



CITY OF EAST PALO ALTO

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

2415 University Avenue • East Palo Alto, CA 94303

DATE: May 25, 2005

TO: Mayor and Honorable Members of the East Palo Alto City Council

VIA: Alvin James, City Manager

FROM: Debbie Schechter, Environmental and Economic Development Coordinator
Debra O'Leary, US Army Corps of Engineers Liaison
Carlos Martinez, Redevelopment Agency Director

SUBJECT: Special Study Session on Cooley Landing

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that Council receive the information presented during the Special Study Session and direct staff to (1) compile and analyze community input received at the Study Session, (2) revise the concept drawings in accordance with community input and site constraints, and (3) come back to Council with a revised consensus concept or concepts for Council review and approval.

BACKGROUND:

East Palo Alto leaders and residents have had a long term interest in opening Cooley Landing to the public. On November 12, 2003, the City Council held a Cooley Landing Study Session to solicit community input on how Cooley Landing should be used. At the Study Session, residents and Council members sent a strong message that they want public access to Cooley Landing for low intensity recreation, education, and conservation while respecting the natural and historic integrity of the site. A list of potential uses for Cooley Landing was generated from the Study Session. The Council also expressed a desire to have Cooley landing, to the extent possible, transferred to City ownership.

Ownership of Cooley Landing is complex. The property the City expects to receive is a narrow strip 127 feet wide running the length of the middle of Cooley Landing, at the end of Bay Road, within the jurisdictional boundaries of the City of East Palo Alto. It is currently owned by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and is approximately 6.62 acres, of which about half is above water. POST has also expressed a willingness to gift its portion of the property to the City. The POST property is practically surrounded by the Ravenswood Open Space Preserve, which is owned by Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD). This preserve is within the

jurisdictional boundaries of Menlo Park. To the south of the site is the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve, which is within the jurisdictional boundary of the City of East Palo Alto, but owned by the City of Palo Alto.

Stakeholder Process

At the November 2003 Study Session, Council directed staff to convene stakeholders to reach a mutual understanding of the types and intensities of uses that might occur at Cooley Landing and to ultimately reach agreement for conveying the portion of Cooley Landing owned by POST to the City for implementation of joint goals.

Staff invited property owners, cities with jurisdiction over the site, a potential funder, and potential developers to participate. The invited parties were: City of East Palo Alto (Cooley Landing Committee and City staff), City of Palo Alto, City of Menlo Park, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Coastal Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, Audubon Society, and San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. At the City's request, the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program assisted in designing the stakeholder process and facilitated stakeholder meetings.

The stakeholders met four times between August, 2004 and December, 2004. Starting with the list of potential uses for Cooley Landing that was generated in the November 2003 Study Session, stakeholders (1) categorized uses according to their organization's level of support for the uses; (2) identified resources that might be available to implement these uses; and (3) described concepts and assumptions for ways to use the site to support these uses. The list of uses is included as an attachment.

Concept Drawings

On October 19, 2004, the City Council authorized the City Manager to enter into a contract with Cypress Environmental and Land Use Planning to prepare Cooley Landing concept drawings illustrating several possible approaches for accommodating various uses on which the group had agreed. On November 16, 2004, the City Council gave authorization to accept \$25,000 from the Packard Foundation to pay for preparation of the concept drawings and other Cooley Landing planning activities.

The concept drawings were prepared with the following assumptions:

- Nature, open space, and history were the emphasis at the site, with public access and interpretive information
- Facilities serve as support for appropriate uses at the site, not as regional draws in themselves
- Discussion of appropriate uses (i.e., levels of support) included by reference
- Contingent on further site analysis, environmental review, and community support.

Three concept drawings were prepared, representing a range of intensities of use at the site:

- Concept A: Primary uses limited to the former boatworks building and adjoining paved area of the site, with low intensity secondary uses (e.g., kayak launch, fishing, picnicking) located beyond the building/pavement area.

- Concept B: Primary uses limited to the former boatworks building, the dredge, the adjoining paved area and the open space area between the boatworks building and the dredge. Some low intensity secondary uses are located beyond this area.
- Concept C: Uses are located throughout the site.

The concept drawings were presented to the stakeholders at a meeting on December 6, 2004. Stakeholders were generally satisfied with them, though several stakeholders expressed some concern about the intensity of uses in Concept C. *It is important to note that the drawings were to serve as tools to talk about conceptual uses, rather than as concrete site designs.*

The concept drawings are directly linked to input on Cooley Landing uses that residents and Council members provided in November, 2003. They depict in differing ways the uses supported by the public. On March 15, 2005, staff provided an update to Council on the stakeholder process and the concept drawings. At that time, Council directed staff to get community input on the concept drawings at a Special City Council Study Session.

US Environmental Protection Agency \$200,000 Brownfields Grant

While concept drawings depict ideas for uses of Cooley Landing, the development of the site is constrained by contamination at resulting from the former use of the site as a County dump, and other environmental and ecological factors. Some sampling and cleanup activities will be required to make the site safe for a nature center. In November, 2004, the City submitted an application to the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) for funding to conduct environmental sampling and cleanup planning activities at Cooley Landing. On May 10, 2005, the City was notified that a \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment grant was awarded to the City for Cooley Landing. The City is required to submit a workplan to the US EPA by June 15, 2005 indicating specific activities that will be conducted using the grant funds.

ANALYSIS

Tonight's Study Session will provide the Council and the community with a description of the stakeholder process, a presentation of the concept drawings, and an opportunity for community members to comment on the concept drawings in break-out groups and during community forum. Staff recommends that Council direct staff to (1) compile and analyze community input received at tonight's Study Session, (2) revise the concept drawings in accordance with community input and site constraints, and (3) come back to Council with a revised consensus concept or concepts for Council review and approval.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Any subsequent revisions to the concept drawings and other Cooley Landing planning activities can be paid for through remaining funds from the Packard Foundation's \$25,000 grant to the City for Cooley Landing planning activities. In addition, the City's new \$200,000 grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency can be used for environmental sampling and cleanup planning activities at Cooley Landing. There will be no impact on the General Fund.