



To: Members of the Balboa Reservoir Community Advisory Committee

From: Jeremy Shaw, Planning Department

Date: October 8, 2015

**Subject: Public Realm Parameters for Discussion at the October 19, 2015 CAC Meeting**

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This memo pertains to the upcoming discussion of the Public Realm (consisting of open space and streets) at the CAC meeting scheduled for October 19, 2015. City staff will propose the following Public Realm principles and parameters based on community feedback to date, combined with our understanding of design, development and public policy considerations. At subsequent CAC meetings we will seek feedback on additional categories of parameters including urban design, transportation, relationship with City College, sustainability, and other desired community amenities. In preparation for October 19<sup>th</sup>, please review these draft principles and parameters, share them with your respective constituencies and solicit their comments, and be prepared to provide feedback at the CAC meeting.

As described at the prior CAC meeting, these parameters will inform the selection of a developer partner for the Balboa Reservoir site. This selection will occur through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process in which prospective developers will propose concept-level ideas for development at the site. The proposals will be evaluated on how they adhere to these and several other parameters, in addition to their experience, proposal's financial feasibility and other factors.

Please note that the writing of these parameters will not be the only opportunity for the community and the City to impact the development. Once a developer partner is selected through the RFP process, its winning proposal will be refined with additional feedback from the City, community members and the CAC.

In our experience, the RFP process is most successful when the development parameters balance (1) setting clear expectations about City and community priorities and (2) providing flexibility for proposals to creatively meet and exceed those priorities. The best responses allow for continued, iterative work after the developer selection and, ultimately, the strongest end result. The draft parameters below seek to strike that balance by providing high-level guidance on critical open space issues and certain minimum requirements based on community input.

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the October 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, staff will also present background information that will help inform the discussion of the proposed parameters. You can find additional policy direction and guidance for designing the site by consulting these resources:

1. Community input and background studies to the Balboa Reservoir process to date. At the link below, you can find input from previous public input and existing conditions studies for the site conducted by AECOM. [www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=3989#materials](http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=3989#materials)
2. Balboa Reservoir Site Opportunities and Constraints Map / Existing Conditions report - <http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=3989#materials>
3. Balboa Park Station Area Plan contains policies regarding open space, pedestrian and transit access, and urban design in the Balboa Park Station Plan area. <http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=1748>
4. The Urban Design Element and Recreation and Open Space Element of the San Francisco General Plan contain planning policy and design guidance for these two aspects of city design. [www.sf-planning.org/ftp/general\\_plan](http://www.sf-planning.org/ftp/general_plan)

In addition, a number of local regulations, codes and design guidelines will ultimately apply to the site design. Only after further community design input in 2016 will detailed designs and codes be applied. The codes which ultimately apply include:

1. SFPUC Utility Standards - <http://sfwater.org/index.aspx?page=574>
2. San Francisco Stormwater Design Guidelines describe the requirements for stormwater management in San Francisco and give developers the tools to achieve compliance. <http://www.sfwater.org/index.aspx?page=446>
3. The Better Streets Plan contains city policy and design guidance on making walkable, safe and streets that are designed appropriately to the urban context around them. [www.sfbetterstreets.org](http://www.sfbetterstreets.org)
4. City and County of San Francisco 2015 Subdivision Regulations

**PROPOSED PUBLIC REALM PRINCIPLES AND PARAMETERS**

**Principle #1:** *Develop a cohesive public realm (network of streets and open spaces) which provides a range of programmed and unprogrammed spaces for functional, recreational and social activities. Public spaces should be visible and activated from adjacent streets and uses; connect gathering places, destinations and residences on the site and beyond; and provide a sense of identity unique to the neighborhood.*

*Draft Parameters*

- a. Create a publicly-accessible open space network, totaling at least 4 acres, including off-street walking routes or linear parks, and privately owned public open space (POPOS) but excluding streets. Aim to exceed this minimum requirement.
- b. Create one significant open space to serve as a park for the site and neighborhoods beyond the Balboa Reservoir (aka Balboa Public Site). Include a mix of programmed and unprogrammed spaces based on community input and neighborhood need. Rather than creating a large void, the park should be varied in design and uses, be scaled appropriately with the pattern of blocks and buildings, and create a sense of shared neighborhood identity. This contiguous open space (which may extend multiple blocks if intersected by shared public ways or pedestrian-priority streets), should be at least 1.5 acres and would constitute a portion of the minimum 4 acres of open space referenced in Section 2.a. This park will be designed with the community in a public process.
- c. Consider the childcare facility that may be built on-site and its needs for open space.
- d. Create a walking route or network of walking routes which facilitates walking for recreational purposes, minimizing street crossings and connecting or defining on-site open spaces. Pedestrian networks should connect to surrounding networks of streets, paths and open spaces.
- e. Create a buffer zone or open space along the southern end of the Balboa Public Site, an area which cannot accommodate new structures since it contains existing SFPUC underground water transmission pipelines.
- f. Respect the privacy and scale of adjacent uses, especially Westwood Park neighbors to the west with appropriate public space design, landscape, topography or walking routes to serve as a buffer or transition from the new buildings on the Balboa Public Site.
- g. Build in enough flexibility to the open space network to allow for it to evolve with changing neighborhood needs, incorporating successive layers of programming, public art, and community stewardship over time.
- h. Prioritize views of Mt Davidson, Mt Bruno and the main entrance to the CCSF Science Hall.
- i. Emphasize the special nature of the area through distinctive landscaping and other features that complement and respect adjacent neighborhoods.

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**Principle #2:** *Design the public realm as a useful, safe and welcoming part of daily experience for diverse neighbors of all ages, visitors to the site, and CCSF affiliates.*

*Draft Parameters:*

- a. Create public and common open spaces that are active, well defined by landscape features, streets or walking routes, active pedestrian entries to adjacent buildings, and adjacent building massing.
- b. Design the landscape and buildings so that they complement each other in support of site-wide design public realm and urban design goals (see urban design section).
- c. Incorporate linear spaces, smaller common areas, courtyards and/or mid-block alleys into the site and buildings to moderate building scale, provide intimate spaces and diversify activities in the public realm. Wherever possible, pair spaces with complementary adjacent land uses to help activate the public realm, for example small plazas near natural gathering places, playgrounds near daycare etc.
- d. Avoid corner public areas, fore courts and other designs that are ultimately passed through or observed from outside rather than serving a necessary, recreational or social purpose.
- e. Propose a gradual transformation of the site, maintaining access to usable open space throughout all construction phases to allow people to experiment with new ways of using the site, and to give the community time to adapt to the physical changes of the site. For example, create a nursery for trees to mature on-site in advance of future site construction.

**Principle #3:** *Incorporate the different needs and hours of activity for diverse users in the area.*

*Draft Parameters:*

- a. Ensure opportunities for people of all ages, including students, seniors and families, to utilize the public realm.
- b. Design for sight lines between caregivers and open spaces or adjacent uses such as daycare, family residential units or other ground-floor uses. Buildings with family units should maximize the number of units overlooking play areas.
- c. Locate gathering places at natural confluences of pedestrian activity, walking routes, and public life.

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**Principle #4:** *Privately-owned public open spaces (POPOS) should read as part of an overall, coordinated pattern of open space. Recognize that per City policy, buildings will be required to provide a minimum 80 square feet of private open space per unit or 60 square feet of public open space per unit (above and beyond the public open space requirements above).*

*Although detailed building design will occur following the selection of a master developer, the following parameters should guide RFP respondents' general site planning vision, as applicable.*

*Draft Parameters:*

- a. Maximize the percentage of private open space at ground level.
- b. Connect courtyards and/or mid-block alleys wherever possible.
- c. Private open spaces should be intimate and inviting. They should maximize green space, programmable spaces and visibility from residential units.
- d. Consider including residential building(s) with a shared open space designed for children and families, with play equipment and good visibility from larger, family-sized units.

**Principle #5:** *Design a variety of open spaces within the public realm network to create a variety of sensory experiences, incorporating the surrounding natural and/or cultural environment into the siting and design.*

*Draft Parameters:*

- a. If open space includes grade changes, use topography as a means of adding variation or creating a series of intimate spaces, without limiting visibility or accessibility.
- b. Maximize sun exposure in public spaces.
- c. Design open space areas that are protected from westerly winds.
- d. Integrate stormwater management features, such as bioretention planters and green roofs, into the public realm.
- e. Use drought tolerant species that will minimize the need for irrigation.

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**Principle #6:** *All public rights of way should be attractive, safe and useable public open spaces with generous landscaping, lighting and greenery as appropriate to the scale and use of buildings and the site. Street design should be built to standards established in Better Streets Plan.*

*(See Better Streets Policy. This section addresses street design only; pedestrian, transit, bicycle and auto activity are discussed in the transportation section.)*

### *Draft Parameters:*

- a. Design new streets and alleys as public spaces which create intimate, safe pedestrian environments, while encouraging social interactions between diverse users from the site, adjacent neighborhoods and CCSF. Use shared streets/public ways and living alley designs where appropriate.
- b. Street and sidewalk designs should be consistent with Better Streets Plan and other applicable standards, such as utility separation requirements. Streets will generally fall under neighborhood commercial, neighborhood residential, park edge, alley or shared public way Better Streets Plan types.

**Principle #7:** *Plan and design in coordination with a long-term, sustainable maintenance plan and community-serving programming.*

### *Draft Parameters:*

- a. Describe what types of recreational uses are intended for the various public parks and open spaces included in the proposal.
- b. Describe how parks and open spaces will be managed or programmed to promote safe and active use and enjoyment. Include a funding proposal to support these management and programming activities.
- c. Plan proposed park and open spaces with an eye toward efficient maintenance and management, including establishment of funding sources to support such operations.
- d. Integrate educational or cultural opportunities into the public realm and adjacent community spaces, including funding sources to support such operations; work with community partners on this effort is encouraged.