

*Public Art at the Baylands*  
An Overlay to the  
Palo Alto Baylands Comprehensive Conservation Plan, 2019



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; and AECOM, Sacramento, CA

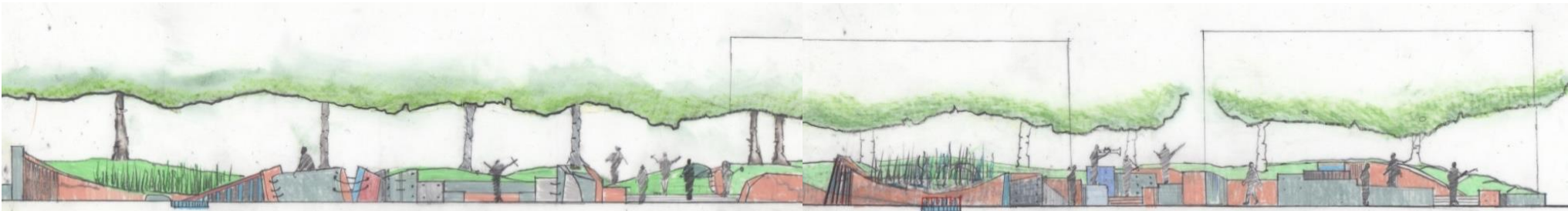
## INTRODUCTION

This public art overlay to the Palo Alto Baylands Natural Preserve (Baylands) Comprehensive Conservation Plan (BCCP), 2019, has been created in accordance with the City of Palo Alto (City) Public Art Master Plan (PAMP) 2016 and in concert with the Palo Alto Public Art (PAPA) Program. The BCCP is a framework for managing the Baylands during the next 15 years and beyond. The PAMP cited the Embarcadero Road corridor as needing its own art plan. This recommendation recognizes the significant transition from the corridor's commercial activities to the Baylands and is fueled by the knowledge that several commercial properties in the corridor have plans to redevelop and will have a public art requirement. In lieu of commissioning individual works of public art to be installed on-site, developers may choose to pay the equivalent amount to the Public Art Fund. These in-lieu funds may be pooled from several projects to fund public artworks managed by the PAPA Program.

Based on strategic recommendations by PAPA Program staff and PAMP consultants, this report outlines public art themes and sites in the Baylands and the Embarcadero Road corridor as potential targets for the pooled funds. The recommendations seek to incentivize developers to contribute to projects more in keeping with the Baylands' character, emphasizing ecological and/or educational themes that minimize disturbances to natural areas of the Baylands.<sup>1</sup>

No specific artworks are proposed in this document. The renderings and suggested sites shown are meant to illustrate public art themes and site considerations. Future ecological, environmental, and social practice art at the Baylands will be vetted through an artist selection process, proposal, and review.

Finally, this report imagines how the Baylands could become a setting for artworks, performances, and events that complement the area's ongoing conservation and sustainability efforts.



Concept drawing: Ecological, environmental, and social practice opportunities on Embarcadero Road, looking south. (No actual proposed artworks are represented.)

## A HISTORY OF ADAPTATIONS

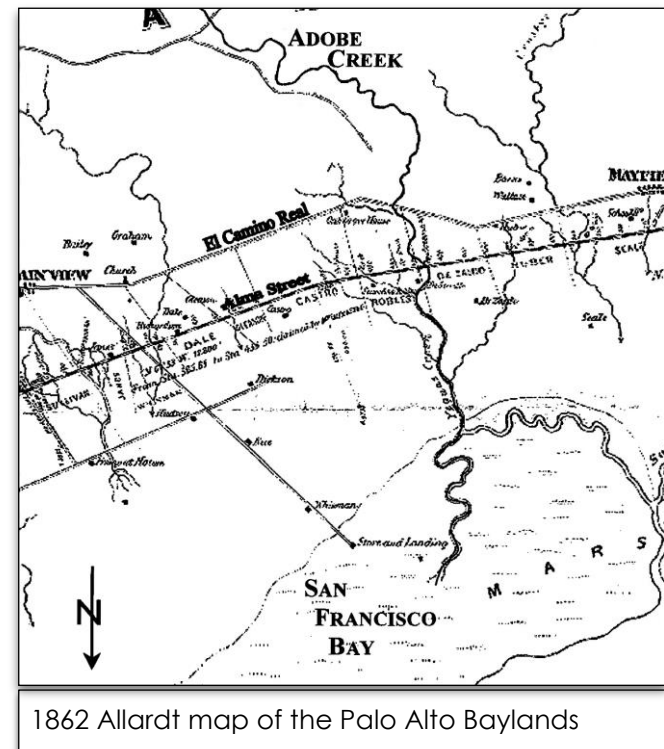
The Baylands is approximately 2,000 acres of varied environments, purposes, and uses. Nature, recreation, and reclamation merge against a backdrop of commercial corridors and U.S. Highway 101 (U.S. 101).

Much of the area that is now the Baylands was altered in the 20th century. The marshes, which previously extended west to nearly the U.S. 101 freeway, were filled; 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 freshwater and salt water marshes, was once a landfill. The Regional Water Quality Control Plant (RWQCP) releases treated water into the Baylands and monitors and captures the leachate and methane piped off Byxbee Park. Fifteen miles of multi-use trails connect to the shorelines of Mountain View and East Palo Alto.

Home to both native and nonnative flora and fauna, the Baylands shoreline is dense with native cordgrass and pickleweed. The endangered salt marsh harvest mouse and Ridgway's rail live here. Burrowing owls and grey fox have been seen in the Baylands.

The restored Environmental Volunteers headquarters, originally built in 1941 in the shape of a ship, and the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive 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 the 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 works—*Pole Field*, *Chevrons*, and *Wind Wave*—are still in place at the Baylands. Other existing public art at the Baylands includes *Foraging Island* by Daniel McCormick and Mary O'Brien in Byxbee Park, *Birdie* by Joyce Hsu and Kai-kooV by Betty Gold on Embarcadero Road, *Currents* and *Riding the Currents*, by Martin Webb at the RWQCP, and *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<sup>ii</sup> confirmed that a diverse community enjoys the Baylands. Respondents highly valued the park's natural communities and environments.

In 2018, the PAPA 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 means of informing the pub-



Public art at the Baylands dates to 1990: *Chevrons*, Richards & Oppenheimer.



*Foraging Island*, by Daniel McCormick and Mary O'Brien, in Byxbee Park. This ephemeral sculpture was designed to help reestablish habitat for burrowing owls, white-tailed kites, and a variety of hawks.



lic 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 such as 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 community input the artists received through this installation directly informed the final overlay to the BCCP.



Volunteers working with artists on *Foraging Island*

## 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.”<sup>iii</sup>

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, and 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, including the PAPA Program, Palo Alto Open Space, Parks & Golf, and Palo Alto Public Works. City staff members provide logistical support for projects involving community volunteers. All art interactions are reviewed by the PAPA 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.”<sup>iv</sup> Information is available from the City regarding the processes that keep the Baylands sustainable and other research topics.



Map Provided by Palo Alto Parks and Recreation:  
Suggested areas for *Foraging Island* (white)  
Artist's installation site (orange)  
Burrowing owl sightings (green arrows)  
Eliminated sites—regrading (red)



Sections of Byxbee Park are regularly regraded

## 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."<sup>v</sup>

The Baylands is well suited for work from artists who 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.

Along the more commercial Embarcadero Road corridor, suggested pedestrian-oriented works or designs are meant to promote engagement with visitors and give a hint of the naturalized aspects of the Baylands beyond.

### 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,



Suggested sites for temporary and permanent art in the Baylands:

<b>Ecological (green)</b>	<b>Environmental (red)</b>	<b>Social Practice (orange)</b>
Embarcadero Rd.	Embarcadero Rd.	Embarcadero Rd.
Lucy Evans Center	Sailing Station lot	Sailing Station lot
Byxbee Hills	Lucy Evans Center	E-Volunteers
SF Bay Trail	SF Bay Trail	Lucy Evans Center
ITT Trails	RWQCP	SF Bay Trail
Household Haz Waste Station	Byxbee Park Trails/Overlooks	Duck Pond
RWQCP	Entrance & E. Bayshore	

- responses to sea level rise including -horizontal levees and native oyster reefs,
- earthworks,
- educational outreach projects, and
- inquiries into the processes at the RWCQP and Household Hazardous Waste Station.

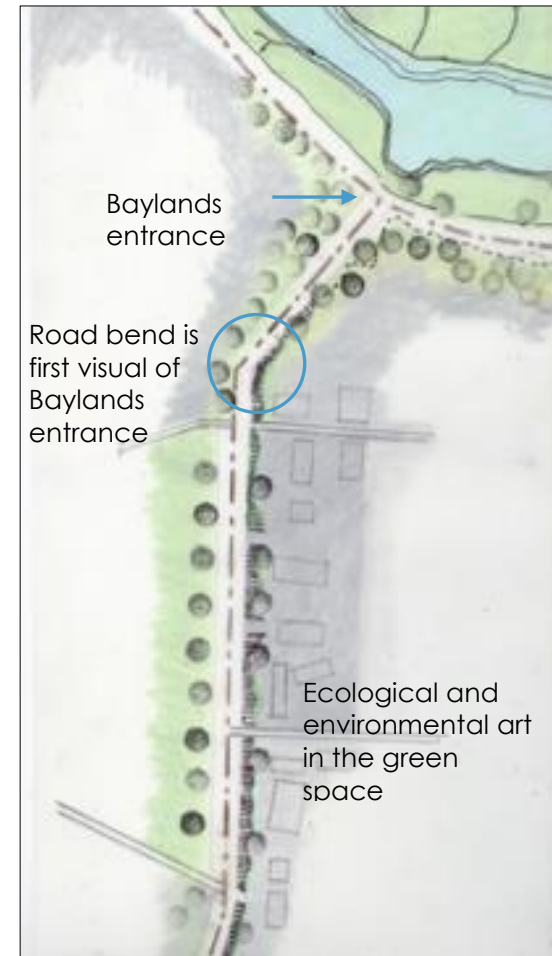
### POTENTIAL SITES FOR ECOLOGICAL ART

Sites that could be used for ecological art include:

- vegetated islands, rock swales, creeks, and drainage systems in Byxbee Park;
- newly regraded portions of the Byxbee Park hills;
- areas adjacent to trails at the ITT parcel and the San Francisco Bay Trail;
- areas adjacent to the Environmental Volunteers building;
- the deck and boardwalk at the Lucy Evans Center; and
- the perimeters of the RWCQP 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.



Ground works and ecological interventions unify existing elements on Embarcadero Road through artist-designed bioswales, labyrinths, cooling stations, seating, and viewing spots. (No actual proposed artworks are represented)



Embarcadero Road offers possibilities for green infrastructure projects and creation of 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, and
- alcoves and small cooling stations.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ART

Environmental artworks use durable materials and help to inspire, inform, and educate visitors regarding the natural and mechanical processes of the Baylands. Temporary or permanent sculptures can symbolize, interpret, and document the processes and 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, such as bird migration and nesting activities, changes to landforms, histories of human uses,



Embarcadero Road curves to the south before the Baylands entrance. Identifiers for the Baylands are not visible until visitors reach 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. (No actual proposed artworks are represented)

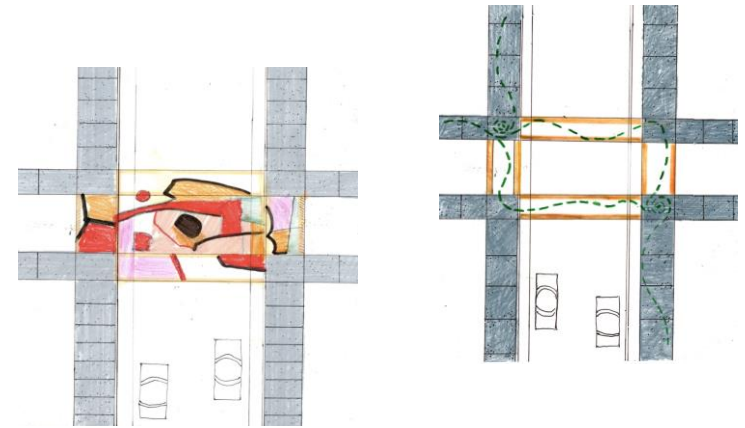
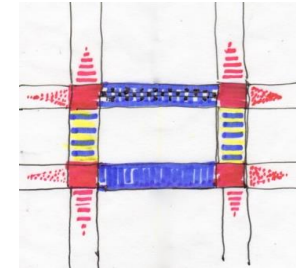
sea level rise, and changes in San Francisco Bay and local creeks;

- interpretive and educational sculptures, or sound art experiences in kiosks, along roadway shoulders, and at the Baylands entrance;
- sculptures made available on a revolving basis;
- expressions of visual patterns, such as Morse code, marine flags, tidal actions, Byxbee Park pipelines, rock drainage swales, and electric transmission towers; and
- inquiries into wastewater treatment and monitoring systems at the RWQCP.

#### POTENTIAL SITES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ART

Sites that could be used for environmental art include:

- the Lucy Evans Center;
- Byxbee Park trails, overlooks, and bench areas;
- areas near habitat islands, rock swales, and creeks;
- the parking island at the Sailing Station;
- land bordering the RWQCP;
- marsh shores and Environmental Volunteers property;
- the Baylands' main entrance; and
- bike and pedestrian entrances.

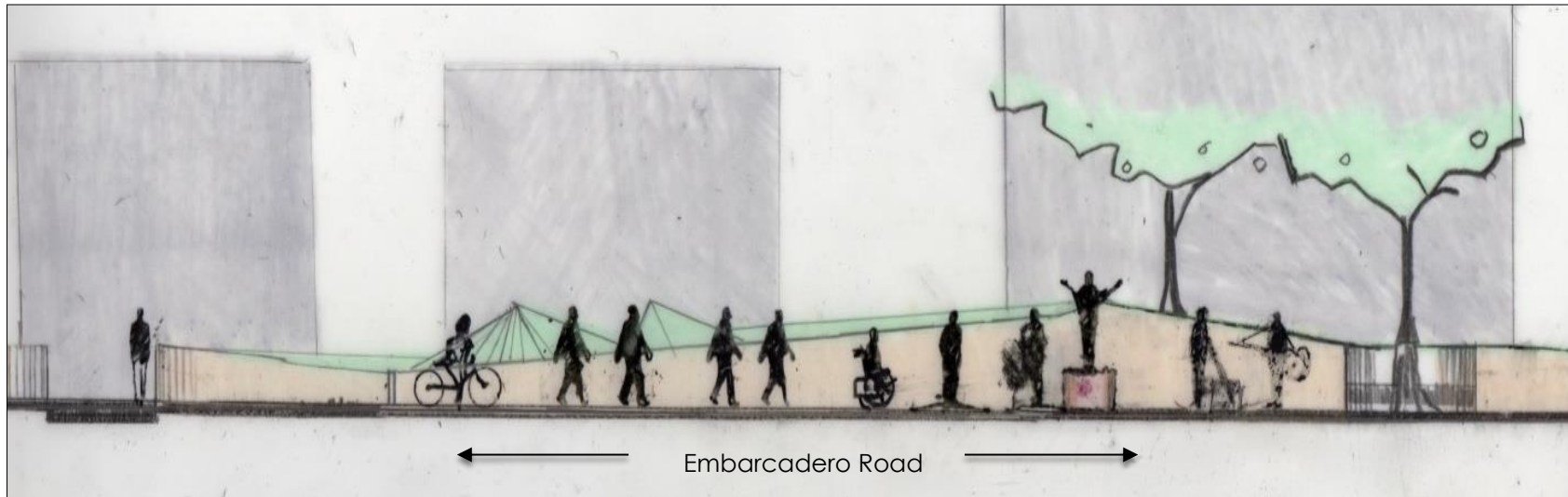


Artist designed crosswalks, bike paths and entry reflective patterns, concepts and sustainability goals of Baylands. (No actual proposed artworks are represented)

## ENVIRONMENTAL ART ALONG EMBARCADERO ROAD

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

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



Embarcadero Road green spaces become settings for temporary art experiences, ecological installations, environmental art, and moveable performances. (No actual proposed artworks are represented.)

## 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 interpretive, educational, and cultural works, these opportunities include:

- conceptualizations of the history, current-day monitoring processes, use patterns, and evolution of 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;
- moonlight festivals;
- human-powered vehicle/vessel celebrations;
- street paintings (chalk art);
- night sky viewing events; and
- art that focuses on wind, tides, and sea levels.



The Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive Center has facilities that an artist-in-residence could incorporate into community outreach projects.



## POTENTIAL SITES FOR ART INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Sites that could be used for environmental art include:

- the parking lot island at the Sailing Station;
- the Lucy Evans Center and Environmental Volunteers property;
- trails, overlooks, and benches;
- the San Francisco Bay Trail and connections (bridges and bike/pedestrian entries); and
- the 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 sites,
- the built and natural environments,
- the physical gateway to the park, and
- ecological interventions.

## CONCLUSION

The Baylands offer 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.



The parking lot island and the Sailing Station become sites for social practice art and celebrations. (No actual proposed artworks are represented)

## REFERENCES

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*Byxbee Park Hills Conceptual Landscape Plan and Narrative*, Oasis Associates, 2015

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> *Baylands Comprehensive Conservation Plan (BCCP) Vision, Goals, and Objectives*, June 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> *Baylands Comprehensive Conservation Plan, 2018, Summary of Baylands User Survey Responses Administered by Baylands Rangers*, April and May 2018.

<sup>iii</sup> *Palo Alto Public Art Master Plan, 2016*, page 13.

<sup>iv</sup> *Palo Alto Public Art Master Plan, 2016*, page 26.

<sup>v</sup> *Palo Alto Public Art Master Plan, 2016, Vision Statement*, page 2.