Recommendation:

Staff requests that the Public Art Commission give input on the draft Baylands Comprehensive Conservation Plan Public Art overlay created by Watershed Sculpture artists Mary O’Brien and Daniel McCormick. No formal action is requested at this time.

Background:

The Public Art Master Plan identified the creation of a public art plan for the Embarcadero corridor east of the 101 as a short term priority (1-2 years after adoption). With a number of future private development projects taking place in that corridor that will be subject to the private percent for art requirement, public art staff and the master plan consultants recommend a proactive approach to creating a vision for appropriate types of artwork along the Embarcadero corridor and in the Baylands that might be funded through in-lieu contributions, rather than potentially having multiple stand-alone artworks installed with each redevelopment. Shortly after the approval of the Public Art Master Plan, Public Art staff became aware of an upcoming opportunity through Parks & Open Space to participate in the development of the Baylands Comprehensive Conservation Plan (BCCP).

The BCCP is:

- A comprehensive plan for holistically managing the City of Palo Alto’s 1,976.5 acre Baylands Preserve for the next 15 years and beyond;
- An ecosystem-based approach that strives to balance resource protection, environmental education, and passive and active recreational use;
- Takes future projects and current trends such as sea level rise and climate change into account;
- Includes site-specific planning aspects for the former ITT property and Byxbee Park.

Public Art staff and Parks & Open Space staff collaborated on language for the call for consultants to create the Baylands Comprehensive Conservation Plan (BCCP) to include the identification of placement and types of public art engagement that might be appropriate in the Baylands, thus preventing two separate planning initiatives engaging the Baylands stakeholders. Parks staff launched a call for consultants in 2016 to create the BCCP, and identified AECOM as the consultant for the project.
Public Art staff launched a call for an artist team to work with the community and stakeholders at the Baylands to:

1. Help broaden Baylands stakeholders’ and the public’s understanding of the definitions of public art, especially through a social practice / environmental focus.
2. Engage the public in a temporary artmaking process that is aligned with the programming and educational initiatives of the Baylands.
3. Collaborate with AECOM and City staff to gather appropriate input and feedback at these engagement events with the community to ensure that the public art element of the BCCP captures the feedback from the stakeholders and adequately explored the many options available throughout the site.

On January 18, 2018, the PAC approved the allocation of $10,000 for the artist in residence for the Baylands and the public art overlay, and staff launched a request for qualifications for artists. On May 17, 2018, the Public Art Commission approved artists Mary O’Brien and Daniel McCormick to create the public art overlay for the BCCP and engage the public in an art making temporary project in the Baylands. Working closely with Public Art and Open Space staff, it was determined that the proposal for Foraging Islands best aligned with existing initiatives at the site and offered the opportunity to engage a broad group of stakeholders in the art-making process. On August 9, 2018, the Public Art Commission approved the artists’ proposal to create a Foraging Island at the Baylands.

Discussion:

Foraging Island was created from woody debris harvested from the Baylands and surrounding area. The sculptural form is intended to create a habitat for small insects, voles, and other small creatures that may attract the burrowing owl, hawks, and other desirable animals to Byxbee Park. Over the course of nine volunteer shifts in September, the public was invited to work alongside the artists creating the artwork, offering ample opportunity for volunteers and visitors to talk to the artists, raise questions about the piece and the overlay, and provide feedback to help inform the overlay.

Nearly 200 volunteer hours went into creating of the final piece, and public art staff and the artists gathered information from volunteers and visitors about the Baylands, how they travel there, what makes it special, and what they might like to see there. Volunteers from Environmental Volunteers, Grassroots Ecology, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Water Quality Control Plant came to work on the installation as well as volunteers who have worked on previous art installations, but had limited knowledge about the Baylands. There were several families who came to work on the project as well.

The feedback on Foraging Island was extremely positive – even from visitors who were initially skeptical. There were quite a few requests to build more of these foraging islands to help attract certain wildlife to Byxbee Park. Many regular users of the trails said they appreciated seeing something new appear and looked forward to keeping an eye out for wildlife attracted to the sculpture. They also shared their favorite animal sightings, activities, and locations in the Baylands. This input helped inform the overlay generated by the artists.
Since the installation of the *Foraging Island*, there have been four burrowing owl sightings near the sculpture. There is a bioblitz scheduled for the sculpture Sunday, January 13\textsuperscript{th} at 11:00 to document what prey species may now be inhabiting the sculpture. Public Art and Open Space staff will be working together to monitor the sculpture and any wildlife sightings.

Feedback from BCCP stakeholders in December and early January prompted three responses. Those responses can be summarized by the following:

- Concerns regarding the impact that future art installations might have on wildlife, either by physical placement or use of light;
- A lack of understanding of the “problem” the overlay seeks to solve;
- Concerns that future installations may interfere with the natural beauty of the environment.

Staff plans to ensure that additional language is added to the overlay to alleviate the concerns raised by the BCCP stakeholders. Mary O’Brien and Daniel McCormick have worked closely with staff on drafts of the public art overlay and have been extremely responsive to input from stakeholders and staff. It is important to keep in mind that the overlay is intended to be a menu of options for future consideration rather than seen as a checklist of definite projects. The suggestions in the overlay are only intended to call out potential placement and types of work, but not intended to dictate the exact works. Should staff recommend funding a particular site and opportunity through in-lieu contributions, artists will either be sourced from the prequalified pool or there will be an open call for artists. Any future artworks will require vetting through appropriate departments, commissions, and regulatory agencies.

**Timeline:**

Feedback gathered from the PAC and BCCP stakeholders will be incorporated into the next draft of the public art overlay to the BCCP. The overlay will be an attachment to the BCCP, and will be presented to Parks and Recreation Commission and the City Council this spring. The BCCP is expected to be finalized in March 2019.
Public Art at the Baylands
An Overlay to the
Palo Alto Baylands Comprehensive Conservation Plan, 2018

Daniel McCormick & Mary O'Brien, 2018 Artists-in-Residence, City of Palo Alto
Created with Palo Alto Public Art Program, Elise DeMarzo, Director; Palo Alto Open Space, Parks & Golf, Daren Anderson, Division Manager; AECOM, Sacramento, CA
INTRODUCTION

This is a public art overlay to the Palo Alto Baylands Natural Preserve (Baylands) Comprehensive Conservation Plan 2018 (BCCP) in accordance with the City of Palo Alto (the City) Public Art Master Plan (PAMP) 2016.

The BCCP addresses future management of the Baylands and is a framework for managing the Baylands during the next 15 years and beyond.

This report offers themes and identifies potential sites appropriate for public art that are ecologically and/or educationally beneficial, and which minimize disturbances to natural areas of the Baylands. ¹

This document identifies opportunities and potential sites for ecological, environmental, and social practice art at the Baylands. It provides guidance on how the Baylands could become an arts area for works, performances, and events that complement the ongoing conservation and sustainability efforts at the Baylands.

Concept drawing: ecological, environmental, and social practice opportunities on Embarcadero Road (looking south)
A History of Adaptations

The Baylands is approximately 2,000 acres of varied environments, purposes, and uses. Nature, recreation, and reclamation merge against a backdrop of commercial corridors and Highway 101.

Much of area that is now the Baylands was altered in the 20th Century. The marshes extended west to nearly the 101 freeway. They were filled, and the land became farms, a landfill, a yacht harbor, and the site of a pioneering marine radio operation.

Byxbee Park, surrounded by a restored landscape of fresh and salt water marshes, was once a landfill. The Regional Water Quality Control Plant (RWQC) releases treated water into the Baylands and monitors and captures the leachate and methane piped off Byxbee Park. Trails connect to the shorelines of Mountain View and East Palo Alto. The Baylands contains the longest uninterrupted stretch of San Francisco Bay Trail separated from streets.

Home to both native and non-native flora and fauna, the Baylands shoreline is dense with native eel grass and pickle weed. The endangered salt marsh harvest mouse lives here. Burrowing owls and grey fox have been seen in the Baylands. Irrigated and non-irrigated landscaped areas also characterize the Baylands.

The restored 1941 ship-shaped Environmental Volunteers headquarters and the Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretative Nature Center (Lucy Evans Center) provide
educational and environmental outreach for children and adults. An artist-in-residence based at either location would be compatible with goals of these organizations and the Baylands at-large.

In 1990, the artist team of Peter Richards and Michael Oppenheimer created several environmental works in Byxbee Park. Three of these are still in place at the Baylands—Pole Field, Chevrons, and Wind Wave. Other existing public art at the Baylands include Foraging Island by Daniel McCormick and Mary O’Brien in Byxbee Park, Birdie by Joyce Hsu, and KaikooV by Betty Gold on Embarcadero Road, Currents and Riding the Currents, by Martin Webb at the Regional Water Quality Control Plant, Streaming by Ceevah Sobel, and Bliss in the Moment by James Moore, on East Bayshore Road.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community members are engaged, and volunteerism is high at the Baylands. A 2018 survey of visitors to the Baylands confirmed that a diverse community enjoys the Baylands. The respondents highly valued the natural communities and environments of the park.

In 2018, the Palo Alto Public Art Program commissioned San Francisco Bay Area artist team Daniel McCormick and Mary O’Brien as artists-in-residence at the Baylands. Sixty-nine community volunteers ranging in age from 6 to 90, donated a total of 189 hours to help the artists create the wildlife-friendly Foraging Island in Byxbee Park. Feedback from volunteers recognized art
in the Baylands as a viable process that can inform the public on ecological practices and other topics relevant to the Baylands.

Several informed groups and site experts were involved, including a stakeholder group consisting of area residents and experts as diverse as the many interests this public space serves.

An energized and capable volunteer base from local organizations Save the Bay (with a native plant nursery at the Baylands), Environmental Volunteers, and Grassroots Ecology, as well as neighbors and individuals from nearby businesses, also assisted the artists.

The artists’ research for their installation became the foundation for this overlay to the BCCP.
SITE CONSIDERATIONS

Various conditions affect the development of art at the Baylands, including an emphasis on maintaining a natural environment. “Palo Alto residents value the natural environment more than almost any other characteristic of their city.”iii

Artists work closely with City departments and stakeholders throughout the planning process. Art installations at the Baylands are developed with careful consideration of several factors: various ecotones, wildlife communities, natural environments, as well as human uses. Other considerations include bird migration and nesting seasons, and the ecological needs of the salt marsh harvest mouse.

Artists working in the Baylands coordinate their plans closely with City departments that interact with the Baylands, include the Public Art Program, Parks & Open Space, and Public Works. City staff provide logistical support for projects involving community volunteers. All art interactions are reviewed by the Public Art Program staff and key members of other City departments and commissions.

Best Management Practices are developed for the goals outlined in the BCCP and the PAMP, including the recommendation to use “art to promote environmental stewardship and sustainability”.iv Information on the processes that keep the Baylands sustainable and other areas of research are available from the City.
PUBLIC ART THEMES AT THE BAYLANDS

Public Art in Palo Alto reflects the City’s “people, diverse neighborhoods, the innovative and global character of its businesses and academic institutions, and the beauty of its natural environments”.

The Baylands is well suited for work from artists that explore and promote local sustainability practices. Its many environments are appropriate for both temporary and permanent ecological, environmental, and social practice art that is suitable for developed, isolated, and semi-wild spaces. Successful projects will reveal the natural, recreational, and civic processes at the Baylands.

ECOLOGICAL ART

Ecological art works with the sustainable processes present at the Baylands. These opportunities include:

- habitat enhancement projects
- permaculture and xeriscape landscaping
- endangered species protection
- invasive species control projects
- trail and creek erosion remediation
- climate visualizations
- responses to sea level rise--horizontal levees and native oyster reefs
- earthworks
- educational outreach projects
inquiries into the processes at RWCQ and Household Hazardous Waste Station

**Potential Sites for Ecological Art**
- vegetated islands, rock swales, creeks, and drainage systems in Byxbee Park
- newly regraded portions of Byxbee Park hills
- adjacent to trails at ITT parcel and the San Francisco Bay Trail
- adjacent to the Environmental Volunteers building
- deck and boardwalk at Lucy Evans Center
- the perimeters of the RWCQ and the Household Hazardous Waste station

**Ecological Art Along Embarcadero Road**

Ecological art can also help bring focus to the Baylands entrance, add visual continuity to the commercial and pedestrian uses, and become a gateway to the park.

Embarcadero Road offers possibilities for green infrastructure projects and creating a transition from the commercial corridor to the Baylands entrance. These opportunities include:
- a multi-objective green wall and earthworks
- green open spaces and pathways
- alcoves and small cooling stations
- solar light elements

Ground works and ecological interventions unify existing elements on Embarcadero Road through artist designed bioswales, labyrinths, cooling stations, seating, and viewing spots.
ENVIRONMENTAL ART

Environmental artworks use durable materials and help to inspire, inform, and educate visitors to the natural and mechanical processes of the Baylands. Sculptures that are temporary or permanent can symbolize, interpret, and document the process and the uses of the Baylands. These opportunities include:

• traffic calming designs for crosswalks on Embarcadero Road and the bike/pedestrian entries
• bike racks and benches
• listening stations, audio tours, and closed-circuit radio broadcasts.
• viewing stations and wayfinding sculptures that connect view corridors and help visitors travel through the Baylands
• earthworks that serve as an informal amphitheater, stage, and outdoor classroom at the sailing station parking lot
• works reflecting natural and human processes—bird migration and nesting activities, changes to the land forms, histories of human uses, sea level rise, and changes in the San Francisco Bay and local creeks
• interpretative and educational sculptures, or sound art experiences in kiosks, shoulders of roads, and at the Baylands entrance
• available sculptures on a revolving basis

Embarcadero Road curves to the south before the entrance to the Baylands. Identifiers for the Baylands are not visible until the visitor reaches the curve.

Low undulating horizontal elements, such as earthworks and a low wall, work with the existing vertical elements (trees, lights, transmission towers) and lend focus to the Baylands entrance.
• expressions of visual patterns: Morse code, marine flags, tidal actions, Byxbee pipelines, rock drainage swales, electric transmission towers
• inquiries into waste-water treatment and monitoring systems at the Regional Water Quality Control Plant (RWQC).

**Potential Sites for Environmental Art**

- Lucy Evans Center
- Byxbee Park trails, overlooks, and bench areas
- near habitat islands, rock swales, and creeks
- the parking island at the sailing station
- land bordering the RWQC plant
- marsh shores, E-Volunteers property
- Baylands main entrance
- bike and pedestrian entrances

Artist designed crosswalks, bike paths, and entry reflect patterns, concepts, and sustainability goals of Baylands,
ENVIRONMENTAL ART ALONG EMBARCADERO ROAD

Environmental art can contribute to the “gateway” effect along Embarcadero Road and draw visitors towards the entrance. These opportunities include:

- traffic calming solutions at pedestrian crosswalks
- temporary performance spaces
- environmental sculptures

Embarcadero Road green spaces become settings for temporary art experiences, ecological installations, environmental art, and moveable performances.
SOCIAL PRACTICE ART

Art that relies on human interactions and social discourse with the community is appropriate in several places at the Baylands. For visual artists, performers, and poets/writers who conduct research and create interpretative, educational, and cultural works, these opportunities include:

- conceptualizations of the history, current-day monitoring processes, use patterns, and evolving changes to Baylands ecology
- documentations of human use, sustainability efforts, and adjustments to Baylands ecology
- audio and augmented reality interpretations
- community cultural celebrations, events, and moveable performances.
- solar light festivals
- human powered vehicle/vessel celebrations
- street painting (chalk art)
- night sky viewing events
- art that focuses on wind, tides, and sea levels

The Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretative Nature Center has facilities that an artist-in-residence could incorporate into community outreach projects.
Potential Sites for Art Interaction and Engagement

- the parking lot island at the sailing station
- Lucy Evans Center and Environmental Volunteers
- trails, overlooks, and benches
- San Francisco Bay Trail and connections (bridges, bike/pedestrian entries)
- duck pond and picnic areas

Social Practice Art along Embarcadero Road

Embarcadero Road bridges several cultural aspects of the Baylands of interest to social practice artists, including:

- the new and historic
- built and natural environments
- the physical gateway to the park
- ecological interventions
- performances

Conclusion

The Baylands offers a great diversity of locations where artwork may be appropriate—naturalized areas, recreational and municipal facilities, open space areas along Embarcadero Road, and other previously developed areas.
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FOOTNOTES

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