Sea level Rise within the Context of the Historic District Guidelines*, the report states, “The waterfront park design

maintains the ‘**horizontality**’ of the space and minimizes the use of walls in order to respect the cultural landscape guidelines. The sea level rise strategy is designed around a series of short terraces spread over a larger space to **minimize the impression of changes in elevation.**” (Emphasis added.)

**Comment #5 – Waterfront Park** – The new design eliminates the extensive seating opportunities on short terrace walls that would invite people into this expansive public space. This loss of terrace walls is a drastic change and would reduce this park from great to mediocre.

The staff report states, “The revised plan results in changing the amount and types of seating provided in the Waterfront Park. The previous terrace design provided extensive informal seating as part of the terrace walls. The removal of the terraces eliminated those seating opportunities.”

The change in design appears to be driven largely by the need to reduce the costs of constructing concrete surfaces, since the staff report references the reduction in hardscape more than once. The reduction in concrete surfaces comes in part from eliminating the terrace walls. No figures are given as to what the cost savings will be. Instead of providing cost-saving numbers, the staff report points to the heat island effect, saying it will be reduced by substituting vegetation for concrete and thereby benefitting the environment. While this general principle is true, the cumulative benefit for these few square feet is probably not even measurable.

Given the increased amount of natural landscape in the remaining part of the Waterfront Park along the north side of the Seaplane Lagoon and in DePave Park on the west side, the heat island effect is not a compelling reason to lessen the attractiveness and availability of seating. Saving money on construction of concrete features is likewise not a compelling reason to eliminate seating and lessen the attractiveness of the park.

**Comment #6 – Waterfront Park** – The proposed changes include eliminating a pump system. Why was this a good idea in 2016, but now, three years later, it is considered outdated and an undesirable system for handling drainage? Where were the pumps going to be located, how many, at what cost, with what lifespan, and with what maintenance cost?

**Comment #7 – Waterfront Park** – While Block 11 is private property, the park is *public* property. The funding for this park is in lieu of the purchase of Site A from the city. Any changes to the park should not be made on the basis of saving money for the developer. This is a city park.

If memory serves, the city has already given the developer a big break (several million dollars) on their park and recreation commitment by postponing when the contribution of \$5 million is due in full for the proposed Sports Complex on the north side of Alameda Point.

Now the developer is asking for a reduction in their park and recreation contribution at the waterfront. This Waterfront Park is a promised and prominent public amenity that should not suffer changes because the developer’s construction costs are rising. The city has been very accommodating over the past few years in approving a number of changes to the development agreement requested by the developer, such as the delayed Sports Complex funding, modified construction milestone requirements, and modified construction phasing, but this one should be rejected.

**Comment #8 – Waterfront Park** – Substituting shade trees for the palm trees in the original plan is a good idea. Other than that, the proposed changes are a downgrade. The already-approved 2016 design is a world-class design, grand in scale, inviting to the public, drawing a visitor’s eyes onward through the linear (horizontal) terraced gathering space, regardless of the vantage point.

In sum, please do not compromise our public park for short-term savings to a private developer.

## NANCY McPeak

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**From:** Rachel Campos <ratcampos@gmail.com> on behalf of Rachel Campos de Ivanov <rcampos@alumni.haas.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, December 09, 2019 2:03 PM  
**To:** NANCY McPeak  
**Cc:** Jeffrey Cavanaugh; Ronald Curtis; Hanson Hom; Rona Rothenberg; Teresa Ruiz; Asheshh Saheba; Alan Teague  
**Subject:** Opposition to proposed changes for Block 11 & Waterfront Park

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Members of the Planning Board,

I am writing regarding tonight's issue with the changes to Site A's waterfront park and Block 11.

The waterfront park and block 11 are two crucial areas that have been used as the face of the project. Their attractive and distinctive architectural design, and the creation of an inviting and activated waterfront park that would honor our world class views of the water and San Francisco skyline are some of the benefits that we were sold when the project was approved. The changes currently proposed by the developer would significantly diminish both of those benefits. With that, I wanted to express my support for every point Richard Bangert outlined in his article posted on his blog, AlamedaPointEnviro.com – "Developer Proposes Changes That Would Cheapen Waterfront Area." My only point of disagreement with Mr. Bangert's arguments is with the palm trees.

<https://alamedapointenviro.com/2019/12/08/developer-proposes-changes-that-would-cheapen-waterfront-area/?fbclid=IwAR375kIDMhodkMIm7JN-Dzaz1RsYEAIOUCmD6s6PmRaVKrxA22vb8QhNAhI>

Regarding the waterfront park, the original design elements enabled the space to be broken up with different tones and textures making the current sea of concrete and vast space on the Taxiway feel human-sized. Much like the palms on Burbank & Portola, the alleyway of palms on the taxiway could create a sense of identity and an attractive landmark visible from land and water. While, yes, the area desperately needs shade, the palms have a more distinctive feel. The other proposed design changes take away from the details and this area needs detail to break up the vast feeling on the taxiway. An area where one could drown in water & concrete.

The other proposed changes to Block 11 greatly diminish the original design details that made this building the signature design and cornerstone that defined the project. Its rounded balconies, were inspired by the art nouveau architecture that defines some of the base's most memorable buildings. The color and rhythm of the windows and storefronts were meant to mimic the rhythm of the surrounding hangars just across the street. The vast windows on the residential and retail floors would make the building sparkle from the waterfront. Combined these details created an identity to the building that set it apart from the other lack-luster projects that have recently been developed on the island.

Alameda has a lot of competition and challenges before us when it comes to attracting new retail leases. We need to create a street front that is unique and distinctive, not one that could easily be replicated elsewhere. It is the details that will help this neighborhood create its own "only in Alameda" feel in the way that Berkeley or Walnut Creek have their own distinct aesthetic. That's what the community signed on for and that's what such an incredible space deserves to be – not a bland, boxy, unremarkable replication of Emeryville.

I fully understand the realities of changing construction costs. The issue is real. However, these two important components of the project, two that will help to define the character and public face, are not the place to diminish the design elements that will define that character. I would encourage you, and staff, to work with the APP team to find other options that would enable our community to keep the vision we were originally sold.

Thank you,  
Rachel Campos

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