



To: Members of the Balboa Reservoir Community Advisory Committee

From: Jeremy Shaw and Sue Exline, Planning Department; Emily Lesk, OEWD

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**Subject: Public Realm Parameters: Version 3**

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At the CAC meeting on October 19, 2015, City staff proposed development parameters related to housing at Balboa Reservoir. Incorporating comments from the October 19, 2015 CAC meeting, staff revised the original parameters (**revisions in red**). Staff has now revised the Public Realm Parameters again to reflect additional comments received after October 19<sup>th</sup> and at the January 11, 2016 CAC meeting; (**revisions in blue**). City staff and the CAC received several comments from stakeholders via email. The feedback can be found in its entirety within the following files:

- [October 19, 2015 meeting minutes](#)
- [October 19, 2015 meeting recording](#)
- [October 19, 2015 written public comment](#)
- [January 11, 2016 meeting minutes](#)
- [January 11, 2016 written public comment](#)

Links to all of these files are posted online at <http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=4224>.

Staff expects to hear additional feedback on these revised parameters at the upcoming CAC meeting scheduled for February 8, 2015, and is prepared to make additional revisions as appropriate. Once finalized, City staff will incorporate these revised parameters into a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to select a developer partner for the Site.

The most recent round of revisions to the Public Realm Parameters appear in blue text below and were based on public comments which focus on:

- Increasing the continuity and amount of open space on the site
- Minimizing privacy, light and character impacts on Westwood Park properties
- Greater consideration of the uniqueness of the site, especially the local micro-climate
- Clarifications of open space language and terminology
- Several additional comments which are incorporated into the housing, urban design and city college parameter revisions

This revision (“Version 3”) addresses the collected public concerns to the greatest extent feasible, understanding that future community design meetings with architects and a developer partner present further opportunities to discuss, propose and revise design solutions.

The RFP seeks to maximize open space. To that end, staff increased the target for the “continuous significant open space” to 2 acres. However, staff concluded that it is premature to increase the minimum open space acreage for several reasons. First, the best responses to the RFP will exceed minimum requirements. Second, four acres can accommodate two parks on par with nearby neighborhood parks. *In addition* to these four acres, the future developer will be required to provide on-site open spaces based on the number of units built. These spaces can be designed as publicly-accessible or private; a mix of both is most likely. Finally, we seek a neighborhood of diverse household types, youth of all ages, and families of different needs. The site should therefore include a variety of open spaces to serve them, including smaller courtyards, tot lots, private yards and other spaces. Dedicating too much land to large open spaces limits the flexibility for designing other types closer to or incorporated into buildings.

Ultimately, the developer will be required to provide several acres of diverse open spaces, but more than the quantity of space, the quality will determine if they are successful – including their ongoing stewardship. To that end, community input into future design workshops focused on open space needs, programming and uses will be especially important. The developer and architect will host such workshops after a team is selected through the RFP process.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 [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 <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 [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 <http://www.sfwater.org/index.aspx?page=446>
3. The Better Streets Plan [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, whether softscape or hardscape, 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 at ground level, including parks, playgrounds, gardens, picnic areas, off-street walking routes or linear parks, ~~and privately owned public open space (POPOS)~~ but excluding streets. Aim to exceed this minimum requirement. Spaces shall accommodate multiple types of open space activities or programs within a given day, week, or time of year.
- b. Create one significant open space at ground level 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 shall 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 continuous significant~~ open space (which may extend multiple blocks if intersected by ~~shared public ways or~~ pedestrian ways or pedestrian/bike paths ~~priority streets~~), shall strive to be at least 2 acres (no less than be at least 1.5 acres). This park would constitute a portion of the minimum 4 acres of at-grade open space referenced in Section 1.a. This park and 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 shall connect to surrounding networks of streets, paths and open spaces. Walking routes should be supportive of and consistent with parameters 1(e) and 1(f).
- e. Create a usable linear open space ~~buffer area zone or open space~~ along the southern end of the Balboa Public Site, an area which cannot accommodate new structures or large trees since it contains existing SFPUC underground water transmission pipelines.
- f. Respect the privacy and scale of all adjacent uses, ~~especially Westwood Park neighbors to the west~~ with a reasonable distance and appropriate public space design, private rear yards, landscape, topography (possibly including a berm) or walking routes to serve as a buffer or transition between the new buildings on the Balboa Public Site and Plymouth Avenue homeowners' backyards. Open space design shall be preserved in perpetuity, as with other public spaces on the 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. As these elements evolve to respond to changing needs, the spaces shall remain unbuilt and open to the public.

- h. Prioritize view [corridors from public streets and spaces to Mt Davidson, Mt Bruno and the main entrance to the City College Science Hall. Incorporate view studies into public community design workshops.](#)
- i. Emphasize the special nature of the area through distinctive landscaping and other features that complement and respect adjacent neighborhoods [and educational institutions.](#)

**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 City College affiliates.*

*Draft Parameters:*

- a. Create public and common open spaces that are active. They should be 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, [and/or](#) 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. [Carefully consider and protect against construction impacts on neighboring homes and foundations, many of which are over 90 years old.](#)

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

*Draft Parameters:*

- a. Ensure [safe and accessible](#) 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, [in support of the privacy concerns addressed in parameter 1\(f\).](#)

**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) Private open spaces should meet or exceed City regulations that require a minimum of 80 square feet of private open space per unit, or 60 square feet if the space is made publicly accessible (above and beyond the project-wide public open space area minimums in Principle #1). Any publicly accessible open space associated with an individual building should read as part of an overall, coordinated pattern of open space.~~

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, [mid-block open spaces](#), and/or ~~mid-block alleys streets~~ wherever possible.
- c. Private open spaces shall be [human-scale](#), intimate and inviting. They shall 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 [and in adjacent neighborhoods](#).
- c. Design open space areas that are protected from ~~westerly~~ winds. [Landscaping should withstand 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.

**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 City College. 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 Better Streets Plan's Neighborhood Commercial, Neighborhood Residential, Park Edge, Alley or Shared Public Way street 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 [and who will be accountable on a daily basis for the long-term](#). 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.