

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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Staff Report: 1/29/98
Hearing Date: 3/10-13/98
Commission Action:

**RECORD PACKET COPY**STAFF REPORT: REGULAR CALENDAR

APPLICATION NO.: 5-98-026

APPLICANT: City of Santa Monica

AGENT: Judith Meister

PROJECT LOCATION: Palisades Park, from Arizona Avenue to the south to the north end of the park near Adelaide Avenue, City of Santa Monica

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Renovation of an existing blufftop park. The improvements include: installation of a subsurface drainage system, landscaping including new trees, sod and drought tolerant plants in locations, replace park lighting system, construction of a new jogging path, replacement of park furniture, relocation of existing bluff fence, installation of a Veteran's Memorial, beacon overlook with approximately 43-foot high light pole, and demolition and reconstruction of two existing restrooms and the construction of one new restroom.

Lot area:	686,680 sq. ft.
Building coverage:	3,640
Pavement coverage:	238,200
Landscape coverage:	429,840
Parking spaces:	N/A
Zoning:	Park
Ht abv fin grade:	15 feet (restrooms)

LOCAL APPROVALS RECEIVED: Approval In Concept

SUBSTANTIVE FILE DOCUMENTS: Coastal Development Permits: #5-92-224(City of Santa Monica); #5-93-261(City of Santa Monica)

SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval with a special condition informing the applicant that in the event of further bluff erosion slope protective devices will not be permitted to protect those structures that are placed near or along the bluff's edge.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The staff recommends that the Commission adopt the following resolution:

I. Approval.

The Commission hereby grants a permit for the proposed development on the grounds that the development, as conditioned, 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 is in conformance with the public access and public recreation policies 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.

1. Notice of Receipt and Acknowledgment. The permit is not valid and development shall not commence until a copy of the permit, signed by the permittee or authorized agent, acknowledging receipt of the permit and acceptance of the terms and conditions, is returned to the Commission office.
2. Expiration. If development has not commenced, the permit will expire two years from the date this permit is reported to the Commission. Development shall be pursued in a diligent manner and completed in a reasonable period of time. Application for extension of the permit must be made prior to the expiration date.
3. Compliance. All development must occur in strict compliance with the proposal as set forth in the application for permit, subject to any special conditions set forth below. Any deviation from the approved plans must be reviewed and approved by the staff and may require Commission approval.
4. Interpretation. Any questions of intent or interpretation of any condition will be resolved by the Executive Director or the Commission.
5. Inspections. The Commission staff shall be allowed to inspect the site and the project during its development, subject to 24-hour advance notice.
6. Assignment. The permit may be assigned to any qualified person, provided assignee files with the Commission an affidavit accepting all terms and conditions of the permit.
7. Terms and Conditions Run with the Land. These terms and conditions shall be perpetual, and it is the intention of the Commission and the permittee to bind all future owners and possessors of the subject property to the terms and conditions.

III. Special Condition

1. Geologic Hazard

With the acceptance of this permit the applicant acknowledges that due to

the inherent nature of the bluffs, the bluffs are subject to landslides and soil erosion which, in the future, may threaten the structural integrity of any structure placed near or along the bluff edge. In the event that any structure placed along the bluff is threaten by landslides or soil erosion the construction of slope protective devices to protect those structures will be prohibited. The relocation of any structure approved by this permit will require an amendment to this permit.

IV. Findings and Declarations.

The Commission hereby finds and declares as follows:

A. Project Description

The applicant proposes to renovate an existing blufftop park (Palisades Park) between Arizona Avenue to the south to the northern end of the park at Adelaide Drive. The improvements include: installation of a subsurface drainage system, landscaping including new trees, sod and drought tolerant plants in locations, replace park lighting system, construction of a new jogging path, replacement of park furniture, relocation of existing bluff fence, installation of a Veteran's Memorial, beacon overlook with a 43-foot light pole, and demolition and reconstruction of two existing restrooms and the construction of one new restroom.

Palisades Park consists of approximately 26 acres on a blufftop overlooking the ocean. Palisades Park is located in the northwest section of the City of Santa Monica, adjacent to and west of Ocean Avenue. Palisades Beach Road (Pacific Coast Highway) is located to the west and at the base of the bluffs. The Park bluffs vary in height from 50 feet in the southern area to 150 feet in the northern area. The bluff face varies from nearly vertical to approximately 2:1.

The park extends from Colorado Boulevard north to Inspiration Point, a distance of 1.5 miles. The proposed project is the second phase of the Palisades Park improvements. The proposed second phase of improvements will be located between Arizona Avenue and Inspiration Point (approximately 1.20 miles). The first Phase involved the area between Colorado Boulevard and Arizona and consisted of basically the same type of improvements. The Commission approved the first phase in August 1992 (Coastal Development Permit #5-92-224). The improvements for the first phase have been completed.

Palisades Park is heavily used by the public with attendance estimated at 20,000 visitors per weekend and 1,500 joggers per day. Other than Santa Monica State beach, Palisades Park is the largest park in the City and it affords panoramic views of the ocean and coastline.

The park is currently developed with landscaping, footpaths, benches, a visitor center, senior citizen center, memorials and sculptures, restrooms and other park support facilities.

B. Geologic Hazard

Section 30253 of the Coastal Act states:

New development shall:

- (1) Minimize risks to life and property in areas of high geologic, flood, and fire hazard.
- (2) Assure stability and structural integrity, and neither create nor contribute significantly to erosion, geologic instability, or destruction of the site or surrounding area or in any way require the construction of protective devices that would substantially alter natural landforms along bluffs and cliffs.
- (3) Be consistent with requirements imposed by an air pollution control district or the State Air Resources Control Board as to each particular development.
- (4) Minimize energy consumption and vehicle miles traveled.
- (5) Where appropriate, protect special communities and neighborhoods which, because of their unique characteristics, are popular visitor destination points for recreational uses.

Over the years a number of geotechnical studies have been done on Palisades Park. According to these reports the bluffs, ranging from 50 feet to 150 feet in height above Pacific Coast Highway, have been gradually eroding. According to the geotechnical report the bluffs are receding at an annual rate of approximately 4 inches.

The report states that sixteen landslides were charted between 1930 and 1959. Six of the sixteen slides were caused by mans' activity (irrigation, leaking pipes and grading on PCH). Eleven of the sixteen slides were caused by excessive infiltration of surface water, heavy precipitation, leaking pipes or storm drains. Twelve landslides were recorded from 1960 to present time. Nine of the twelve soil failures are related to heavy precipitation and two to human activity.

Erosion of the unconsolidated sediments comprising the bluffs at Palisades Park is attributed to a variety of causes, including natural events, ongoing natural conditions, man-made events, and ongoing activities of man. One of the main erosional forces is water. Rain falls on the bluff face and blufftop, percolates through and saturates the soil. Human activities compound the effect of water through excessive irrigation, irrigation leakage, storm drain leakage, channeled water through abandoned drainage pipes, and water percolating into the soil from irrigation, leaky underground pipes, and surface drainage. All studies conducted over the years have been unanimous in the belief that the major cause of bluff erosion appears to have been percolation of surface water saturating the subsurface sediments.

Furthermore, the Northridge earthquake of January 1994 caused a number of landslides and shallow slides along the bluffs. Some of the failures damaged fencing and pathways in the park (Dames & Moore geologic report, 1994).

In order to mitigate the impact water has on the erosional process of the bluff the City is proposing to regrade areas and replace the existing irrigation system. The proposed regrading will consist of eliminating low areas, and providing positive drainage directing all surface runoff away from the bluff or toward surface drains. The subsurface drainage system will be

renovated adding new drain inlets and linear trench drains along pathways.

The existing irrigation system will be completely replaced by a fully automated, water-on demand irrigation system which will conserve water, eliminate over spray and reduce excess runoff.

Based on recommendations made in the geotechnical studies the City will relocate the existing bluff edge fence in areas where slope failure has occurred. The geologists recommends that in the slope failure areas the fence be relocated 5 to 15 feet landward. The new location will provide the fence approximately a 30 to 50 year life expectancy, based on the stability analysis that was conducted.

Part of the proposal includes constructing a viewing lookout just south of the California incline. The platform will measure approximately 904 square feet. The platform will extend approximately 69 feet from the pedestrian path to approximately 5 feet from the existing fence location. The existing fence varies from approximately 5 to 10 feet from the bluff edge. According to the geotechnical report this area of the bluffs is more stable than the areas that have failed. The reason for the stability is due to the relatively lower bluff height and slope inclination. Therefore, the location of the platform, which will be setback 10 to 15 feet from the bluff edge will be located a safe distance from the bluffs and will not contribute to the instability of the slope nor will the location threaten the structural integrity of the structure. However, due to the inherent nature of the bluffs there remains the possibility that the bluff could erode or fail and threaten the structural integrity of the structure. Although the remedial measures to control water run-off will help reduce the landsliding and soil erosion there will continue to be gradual bluff degradation due to weathering. Therefore, to ensure that the applicant is aware of the geologic hazard and that the building of protective devices that would alter the natural landform along the bluff would be inconsistent with Section 30253 of the Coastal Act, a special condition placing the applicant on notice that in the future if the platform's, or any other proposed development's structural integrity is threatened the development shall be removed or relocated so that the construction of protective devices will not be necessary.

The proposed mitigation measures will significantly minimize erosion of the bluffs and improve park safety and bluff stability. The proposed project will help preserve both the physical land area and the visual character of the park. Therefore, the Commission finds that as conditioned the proposed project will be consistent with Section 30253 of the Coastal Act.

C. Visual Resources

Section 30251 of the Coastal Act states:

The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic area such as those designated in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan prepared by the

Department of Parks and Recreation and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting.

Palisades Park is a resource of local, regional, and statewide importance. The park provides panoramic views to the ocean and is a major public recreational area. In past permit action the Commission has been concerned with the protection of ocean views offered by the park.

The proposed park improvements will not adversely impact the existing views to the ocean and will not adversely impact the recreational opportunities that are currently available and enjoyed by the public.

According to the City the existing lighting system is technologically obsolete and inconsistent in design. The City will replace and add new energy efficient lighting fixtures. Light fixtures next to the bluff will also include light shields to ensure that the illumination is directed away from the bluff edge. Providing more efficient and consistent light fixture design in addition to illuminating special specific areas or features would improve both the day and nighttime visual quality of the park.

The City proposes to construct a 8-foot wide jogging path using decomposed granite, and repair existing asphalt/concrete walks throughout the subject area. Such improvements will resolve conflicts between passive and active recreational uses and increase the enjoyment for all users.

Another area of improvement is to the park's existing bluff railing (precast concrete posts and rails). The existing railing is approximately 42" high and keeps the public a safe distance from the bluff's edge but at the same time affords the public a safe area to enjoy the panoramic views of the coast. In areas where erosion has undermined the railing or where the bluff edge has eroded to a point to create a potential hazard the City will realign the railing or construct a new railing. Such railing improvements will not adversely impact the coastal views but continue to provide the public a safe viewing area along the bluffs.

The City also proposes to add some minor landscaping to enhance those areas where improvements are proposed. New drought tolerant and succulent planting will be placed in a few specific areas along the bluff edge which will minimize the need for watering. The additional landscaping will not significantly impact the scenic views from the park.

The two existing restrooms will be demolished and redesigned and rebuilt to current handicap standards with storage rooms. The approximately 660 square foot restroom currently located in the northern portion of the park (Inspiration Point) will be rebuilt to 693 square feet in the same location. The 539 square foot restroom currently located at the foot of Idaho Avenue will be demolished, rebuilt to 693 square feet, and relocated to the north between Idaho Avenue and Montana Avenue to improve the view corridor from Idaho Avenue. A third and new restroom facility will be located south of California Avenue in an area that is not currently served by such a facility. The new restroom facility will consist of two separate 438 square foot buildings with storage area. An existing 313 square foot maintenance building in the area of the new restroom facility will be demolished and a new one will be constructed and combined with the new restroom.

The restrooms will be located 50 to 70 feet from the edge of the bluff and

will not interfere with pedestrian access and viewing along the bluff. Two of the proposed restrooms will replace existing structures. The third will be new but will be combined with an existing maintenance building. As located the proposed restrooms will not significantly impact scenic views.

As part of the park's improvements the City will install two artworks. A veterans memorial will be located south of Arizona Avenue, landward of the existing blufftop fence. The second artwork, which is a viewing platform, will be located just south of the California incline.

The veteran's memorial will consist of 6 columns, 18 inch square by 8 foot high, aligned in a row along a pedestrian path that leads to the blufftop fence. The second artwork, entitled "Beacon Overlook", will consist of a 1.5 foot high concrete and wooden pedestrian platform, with 3.5 foot high railing, leading to the bluff edge (existing fence line), with a 40-foot high, tapering 1.5 to 1 foot in diameter light pole.

In 1994 the City submitted to the Commission a comprehensive art plan for the City's coastal zone. The purpose of the plan was to aid in the implementation of an outdoor public art program within the City's coastal zone which would integrate all aspects of policy and administrative guidance for the installation of outdoor art works. The Commission approved the art plan (CDP# 5-93-261). The plan was for information purposes only in order for the Commission to evaluate the individual and cumulative impacts of all planned artwork within the coastal zone. The plan included the future placement of two artworks within Palisades Park. One of the artworks was a memorial for veterans (specific design was not selected at the time) and a specifically designed 14-foot high statue entitled, "The Avataar". The installation of the statue was subsequently approved in 1996 by the Commission (CDP #5-96-171). The statue was never installed.

The two art works currently proposed represent the two art works presented in the Commission approved Art Plan. The City currently has a specific design for the veterans memorial and has come up with a new artwork to replace the Commission approved statue.

The installation of the two artworks within Palisades Park will not significantly impact views to and along the coastline. Palisades Park and the specific area in which the two artworks are proposed consists of many vertical elements, such as palm trees, signs, lampposts, and other art work. The vertical elements range in height from a few feet to 40-50 feet.

Although the beacon overlook will contain a 43 foot high lighthouse pole, the pole is slender and will blend with the other existing vertical elements, such as the 40-50 foot tall palm trees and 10 foot high light poles. The artworks will blend with the existing vertical elements and other structures in the park and will not significantly detract from the views offered in these areas. As designed the artworks will enhance and improve viewing along the bluff edge by providing a pedestrian walkway and viewing platform to the bluff edge (blufftop fence). Furthermore, as the Commission found in approving the comprehensive Art Plan, the installation of two additional artworks in addition to all the development within the park, which measures approximately 1.5 miles in length and covers approximately 26 acres, will not adversely impact, individually or cumulatively, the visual resources offered from the park and the projects will be visually compatible with the character of the surrounding park.

Furthermore, the City is aware of the importance of Palisades Park and the views that are offered from the park and has chosen designs, and have sited facilities, to enhance public views and encourage public use of the area. The proposed improvements are mainly restorative in nature and are sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal area. Furthermore, the proposed improvements are visually compatible with the character of the surrounding area and will enhance the visual quality of the park and enhance existing recreational opportunities. The Commission, therefore, finds that the proposed project, as conditioned, is consistent with Section 30251 of the Coastal Act.

D. Local Coastal Program

Section 30604(a) of the Coastal Act states:

(a) Prior to certification of the local coastal program, a coastal development permit shall be issued if the issuing agency, or the commission on appeal, finds that the proposed development is in conformity with the provisions of Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 30200) of this division and that the permitted development will not prejudice the ability of the local government to prepare a local coastal program that is in conformity with the provisions of Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 30200).

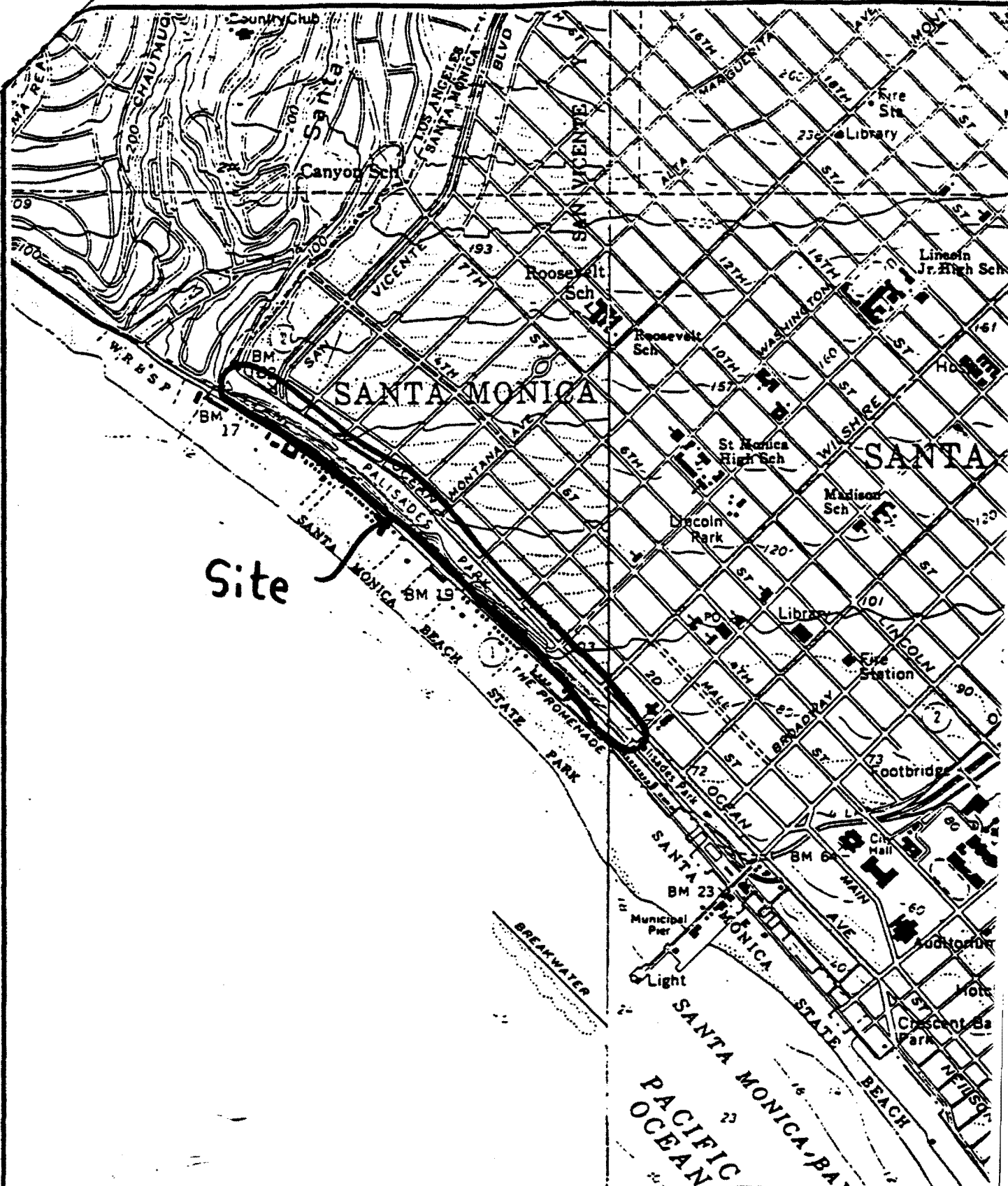
In August 1992, the Commission certified, with suggested modifications, the Land Use Plan portion of the City of Santa Monica's Local Coastal Program, excluding the area west of Ocean Avenue and Neilson way (Beach Overlay District), and the Santa Monica Pier. On September 15, 1992, the City of Santa Monica accepted the LUP with suggested modifications.

The proposed project is located west of Ocean Avenue and is in the area excluded from the 1992 certified Land Use Plan. As proposed the project will not adversely impact coastal resources or access. The Commission, therefore, finds that the proposed project will be consistent with the Chapter 3 policies of the Coastal Act and will not prejudice the ability of the City to prepare a Land Use Plan for this area of the City's coastal zone consistent with the policies of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act as required by Section 30604(a).

E. CEQA

Section 13096(a) of the Commission's administrative regulations requires Commission approval of Coastal Development Permit applications to be supported by a finding showing the application, as conditioned by any conditions of approval, 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.

There are no negative impacts caused by the proposed development which have not been adequately mitigated. Therefore, the proposed project is found consistent with CEQA and the policies of the Coastal Act.



Site



EXHIBIT NO. 1

APPLICATION NO.

5-98-026

Vicinity Map

California Coastal Commission

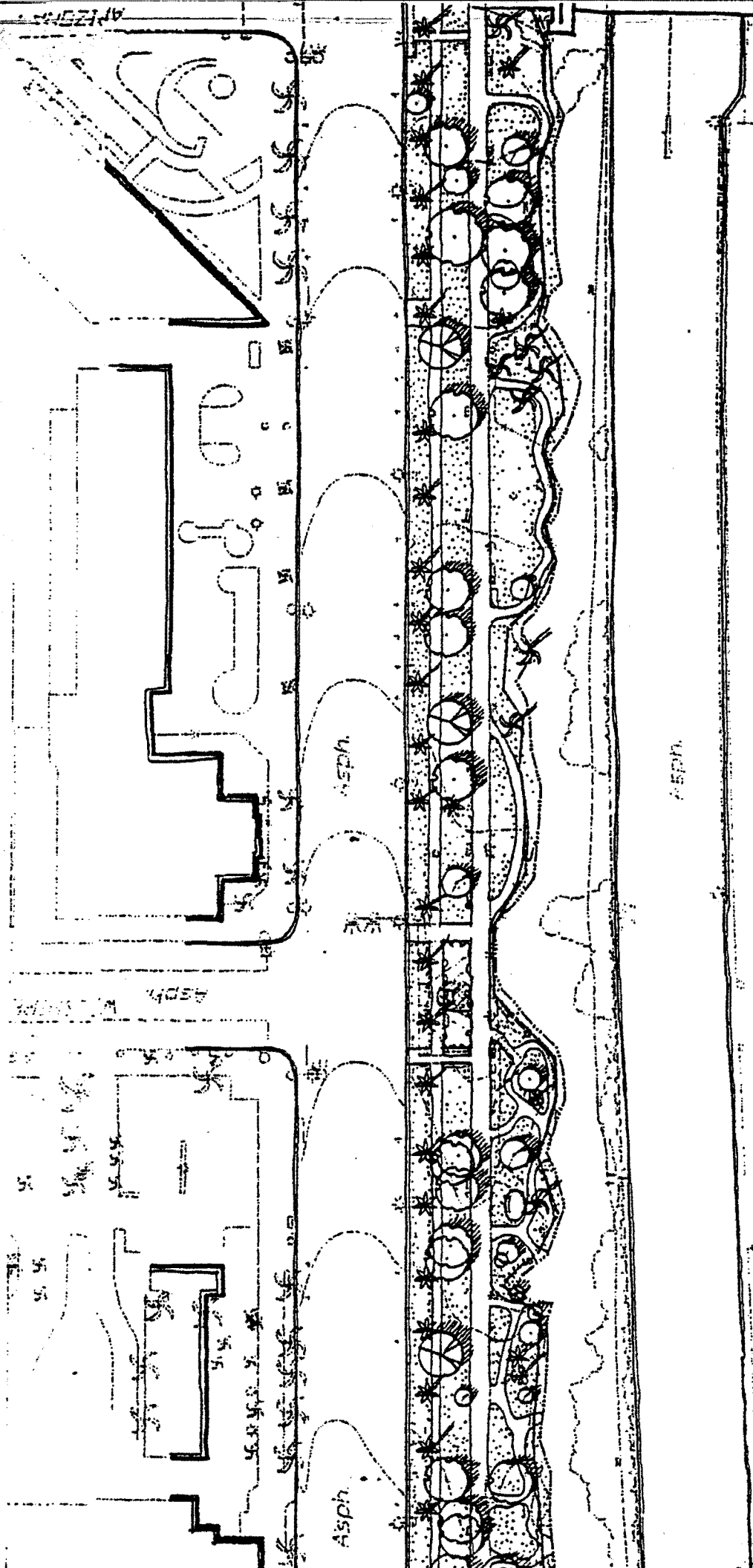
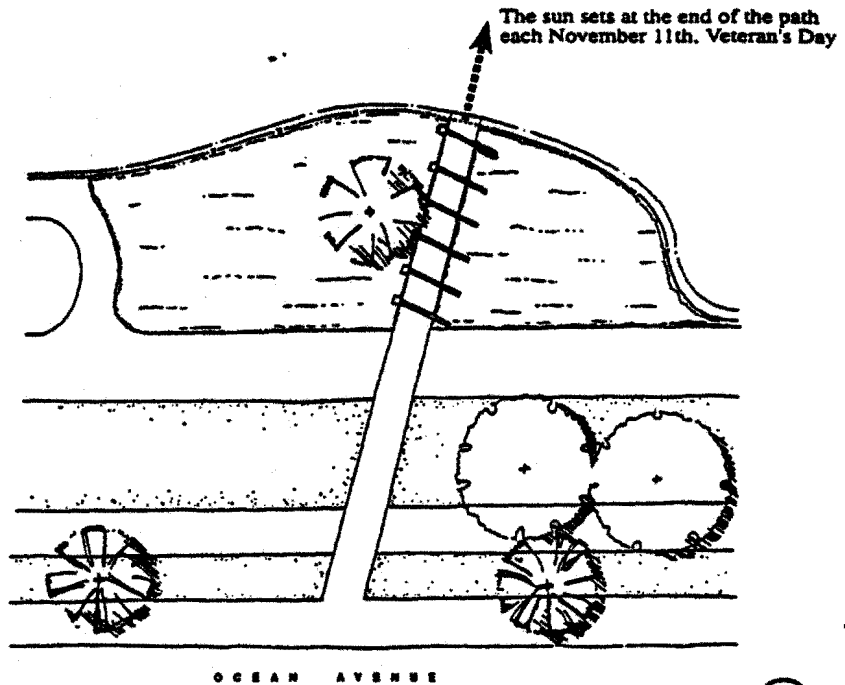


EXHIBIT NO. 3
Application Number 5-98-026
Conceptual Drawing of Park
California Coastal Commission

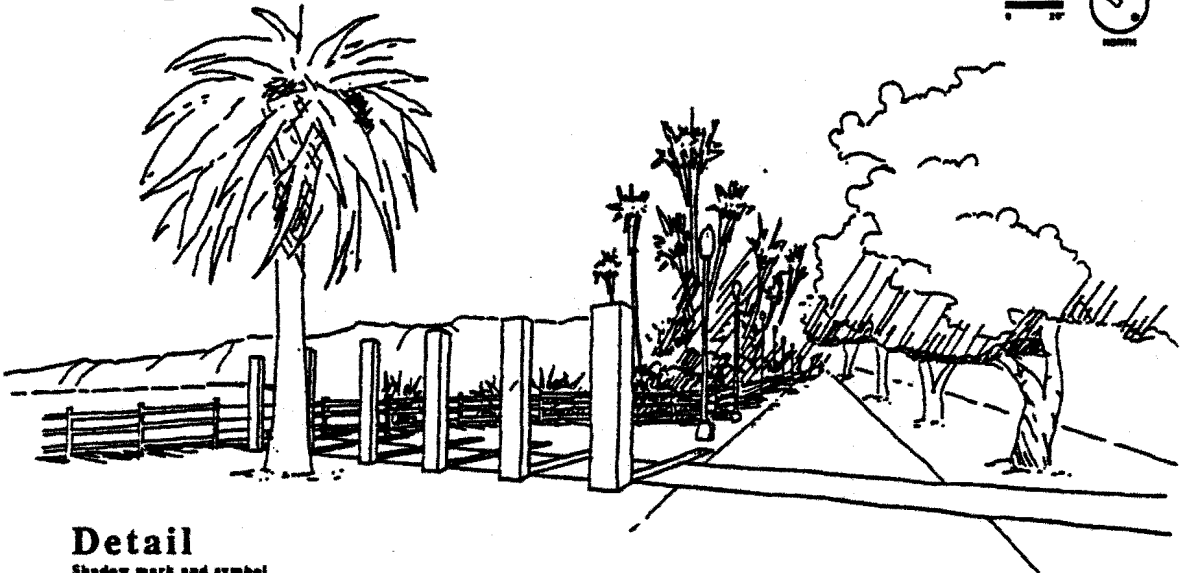
VETERANS MEMORIAL

Plan View

Near Arizona Street



Perspective



Detail

Shadow mark and symbol



- * Columns to be formed of warm, textured granite, 18" square x 8' high.
- * Columns and path align with setting sun on November 11th, Veteran's Day.
- * Granite bands set flush in path align to angle of shadow at 11:11 AM, Veterans Day. The shadow cast by the column will bisect the service branch's graphic emblem inset at the top of the granite band.
- * A stainless steel ribbon will reflect evening light drawing the eye to the memorial and horizon beyond.
- * Etched text will indicate branch of service represented by column.
- * Columns will be uplit from base.

EXHIBIT NO.

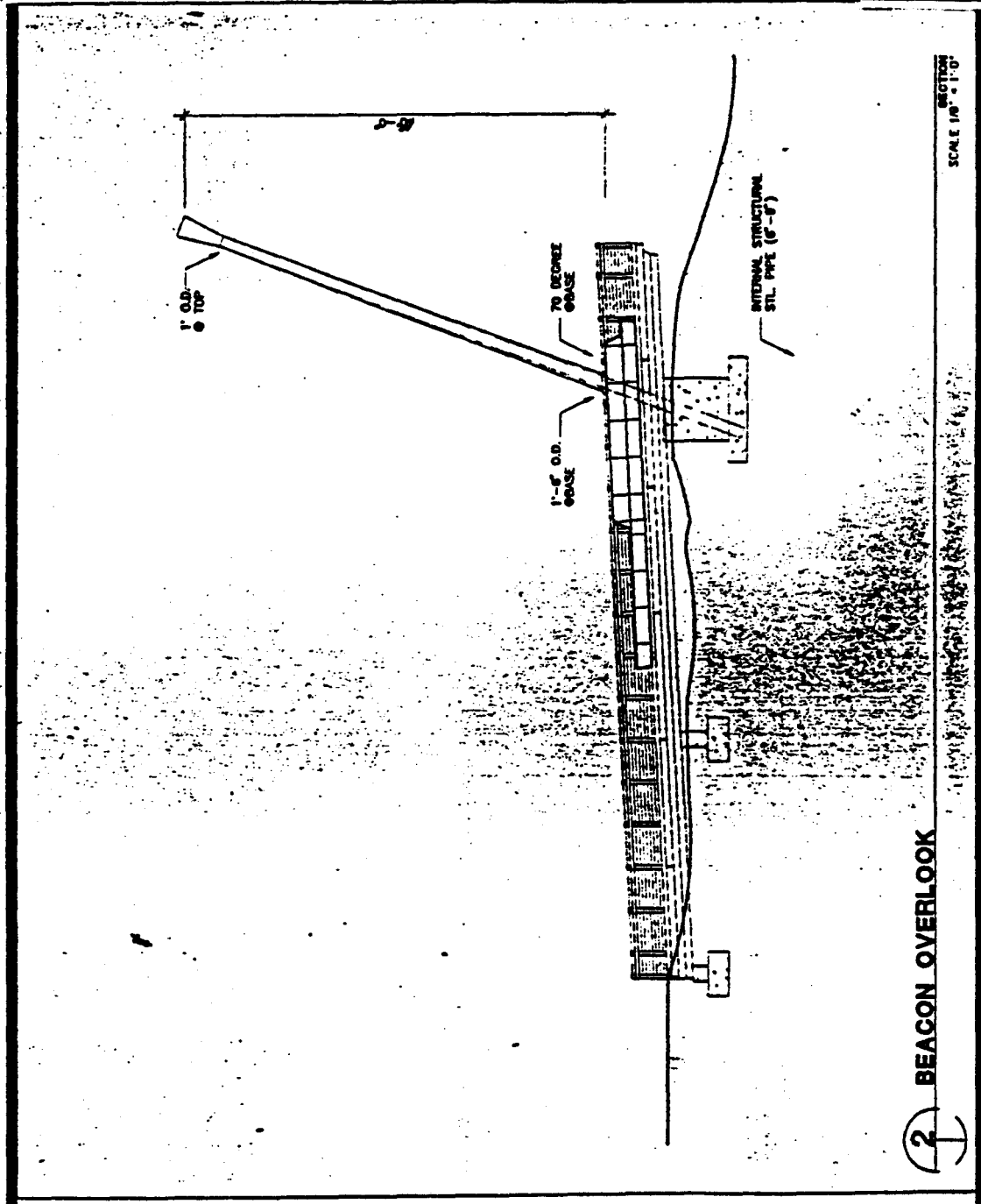
APPLICATION NO.

5-98-026

Veterans Memorial

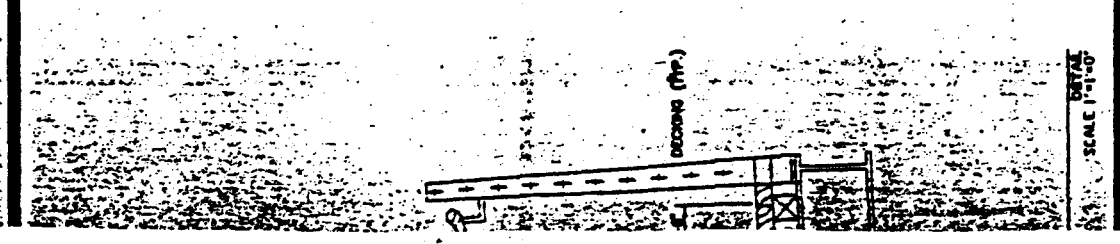
California Coastal Commission

EXHIBIT NO. 5
Application Number 5-98-026
Elevation of Beacon Overlook
California Coastal Commission



2 BEACON OVERLOOK

SECTION
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"



SECTION
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"