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Reply to: 802 Balra Drive
El Cerrito, CA 94530

June 23, 2014

Mayor Gilmore and City Council
City of Alameda
2263 Santa Clara Avenue
Alameda, CA 94501

**Subject: July 1, 2014 City Council Meeting, Item 6E
Alameda Point Town Center and Waterfront Specific Plan**

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

The Sierra Club offers the following response to city staff's latest recommendation for the western portion of the Seaplane Lagoon. We side with the city's consultant Skidmore, Owings and Merrill original proposal and the Planning Board's recommendation and favor the removal of Building 25 and adding clear language to the specific plan that supports pursuing wetland creation now.

If the staff recommendation is accepted by the city council, the unavoidable conclusion is that the De-Pave Park natural wetland will never be implemented during the projected build-out timeframe (25 years) for the Alameda Point project described in the Environmental Impact Report. The language and drawings of the park are ambiguous and contradictory.

City staff says they are OK with proceeding with plans for conversion to a wetland "park" that includes demolishing all the structures when "feasible," except for Building 25. However staff also says the existing buildings will remain "until such time that the buildings become un-usable due to sea level rise." These contradictory statements show a lack of commitment. The city needs to pursue feasibility by enlisting wetland consultants.

In opposition to the Planning Board's recommendation, the staff report states that "the Plan be silent on whether and when Building 25 be removed to provide the City with flexibility in how to address the long-term reuse of this area." Being silent does not equal flexibility in this case. It equals a declarative statement about the future commercial reuse of this area

that will preclude incorporating Building 25 into a wetland mitigation bank. There would be “flexibility” for revenue generation even under the most optimistic timeline for wetland creation. Revenue could be generated at least for five years, if not longer, while a wetland bank is being established.

The report continues with “this Building generates much-needed lease revenue.” Staff has not provided information about the potential future value of the 7.5 acres of land associated with Building 25 if it were a credit for sale in a wetland mitigation bank. The acreage may be worth more than the cost of conversion to wetland, but we don’t know what it is worth at this point. It is incumbent upon you to insist the city gather data.

In the meantime, one idea, which does preclude others, is that the footprint and mass of this building may be worth more as an addition to one of the other beverage companies further north on Monarch Street. Demolishing this building may not end its value. The 2012 Biological Opinion allows for any building on Monarch Street to be demolished and a new structure built in its place that does not exceed the existing footprint and mass. Shifting this building’s footprint northward would require an amendment approved by the U.S Fish & Wildlife Service. There are no reasons that we can think of to disapprove such an amendment, and one good reason to approve it: It would remove an obstruction from the foraging flight path of the least terns when they are nesting. The building is in the direct flight path to the harbor area where they frequently forage. The staff has not provided the council with estimates of future monetary value to a beverage company wishing to expand. Situating the Building 25 footprint between hangars on Monarch Street would not only be worth a lot to an existing and expanding company, it may also serve as a “business retention” perk to keep an expanding company from ever considering moving. Think of what Rock Wall Wine Company could do with that amount of buildable space. They could have two floors of dining and wine tasting instead of that “temporary” plastic dome house.

The report further states: “There are few places left in the Bay Area that offer these types of buildings in a location as unique as Alameda Point.” Conversely, there are few places on San Francisco Bay that have former military buildings situated in between Bay waters and an existing wetland that could be easily removed to expand a wetland. It’s an opportunity that should be acted upon now.

Planning Board members voiced concern that future city councils may be reluctant to remove buildings because of having good tenants, and therefore the wetland area will never be pursued. They also did not like the concept of Building 25 ruining the view of the San Francisco Skyline from the Town Center corridor. The Board recommended that the buildings be kept only until funding for wetland creation is secured. We hope you agree and set the stage for gathering information to make that happen.

We urge you to reject staff's recommendation and include language that ensures creating wetland.

Sincerely yours,

Norman La Force

Chair, East Bay Public Lands Committee

cc: Jennifer Ott and Andrew Thomas (letter to be included council's packet)