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CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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AMENDMENT REQUEST
STAFF REPORT AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATION

Application No.: 6-95-18-A

Applicant: City of San Diego Agent: Christopher J. Toth
 Metropolitan Wastewater Department

Original Description: The retention of eleven belt filter presses and associated improvements at an existing sludge processing facility. Overall improvements include a concrete pad, with a sixteen-foot high cover, housing the mechanical belt filter presses, propane storage tanks and generators, pump station and 350-foot section of force main for effluent flows, odor control equipment, paving of access roads, a truck washing facility, a truck-loading hopper with a twenty-eight-foot high cover, and water and electric lines to allow continuous operation of the mechanical equipment. No new development is herein proposed; this permit is to retain facilities already installed under prior permits.

Proposed Amendment: Modify Special Condition #2 of the permit to allow retention of the belt filter presses and associated mechanical dewatering improvements for an additional two years.

Site: Southwestern portion of Fiesta Island, Mission Bay Park, San Diego, San Diego County.

Substantive File Documents: Certified Mission Bay Park Master Plan
 CCC Files #6-86-651-A1-11; 6-92-75-G-A; 6-93-143-G

STAFF NOTES:

Summary of Staff's Preliminary Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of the proposed amendment to retain the mechanical dewatering equipment for two years, until April, 1998, with special conditions reiterating this deadline for removal and advising that all other prior terms and conditions remain in full force and effect.

PRELIMINARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The staff recommends the Commission adopt the following resolution:

I. Approval with Conditions.

The Commission hereby grants a permit amendment for the proposed development, subject to the conditions below, on the grounds that the development, as amended, will be in conformity with the provisions of Chapter 3 of the California Coastal Act of 1976, will not prejudice the ability of the local government having jurisdiction over the area to prepare a Local Coastal Program conforming to the provisions of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act, and will not have any significant adverse impacts on the environment within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act.

II. Standard Conditions.

See attached page.

III. Special Conditions.

The permit is subject to the following conditions:

1. Deadline for Removal. The deadline for removal of the belt filter presses and associated mechanical dewatering equipment from Fiesta Island is April 30, 1998. This condition replaces in its entirety Special Condition #2 of CDP #6-95-18.

2. Prior Conditions of Approval. All special conditions adopted by the Coastal Commission as part of the original permit action, except Special Condition #2 which is modified herein, remain in full force and effect.

IV. Findings and Declarations.

The Commission finds and declares as follows:

1. Summary of Site/Project History. The City of San Diego was granted two permits (CDPs #6-93-75-G and #6-93-143-G) to install and maintain mechanical dewatering equipment on Fiesta Island, to address increases in sludge flows. These were combined into the single, subject permit approximately one year ago for ease in record-keeping. The permit allows retention of eleven belt filter presses and associated support structures installed under the two cited permits. This equipment has allowed the City to rely more fully on a mechanical dewatering system, and thus reduce its dependence on open-air drying beds, which occupy large areas of public parkland. The entire facility will be relocated within the next few years, as required by the Coastal Commission in prior permit actions. Most of the permits relating to the Fiesta Island sludge facilities, including the subject permit, have been granted for short terms only, so the Commission can frequently review the City's relocation efforts.

The sludge processing facility on Fiesta Island was installed prior to the establishment of the Coastal Commission, but was expanded in 1981 under Coastal Development Permit #F9559. In its action on that permit application, the San Diego Coast Regional Commission approved the project with a condition requiring that the entire operation be relocated within six years of Commission action on the permit, i.e., January, 1987. In December 1986, the Commission heard the first of eleven (to date) amendment requests from the City, ten of those to extend the deadline for relocation. Each amendment was granted, but for differing amounts of time, and with stringent requirements for the City to submit annual reports documenting its ongoing efforts to relocate the facility. Extensive findings were adopted over the years through the many permit, amendment, reporting and mitigation matters than have come before the Commission. In the interest of brevity, the findings for Coastal Development Permit #6-92-75-G, #6-93-143-G and #6-86-651-A1-11, are herein incorporated by reference. They include discussions of various alternatives to address the ongoing presence of the sludge facility on public parkland and current land use planning efforts.

2. Amendment Request. The City is currently requesting that the removal deadline for the belt filter presses and associated improvements be extended until April, 1998. This requires amending Special Condition #2 of the subject permit, which established a deadline of April, 1996. This deadline would be consistent with the deadline established in the Commission's recent approval of an amendment request on CDP #6-86-651-A11, which addresses temporary retention of the overall sludge drying facility.

3. Visual Impacts. Section 30251 of the Coastal Act provides for the protection of scenic coastal areas and for the compatibility of new and existing structures. The project site is within Mission Bay Park, but somewhat removed from areas of active public recreation. This permit amendment is to retain existing facilities, not to authorize any additional structures. Thus, no new visual impacts will occur with approval of the subject permit amendment; impacts related to installation of the mechanical dewatering equipment were addressed previously. Moreover, these existing structures are temporary, approved herein to be retained for two additional years only. Even if further permits or permit amendments are granted to allow retention of mechanical equipment, the entire sludge facility is considered a temporary use. Therefore, the Commission finds the project, with the attached special conditions, consistent with the intent of Section 30251 of the Act.

3. Removal of Existing Sludge Beds. In addition to expected improvements in wet weather capacity and water quality, the full use of mechanical dewatering also provides a potential benefit to the public, in that it eliminates the need to retain all the existing air-drying beds, which previously occupied nearly 130 acres of public parkland; the mechanical equipment occupies approximately five acres. In 1994, the City vacated six drying beds, restoring approximately 40 acres of parkland to the City's Parks and Recreation Department in 1995. Another 18 acres of drying beds are scheduled for abandonment in 1996.

Water Utilities Department personnel state that most of the air-drying beds must be maintained as a backup system to address potential overflow needs in

the event of mechanical breakdown. Special Condition #3 of the original permit, which remains in effect, requires the City to monitor the operation of the mechanical equipment, with the intent of closing down additional beds in the future. Two years of monitoring reports have been reviewed, with the mechanical system being fully operational since spring, 1994. Based on the reports, the Commission concurs with the City that, except for the 18 acres the City is preparing to abandon this year, no additional sludge beds can be abandoned now. Any future sludge bed abandonment, while not making the ongoing sludge operations consistent with the public access and recreation policies of the Coastal Act, would somewhat mitigate the impacts by reducing the extent of public parkland to which the public is currently denied access.

5. Local Coastal Planning. Section 30604 (a) also requires that a coastal development permit, or permit amendment, shall be issued only if the Commission finds that the permitted development, as amended, will not prejudice the ability of the local government to prepare a Local Coastal Program (LCP) in conformity with the provisions of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act. Such a finding can be made for the subject amendment, as conditioned.

The project site is within the Coastal Commission areas of original jurisdiction and deferred certification. The existing development is not consistent with the Parkland, Open Beach and Coastal Landscape designations for this area of Fiesta Island contained in the 1994 Mission Bay Park Master Plan, certified with suggested modifications by the Coastal Commission in May, 1995. However, as a temporary interim use, and as conditioned, the proposal has been found consistent with all applicable Chapter 3 policies of the Coastal Act. Therefore, the Commission finds that approval of the amendment request, as conditioned, will not prejudice the ability of the City of San Diego to complete and implement a fully-certifiable land use plan for the Mission Bay LCP segment.

5. Consistency with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Section 13096 of the Commission's Code of Regulations requires Commission approval of coastal development permits, and permit amendments, to be supported by a finding showing the permit, as amended, to be consistent with any applicable requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Section 21080.5(d)(2)(i) of CEQA prohibits a proposed development from being approved if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen any significant adverse impact which the activity may have on the environment.

As discussed herein, the proposed project will not cause significant adverse impacts to the environment. Specifically, as a temporary, interim use, the project has been found consistent with the visual resource policies of the Coastal Act. There are no feasible alternatives or additional mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen any significant adverse impact which the activity might have on the environment. Therefore, the Commission finds that the proposed amendment is the least environmentally damaging feasible alternative and can be found consistent with the requirements of the Coastal Act to conform to CEQA.

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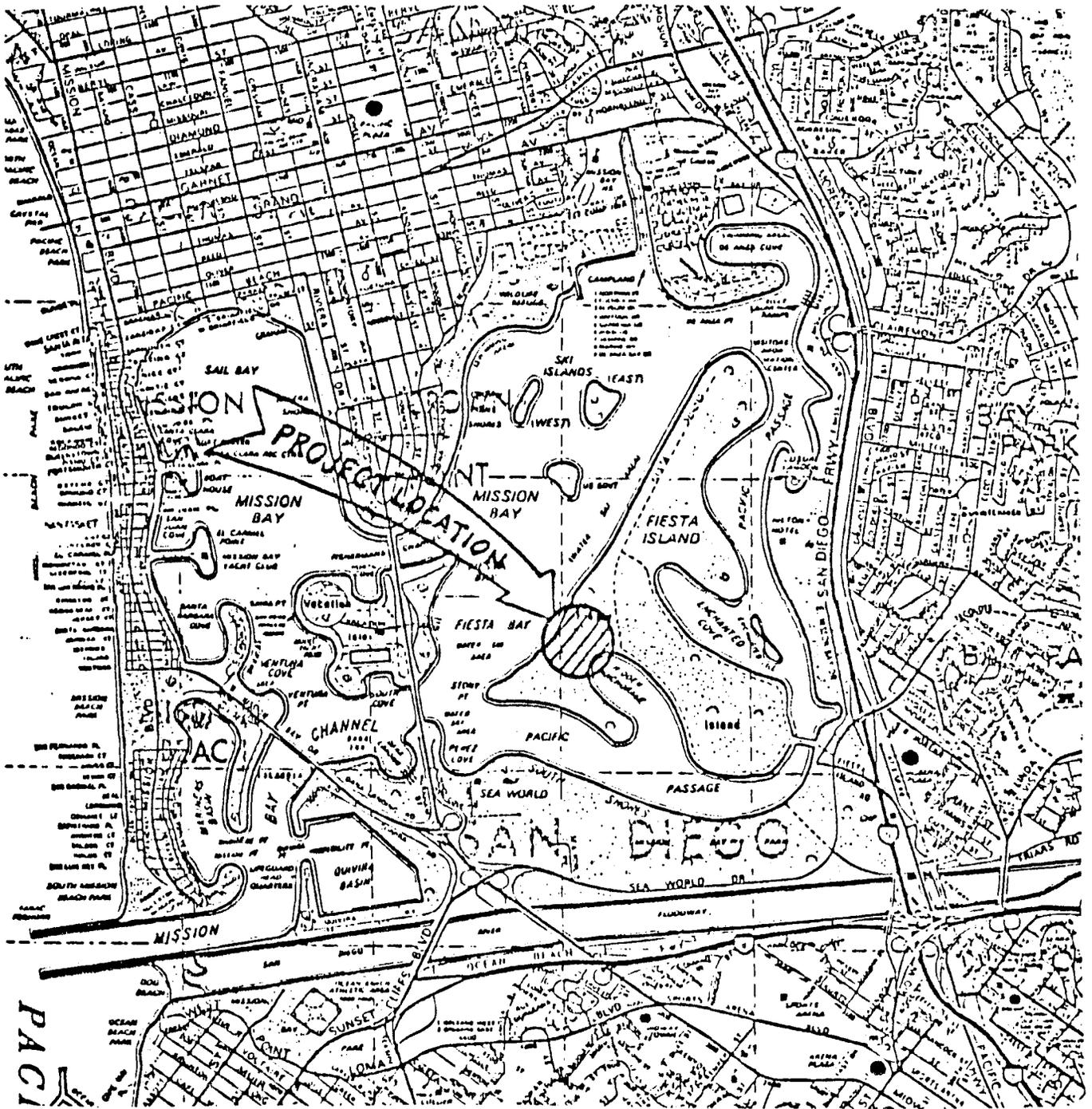
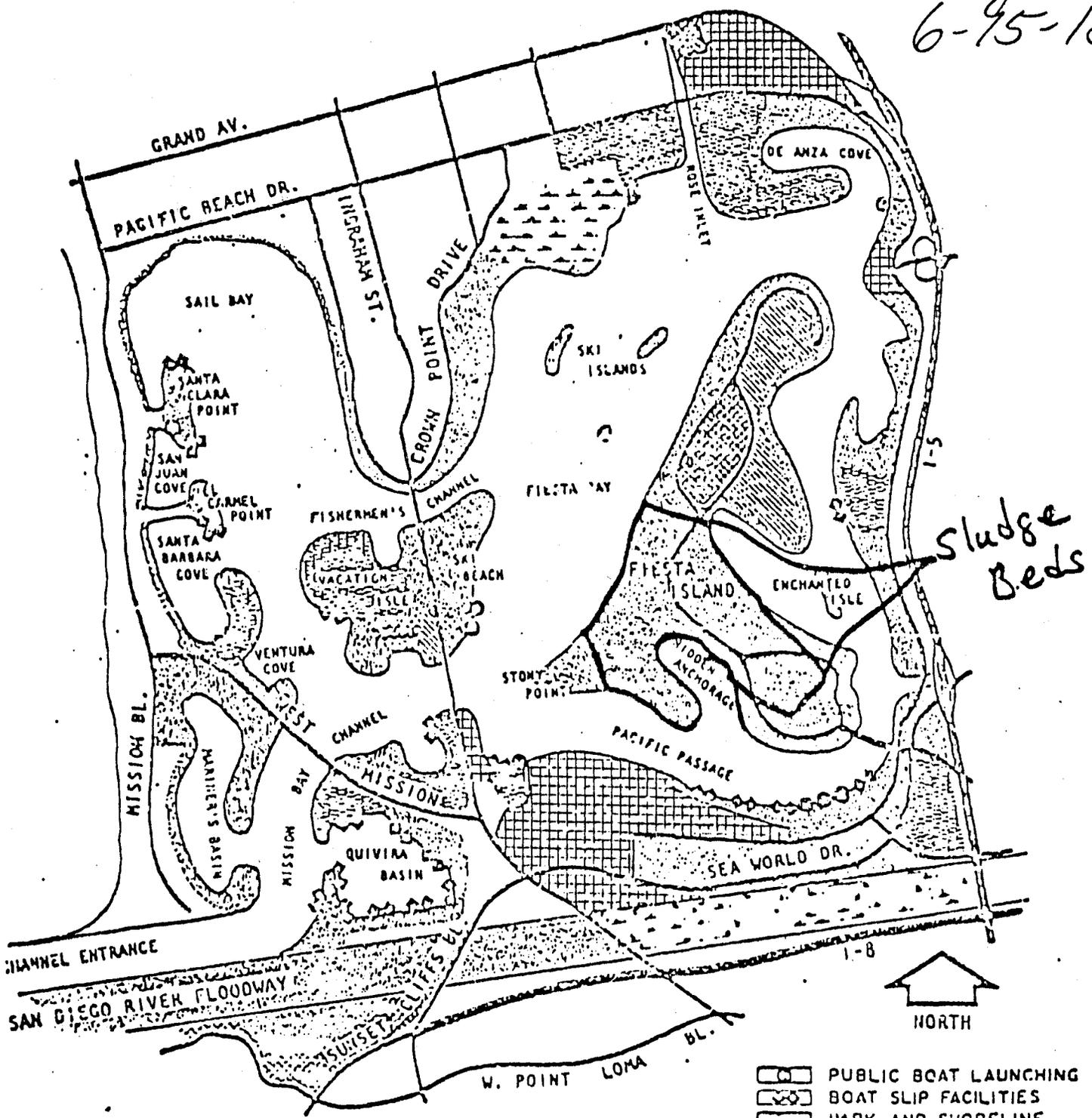


EXHIBIT NO. /
APPLICATION NO. 6-95-18-A
<i>Location Maps</i>
 California Coastal Commission

6-95-18-f



LAND AND WATER USE
MISSION BAY PARK
LAND USE PLAN

-  PUBLIC BOAT LAUNCHING
-  BOAT SLIP FACILITIES
-  PARK AND SHORELINE
-  GUEST HOUSING
-  PUBLIC ACTIVITIES AREA
-  SEMI-PUBLIC OR PUBLIC FACILITIES
-  WILDLIFE RESERVE
-  ORGANIZED YOUTH GROUP CAMPING

EXHIBIT NO. 2
APPLICATION NO. 6-95-18-A
Excerpt from 1978 Land Use Plan
 California Coastal Commission