

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

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# F5

**Prepared July 8, 2022 for the July 15, 2022 Meeting**

**TO: COASTAL COMMISSIONERS AND INTERESTED PERSONS**

**FROM:** Jack Ainsworth, Executive Director  
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**SUBJECT:** Fort Bragg Planning Informational Briefing

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At the July 15, 2022 Commission meeting, the Commission will be given a briefing by Commission staff, City of Fort Bragg staff, Noyo Harbor District staff, and Department of Toxic Substances Control staff on the current status of the City of Fort Bragg's community-based comprehensive planning process for reuse of former Georgia Pacific Corporation's (GP) lumber mill lands west of Highway One, adjacent to downtown Fort Bragg, and on City and Harbor District plans for blue economy related projects in Noyo Harbor and elsewhere in the city.<sup>1</sup> The Commission has previously received briefings related to planning for the reuse of the former GP mill site on August 13, 2009,<sup>2</sup> December 10, 2009,<sup>3</sup> and September 14, 2012.<sup>4</sup> The Commission also toured the former GP mill site in 2009 and 2012.

### Background on Planning Efforts for the GP Lumber Mill Lands Over the Years

The former GP mill site is an approximately 400-acre bluff-top area west of Highway 1 between the highway/urban developed areas of the City and the ocean. The site comprises nearly one third of the area of the City and over 60% of the City's coastal

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<sup>1</sup> When the City's presentation is available, it will be posted as an appendix to this report on the Commission's website at this link: <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2022/7/F5/F5-7-2022-appendix.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> A link to the video archive of the August 13, 2009 briefing is accessible from the CalSpan website (beginning at 11:54): <https://cal-span.org/unipage/?site=cal-span&owner=CCC&date=2009-08-13>.

<sup>3</sup> A link to the report for the December 10, 2009 briefing is accessible from the Commission's website: <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2009/12/Th11a-12-2009.pdf>.  
A link to the video archive of the December 10, 2009 briefing is accessible from the CalSpan website (beginning at 2:45.55): <https://cal-span.org/unipage/?site=cal-span&owner=CCC&date=2009-12-10>.

<sup>4</sup> A link to the video archive of the September 14, 2012 briefing is accessible from the CalSpan website (beginning at 39:49): <https://cal-span.org/unipage/?site=cal-span&owner=CCC&date=2012-09-14>

zone. It also includes 3.5 miles of coastline along which the California Coastal Trail (CCT) has been developed.<sup>5</sup>

The GP mill operated from the late 1800s to 2002. Prior to the plant closure, logs were received by truck and then unloaded, stored, debarked, and milled on site. Milled lumber then was shipped green, kiln dried, or air dried and transported by rail or flatbed trailers. Bark and wood refuse were transported by truck, conveyer, or pneumatic system to the power plant where they were burned to generate steam for electricity. Historically, the facility operations were conducted in sawmills, planer buildings, a fence plant, a power plant, lumber storage areas, and various maintenance facilities. At its peak, the GP mill employed over 1,200 people and was the largest employer in the City, which has a current population of around 7,200.

After the GP mill ceased operations in 2002, between 2004 and 2017, GP obtained CDPs from both the City and the Commission (on appeal<sup>6</sup>) to demolish approximately 675,000 square feet of structural development associated with the former lumber mill operations and to remediate the majority of the site. According to the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) website,<sup>7</sup> the primary hazardous substance used across the site was petroleum. Tanks and drums stored diesel fuel, motor oil, fuel oil, lube oil, hydraulic oil, and diala oil. In addition, jet fuel was used for a short time to refuel planes using the former onsite runway. Other chemicals used onsite included antifreeze and transmission fluids for vehicle servicing, water treatment chemicals, small quantities of acids/bases, solvents, and paint and paint thinners. Buildings had lead-based paint and asbestos containing materials (ACMs), and power poles had transformers using polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). For a few years, small-scale treatment of wood occurred using a fungicide at a small dip tank. Scrap metals, ash/clinker and burn debris were also found in isolated areas of the site. As of 2017, approximately 97% of the mill site has been remediated.

The DTSC is directing the cleanup activities pursuant to a Remediation Order that was recently amended to add the current property owner, Mendocino Railway, as a respondent to the Order. Pursuant to the Order, Remedial Action Plans (RAPs) for the various “operable units” (OUs) have been or currently are being developed based on risk assessments and feasibility studies for site clean-up. Additional CDPs will be

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<sup>5</sup> With funding from the State Coastal Conservancy, the City acquired approximately 90 acres of the GP mill site in ~2010 along the seaward perimeter of the property. Pursuant to CDPs issued by the City, the City constructed the coastal trail project beginning in approx. 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Links to appeal (<https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2005/12/W12a-12-2005.pdf>) and de novo hearing to approve the CDP (<https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2006/5/F7a-5-2006.pdf>). In addition, between 2007 and 2011 the Commission processed a series of nine amendments to the original CDP that authorized much of the cleanup activities that have been performed to date.

<sup>7</sup> Site clean up and remediation is under the direction and authority of the DTSC. Fact sheets and project-related documents from the DTSC on the GP mill site and clean up status are available from the following DTSC websites: <https://dtsc.ca.gov/smrp-projects/georgia-pacific-fort-bragg/> and [https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/profile\\_report?global\\_id=23240008](https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/profile_report?global_id=23240008).

needed from the City and the Commission for those activities within the finalized RAP that meet the definition of “development” under the Coastal Act.

In addition to site clean-up and demolition activities, for approximately ten years after the GP mill closed, the City and GP collaborated on the future development of the mill site area through a specific plan process. Under the City’s comprehensive local coastal program (LCP) update in 2008, the GP mill site was designated and zoned for Timber Resources Industrial (IT) uses. The newly-created IT land use designation<sup>8</sup> was intended to support the continued use of this area for timber processing activities and to establish a clear planning process for the transition of this land to other uses, as initiated by the property owners. The IT designation allows a variety of industrial uses relating to forest products processing such as log yards, manufacturing wood products, planing mills, storage of forest by-products, commercial seedling nurseries, and related support activities including railroad lines, truck shipping facilities, boiler and powerhouse operations, and related uses. In addition, it allows aquaculture uses with the issuance of a conditional use permit. Open space, public parks, recreation use types, and public facilities are also permitted in this district. The LCP update also included specific policies requiring that any LCP amendments and rezoning of IT lands shall be subject to a specific plan process that would have to be effectively certified by the Commission. Specific plans had to meet minimum criteria for (among other things) (a) existing and future infrastructure connections such as roads, utilities, and coastal access to surrounding developed and undeveloped areas; (b) establishing an orderly phasing of development; and (c) the specific plan and supporting studies had to be paid for by the applicant.

With significant input from the Commission (through the three briefings mentioned above), and through public input taken at approximately 150 local public meetings, a draft specific plan for the mill site was published in 2012. However, after publication of the draft document and prior to completion of the draft Environmental Impact Report, GP withdrew from participating in the process.

Subsequent to GP’s application withdrawal, due to funding considerations and other factors, the City applied for an LCP amendment to change the planning process by which the GP mill site would be rezoned and redesignated. In September of 2018,<sup>9</sup> the Commission certified the LCP amendment as submitted. The amendment replaced current requirements for preparation and adoption of a specific plan with a requirement for a community-based comprehensive planning process. The comprehensive planning process is similar to the specific plan process and will continue to facilitate the establishment of site-specific policies and regulations that would establish the kinds, locations, and intensity of land uses for reuse of the former GP mill site consistent with Coastal Act requirements for Land Use Plans. Over the past few years, the City has

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<sup>8</sup> Prior to the 2008 update, the land use and zoning of the site under the certified LCP had been “Heavy Industrial” (HI).

<sup>9</sup> A link to the report for the September 12, 2018 hearing on is accessible from the Commission’s website: <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2018/9/W9b/w9b-9-2018-report.pdf>.

been engaging the local community in the comprehensive planning process for the mill site through meetings, workshops, surveys, outreach, and site tours. Any proposed redesignation and rezoning of the mill site based on the comprehensive planning process will require additional LCP amendments certified by the Commission.

#### Current Planning Efforts By the City, the Harbor District, and Others

At the July 15, 2022 meeting, the Commission will receive a briefing by City staff, Noyo Harbor District staff, and DTSC staff on (1) the current status of the City's community-based comprehensive planning process discussed above; (2) the status of remaining clean-up needs at the former mill site; and (3) plans for some of the blue economy related projects in Noyo Harbor and on properties surrounding the former mill site.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the briefing in part is to inform and provide context for the field trip sites that the Commission will visit following the briefing on July 15 ([item F6](#)).

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<sup>10</sup> The City recently partnered with California Sea Grant to host a Blue Economy Symposium and Learning Festival that focused on "exploring the needs and potential for developing a resilient and vibrant blue economy in and around Fort Bragg." A link to the agenda is available from the City's website: <https://visitfortbraggca.com/blue-economy-symposium/>. Additional project ideas developed through the community visioning process also are posted here: <https://www.city.fortbragg.com/departments/community-development/city-projects/noyo-center-for-marine-science>.