

New Bayfront Park at Cooley Landing



Cooley Landing is an 8.5 acre peninsula at the end of Bay Road, surrounded on 3 sides by San Francisco Bay. It contains Carl Schoof's boat repair shop, wetland plants and animals, views of the entire San Francisco Bay, and other surprises. Visitors enjoy the free and open feeling from being out in the Bay surrounded by water – yet still within East Palo Alto city limits. East Palo Alto has long wanted to open Cooley Landing as a park and nature and history education center.

In 2003, the City started a community process in which residents agreed they wanted to see Cooley Landing become a public park to enjoy scenic views and wildlife and learn about local history and nature. In 2005, the community agreed on concept plans that showed a simple and natural design. To implement this plan, in 2006, the City started technical studies, which are now nearly complete.

These studies of the soil and groundwater contamination, plants and animals, and other practical site conditions show that cleanup and protection of endangered species and numerous permits will be needed to open a park.

The City is now ready to refine the concept plans the community reviewed earlier. A design team will invite community input at several public meetings in spring and summer 2010.

By summer, 2010, a new Cooley Landing community-based Vision Plan will form the basis for applying for permits and funding for construction. If the project can secure permits and funding by fall, 2011, the City hopes to lay new clean dirt on much of the site to protect the public from contamination, plant new plants, construct trails, and open the park to the public in 2012. Opening a building on the site to the public may take longer.

Background

The City's history of dreams began in 1849 at this spot. San Francisco banker Isaiah Wood planned and built a wharf at what is now Cooley Landing. Cooley Landing may be considered the birthplace of the City and was an important place of commerce in the 1800's. From 1932 to 1958 it was a County dump, but from the 1960's to 1990's, Carl Schoof covered the dump with dirt and built and operated a boat repair business in a 4,000 square foot wooden building. He retired, and Cooley Landing has been closed to the public.

As part of the Pacific Flyway, this marsh area provides food, shelter, and habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife and a crucial winter refuge for migratory birds. It connects the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve and the Ravenswood Open Space Preserve, both critical habitats for the California Clapper Rail, a pheasant like bird with a population of only about 300 birds worldwide, and the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse. Cooley Landing is a short walk from the San Francisco Bay Trail.

Community Vision

Cooley Landing can be a place of rest for hikers, a picnic area for local residents, a place of staging for walks to admire nature and a regional amenity. The existing structures may be used if rehabilitated as an educational, historical or recreational facility for neighborhood children and local residents.

In San Mateo County, the City of East Palo Alto has the lowest ratio of municipal parks per capita for a city of equivalent density, with half an acre of parkland per 1000 residents versus the California state recommended standard of 3 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Cooley Landing would increase the City's parkland by more than 50%.

All the stars are aligned to realize the community's vision for Cooley Landing. Diverse local leaders and residents have expressed strong community consensus around a shared vision. Studies thus far shows this vision is technically feasible. Partners from local community groups, schools, funders, and government have already contributed to this project and have committed to further support. Restoration of Cooley Landing will provide residents with direct access to San Francisco Bay, create a link between two other nature preserves, and revitalize the adjacent industrial area.

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