

Final Statement Oak to Ninth Ave. Development

The Measure DD Community Coalition is a broadly representative body of 150 concerned citizens, organizations, and dedicated staff. The Coalition was sanctioned by the City Council to monitor the progress of activity, and to oversee the financial integrity of the myriad of parks, open space, and waterways developments authorized under the Measure DD bond referendum, overwhelmingly adopted in 2002 by the Oakland electorate.

The Coalition has a special interest in the impending development of the Oak Street to 9th Avenue area (Oak-to-Ninth), not only for its projected magnitude, but particularly the project's potential impact on open space, Estuary access, visibility, and questions of level of development appropriate to the largest undeveloped waterfront area remaining in the city.

The Coalition also recognizes a variety of successfully developed urban waterfront developments in the United States and that, in large measure, these successes result from viable partnerships of public interests together with private residential-commercial developers. In appreciation of this fact, and that significant public resources are provided by Measure DD to develop usable, attractive open space, the Coalition strongly urges that public policy must insist on development that augments and encourages public access to the Estuary, and which assures that the "public interest" is paramount in decisions affecting the development of Oak-to-Ninth.

The Port of Oakland's selected developer for the Oak-to-Ninth area proposes development that differs greatly from the Estuary Policy Plan (EPP). The EPP was adopted in 1999 by the City Council and, after a lengthy public process, was incorporated in the General Plan. The vision of the EPP, as expressed and illustrated in the Plan:

"Shoreline access and public space policies are intended to establish this area of the Estuary as the major recreational destination in the city. The Plan recommends a series of large open spaces, intended to provide for a wide variety of recreational experiences. Developing a series of well-defined open spaces would change the entire nature of the waterfront in this area, transforming it from an industrial backwater into a recreational centerpiece of the city. In total, these sites would represent one of the most significant additions of urban parkland within the entire Bay Area. They would create both a regional and local asset of major proportions."

Given the current financial landscape of the city, achieving these goals makes public-private partnership all the more important. However, it is equally important to not allow development that will squander open space or implement designs that fail to serve the interests of all of Oakland. Innovative development adjacent to the Estuary has the potential to enhance the long-term vitality of Oakland's waterfront. However, it is equally essential that the public must not lose in the process.

Under the developer's proposal, 42% of the open space called for in the EPP (approximately 12-14 acres) is eliminated (excluding Estuary Park, an existing City park). The EPP "envisioned" opening up Estuary Park (now a "stealth" park) to public view from the Embarcadero, by demolishing a large warehouse and replacing it with 5 acres of open space. The developer's plan would build a large residential complex at the warehouse site, thereby forever hindering Estuary Park from public view.

The Measure DD Coalition strongly urges close adherence to primary EPP objectives by any development plan being considered for adoption, namely:

1. *Assure maximum physical and visual access for the public to the Estuary and the surrounding parks from the Embarcadero and from interior streets.*

Visual access is a major organizing feature of the EPP, in which all roadways and view corridors provide direct vistas to the water. In the developer's plan, visibility of the water is blocked from the Embarcadero, and from practically all streets within the development. Visibility, of course, is vital for parks, and encourages their use. Lake Merritt's parks are heavily used because they are so visible. At minimum, the developer should work with the City, the Coalition, and other interested parties to assure that this part of the Estuary will – to the greatest extent possible – be “opened up” in the similar ways.

2. *Maximize “open space” in the proposed development consistent with the Estuary Policy Plan.*

The EPP calls for a beautifully designed and sited 11-acre park landward of the 9th Avenue Terminal. In the developer's plan, the 11-acre park is replaced by an approximate 4-acre pier resulting from demolition of the 9th Avenue Terminal' thus losing both a major proposed park, and an historic building. Also, the present General Plan policy to demolish the warehouse at Oak Street and replace it with 5 acres of open space should be enforced. The development of Oak-to-Ninth should invite, not exclude, the public from Oakland's waterfront. It should benefit all Oakland residents, not just those who are sufficiently privileged to live there.

3. *Foster innovative approaches (in signage, street design, landscaping, pedestrian and bicycle access, transit stops, related amenities) to ensure maximum visibility of the Estuary, and attractive gateways and pathways to and within the development.*

The redevelopment of our waterfront is currently the most important land use decision before the city. As Oakland's last massive parcel for a long, long time, the City must ensure that the development of Oak-to-Ninth is nothing less than the best it can be. The new development should have the look and feel of an open waterfront park, perhaps with point towers set apart in large open spaces. Generous vistas should be available from all vantages. The re-newed area should provide attractive amenities, and should be inviting for walking, biking, jogging, sitting, and enjoying new experiences.

Oakland is a waterfront city, but many are hardly aware of that fact because, for so long, so much of our waterfront has been off limits to the public. With thanks to Measure DD and the availability of the Oak-to-Ninth area, Oakland is provided the unusual opportunity to open the waterfront to its people: an historic opportunity to leave – or not leave – a legacy to our children and grandchildren. Oakland lost its waterfront to rapacious politicians in the 1850s; it took 60 years of litigation to get it back. The City should not now lose it again. Oakland should work cooperatively with the Port's chosen developer to assure that our Estuary is an Oakland jewel for generations to come. Moreover, Oakland must ensure that “the public good” is a guiding principle in our collective decisions about how best to balance the beauty of the Estuary with public access and private investment.

The statement above represents the consensus of representatives and attendees at Measure DD Coalition meetings held in May and June 2005, and is thus a statement of the “sense” and “will” of the Coalition’s active attendees. Due to the urgency of the Oak-to-Ninth development, the statement has not been referred to organizations, and should not be presumed as officially endorsed by the Coalition’s various organizational members.