

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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Th21b

ADDENDUM

February 3, 2025

To: Commissioners and Interested Persons

From: California Coastal Commission
San Diego Staff

Subject: Addendum to **Item Th21b**, Coastal Commission Permit Application No. **6-24-0806 (San Diego Unified Port District & Armed Services Young Men's Christian Association)**, for the Commission Meeting of February 6, 2025.

The purpose of this addendum is to correct several special conditions to require that they be satisfied prior to issuance of the coastal development permit, clarify the timing of the drone implementation study, remove or modify certain special conditions that may not be feasible at the time of the event, such as least tern monitoring on military land or debris removal through diving the bay bottom, and to authorize the subject fireworks show for a period of two years. Staff recommends the following changes be made to the above-referenced staff report. Deletions shall be marked by ~~striketrough~~ and additions shall be underlined:

1. On page 7 of the staff report, Special Condition No. 1 shall be modified as follows:

Duration and Scope of Permit. This coastal development permit, as conditioned, shall authorize only:

- a. The ~~single~~ "Big Bay Boom" events to take place on July 4, 2025, and July 4, 2026; and
- b. Set-up and timely removal of all temporary development associated with the event. Set-up activities shall begin no earlier than June 30, 2025, and take-down shall conclude no later than July 6, 2025, for the 2025 event. The same timeframe for set-up and take-down timelines shall be utilized for the July 2026 event.

- c. BY ACCEPTANCE OF THIS COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PERMIT, the applicant agrees that if they wish to implement a future Big Bay Boom event or similar fireworks show in ~~2026~~ 2027 or later, the applicant shall submit a complete coastal development permit application for the event by no later than September 15th of the year prior to when the event will occur. The coastal development permit application shall include a comprehensive analysis of all potential alternatives to the use of fireworks that would minimize or avoid adverse impacts to habitat, wildlife, and water quality, including but not limited to the alternative of drone shows.
- d. [...]
- e. BY ACCEPTANCE OF THIS COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PERMIT, the Port of San Diego shall initiate an implementation study for a future drone show(s) and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations on Port Tidelands evaluating (1) public safety, (2) potential environmental impacts, and (3) a time frame for implementation of a show to activate the Port Tidelands on Independence Day as an alternative to the Big Bay Boom Fireworks Display, or in addition to a reduced scale fireworks show. For the purpose of evaluating the implementation of such shows, said study shall specifically include comparisons to a range of previously executed drone shows such as:
- a. October 23, 2024, Kansas City, MO
 - b. April 22, 2024, Petco Park San Diego
 - c. November 28, 2024, Mansfield, TX
 - d. September 3, 2024, San Francisco
 - e. May 1, 2024, Anaheim
 - f. July 4, 2024, Tahoe City
 - g. Uluru, Australia (ongoing)

The study parameters and methodology shall be submitted to the Executive Director for review and written approval prior to the initiation of the study. A completed Implementation Study shall be required in future applications for the Big Bay Boom fireworks display for any shows proposed to take place after July 2026.

- f. The Port of San Diego's Fireworks Display Ordinance No. 2892 authorizes the Port of San Diego to issue permits for up to forty-seven (47) fireworks display events annually in the City of San Diego, provided the cumulative total does not exceed 9,056 pounds of fireworks per year. This is an

aggregated total based on the shows authorized in the Fireworks Display Ordinance, which places additional size limitation on each individual show. The Port of San Diego has agreed to limit the number of fireworks permits to ensure the cumulative total of fireworks pounds does not exceed 7,698 pounds in calendar year 2025, resulting in a 1,358-pound reduction of the fireworks pounds authorized under the ordinance, and does not exceed 7,245 pounds in calendar year 2026. All reductions in firework weight shall be from events launched from barges or other watercraft in coastal waters. This coastal development permit does not authorize any other fireworks displays, the applicants of which shall separately obtain review of Coastal Act consistency from the relevant agency(ies) with jurisdiction.

- g. At least 24 hours before ~~the~~ each event in 2025 and 2026, the Port of San Diego shall implement sound monitoring to capture data at sensitive receptor locations, such as the active California least tern nesting sites described in **Special Condition No. 6**. The intent is to better understand the noise levels at these sites during the July 4, 2025, and July 4, 2026, Big Bay Boom Fireworks Display events.

[...]

2. On page 10 of the staff report, Special Condition No. 2 shall be modified as follows:

Other Agency Approvals

AT LEAST TEN WORKING DAYS PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE EACH EVENT, the permittee shall submit to the Executive Director for review and approval evidence of all permits, permissions, and approvals granted for the temporary event, as applicable, from local, state, and federal authorities.

The permittee shall inform the Executive Director of any changes to the current approved project required by any of the relevant agencies. Such changes shall not be incorporated into the project until the permittee obtains a new Commission CDP, unless the Executive Director determines that no new permit is legally required.

3. On page 11 of the staff report, Special Condition No. 5 shall be modified as follows”

Clean-up and Restoration of Shoreline Adjacent Ocean Waters Plan.

PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF THE COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PERMIT, the applicant shall submit, for the review and written approval of the Executive Director, a Clean-up and Restoration Plan. The final plan shall comply with the following requirements:

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE EVENT, all event waste and firework debris in the event area and around the fireworks launch site shall be recovered and properly disposed of. The permittee shall periodically inspect the potentially affected area as well as adjacent bay waters and bay bottom following the conclusion of the fireworks event to locate any remaining event waste and firework debris including, but not limited to, all firework detritus. All such waste and debris found shall be properly disposed of. Collection efforts shall continue until fifty percent (50%) of the net explosive firework weight (shipping manifest weight of the aerial shells and special effect pyrotechnic devices prior to use) has been retrieved. If the permittee is unable to collect 50% of the net explosive firework weight, the permittee shall collect alternative marine debris in the vicinity of the event to account for the difference in expected debris and implement additional water quality measures to undertake. More specifically, the permittee shall ensure compliance with the following containment, search, and clean-up procedures:

[...]

(c) ~~At a minimum~~ Subject to safe diving conditions, periodic debris surveys and clean-up, conducted by qualified persons on the mornings of July 5, 2025, and July 6, 2025, ~~and July 5, 2026, and July 6, 2026~~, of the San Diego Bay bottom within the anticipated fireworks debris discharge zone, and the shoreline areas within the anticipated fireworks debris discharge zone. If diving conditions are determined to be unsafe on the specified dates the permittee shall report the status of the conditions to the Executive Director.

[...]

The permittee shall undertake development in accordance with the approved plans. Any proposed change of event activities shall be reported to the Executive Director. No changes to the event activities shall occur without a Commission amendment to this coastal development permit unless the Executive Director determines that no amendment is legally required.

4. On page 13 of the staff report, Special Condition No. 6 shall be modified as follows:

Nesting Bird Surveys and Protection Plan

PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF THE COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PERMIT, the applicant shall submit, for the review and written approval of the Executive Director, a Nesting Bird Survey and Protection Plan. The final plan shall comply with the following requirements:

AT LEAST THIRTY DAYS PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE EACH EVENT, the permittee shall retain the services of a qualified biologist(s) to conduct nesting bird species surveys of active California Least Tern nesting sites

at the San Diego International Airport and ~~Naval Base Coronado, North Island~~. The qualified biologist(s) at each nesting site shall have at least one season of experience observing California least terns at the nesting grounds and experience deploying and maintaining wildlife acoustic monitoring devices. The permittee shall submit the name and qualifications of the consulting qualified biologist(s), as well as a Bird Survey and Monitoring Plan, for the review and written approval of the Executive Director. All project construction and operations shall be carried out consistent with the following requirements:

- a) The Bird Survey and Monitoring Plan shall have the primary goal of recording any observed behaviors and tern or egg loss at the site reasonably related to event impacts. The Plan shall include the details of the specific dates, times, locations, and methods of the surveys. The permittee's qualified biologist(s) shall monitor bird behavior, the number of nests, adults, chicks, fledglings, and eggs, any observed tern predators or other potential disturbances and noise levels prior to, during, and after the event ~~noise levels~~. Noise monitoring shall be designed to capture ambient and event noise levels. The nests shall not be removed or disturbed. The monitor(s) shall be present during all significant event activities (i.e., those with potential noise impacts) to observe any direct or indirect disturbance to nesting birds from event-related noise. The applicant may submit an ambient noise study, AT LEAST THIRTY DAYS PRIOR to the event and for the review and written approval of the Executive Director, to evaluate an alternative noise criterion that may be appropriately applied, in the case that the criterion is higher than 65 dB. If event-related noise exceeds a peak level of 65 dB (or the alternative appropriate threshold) at the nest site(s), sound mitigation measures such as sound shields, blankets around smaller equipment, modification of amplified music or speaker volume levels, re-direction and of loud sound sources, and other such approaches shall be employed, to the maximum extent feasible. Should the 65 dB (or the appropriate alternative) threshold be exceeded, the permittee shall notify the Executive Director of the efficacy of the sound mitigation measures in the Bird Monitoring Report required in **Special Condition No. 7(b)**.

The permittee shall undertake development in accordance with the approved plans. Any proposed change of event activities shall be reported to the Executive Director. No changes to the event activities shall occur without a Commission amendment to this coastal development permit unless the Executive Director determines that no amendment is legally required.

5. On page 14 of the staff report, Special Condition No. 7 shall be modified as follows"

Pre- and Post Event Monitoring Report Plan

PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF THE COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PERMIT, the applicant shall submit, for the review and written approval of the Executive

Director, a Pre- and Post-Event Monitoring Report Plan. The final plan shall comply with the following requirements:

[...]

a) Marine Wildlife Monitoring Report

[...]

ii. An analysis of the data collected at the subject 2025 and 2026 events, indicating whether, and to what extent, the event had an impact, if any, on marine wildlife.

b) Bird Monitoring Report

[...]

ii. A record and description of all adults and active bird nests with eggs, chicks, or fledglings observed in the monitoring area of the event immediately prior to the fireworks display (i.e., on July 3, 2025, and July 3, 2026), during the fireworks, immediately afterwards, and on the day thereafter. All surveys shall include monitoring for changes in nesting bird behavior, including flight, drop, stun, nest abandonment, and return to nests, and shall occur for no less than 30 minutes in each instance. Video footage of the nesting sites may be used to supplement and aid in data collection;

[...]

iv. The quantification and range of ambient and event noise levels recorded using ~~noise~~ acoustic monitoring devices from all monitoring sites, including the time and date of recordings, likely source(s) and mapped location of recorded noise, and an analysis of recorded noise data with regards to noise impacts on nesting avian species available in the scientific literature and observed bird behaviors or tern loss; and

v. An analysis of the data collected at the subject 2025 and 2026 events, indicating whether, and to what extent, the events had an impact, if any, on nesting avian species

c) Water Quality Monitoring Report

[...]

ii. Quantification and qualification of the debris recovered and removed upon conclusion of the fireworks event, found (i) floating on the water surface or within the water column, (ii) atop the bay bottom, (iii) within

bay bottom sediments, (iv) strewn on the beach, and (v) scattered on the shoreline. The report shall include the expected volume and types of debris versus what was collected during the required cleanup measures.

- iii. An analysis of the data collected at the subject 2025 and 2026 events, as well as from past events, indicating whether, and to what extent, the event had an impact, if any, on water quality and pollutant levels. In addition to the proposed water sampling methods, the permittee may employ a water quality (auto)sampler directly attached to the fireworks barge to collect real-time data. The analysis shall assess the impacts to water quality by comparing it to water quality standards and thresholds established by the relevant resource agencies.

The permittee shall undertake development in accordance with the approved plans. Any proposed change of event activities shall be reported to the Executive Director. No changes to the event activities shall occur without a Commission amendment to this coastal development permit unless the Executive Director determines that no amendment is legally required.

6. On page 17 of the staff report, the final paragraph shall be modified as follows:

The proposed event site is located within a mostly urban bay environment. However, many birds inhabit or utilize the bay over the course of the year or during seasonal migrations due to its location in the Pacific Flyway. Fireworks displays have the potential to impact coastal wildlife, particularly birds, in the surrounding area. The Commission's ecologist has prepared a memorandum ([Exhibit 7](#)) describing the potential and observed impacts to avian wildlife from the Big Bay Boom, including the state and federally listed California least tern, which has two nesting sites approximately one mile from the launch barges. One colony is located at the San Diego International Airport to the north and one to the southwest within the boundaries of Naval Air Station North Island. Past iterations of the event have conducted monitoring of the California least tern site at the airport only, which is one mile from the closest of the four proposed fireworks barges while the nesting sites within Naval Air Station North Island have not been monitored by the applicant due to the issue of not being able to access the land within the military facility where the nests are located.

7. On page 19 of the staff report, the following paragraph shall be added after the second paragraph as follows:

However, the Port has explained that due to budgetary and administrative procedures, it is all but certain that a drone implementation study will not be completed in time to submit with a future application for the July 2026 fireworks show, which coincides with the United State's semiquincentennial (i.e. its 250th anniversary). This is due to the money for such a study not being in the current fiscal year's budget and thus needing to be added to the 2025-2026 budget for

the fiscal year starting July 1, 2025. Afterward, the Port would solicit bids from consultants to conduct the necessary reviews, past experience of which indicates such a study not being completed until spring of the following year (6-9 months). The study is intended to allow the Commission to evaluate how fireworks shows could transition toward quieter and less polluting event designs, such as drone shows.

After working intensively with the applicant on the requirement for an implementation study for alternative forms of patriotic entertainment, staff agreed to allow the permit term to increase to two fireworks shows over two years so that the full implementation study can be conducted, received, and reviewed. To prepare for the gradual shift away from fireworks shows and toward alternative events, the Port will reduce the allowable tonnage of fireworks under Port Ordinance No. 2892 by fifteen percent – approximately 1,358 pounds – in 2025, with an additional five percent reduction – for a total of twenty percent reduction – in 2026. Furthermore, all reduction will be in fireworks shows launched from bay waters, which are generally more impactful to water quality than firework shows launched from land. Thus, as conditioned, the permit requires the applicant to gradually reduce the potential scope and scale of fireworks shows permitted around San Diego Bay, provide extensive clean-up measures for the shows that will occur over the next two years, monitor noise impacts on sensitive species, and prepare an Implementation Study for an eventual transition to less impactful alternatives such as drones. **Special Condition No. 1** requires the completed study be a part of any permit application for the Big Bay Boom fireworks show beyond July 2026.

8. On page 20 of the staff report, the second full paragraph shall be modified as follows:

On the following day on July 5th, starting around 8:00 AM, teams will walk the shoreline along Shelter Island, Harbor Island, North Embarcadero, and South Embarcadero to collect debris that may have washed ashore overnight, as well as general litter that is found. The crew will also have paddleboards to conduct near-shore debris removal as necessary. Any collected debris is bagged, photographed, and weighed for future reporting. Finally, the event operator will provide crew to the Port's annual "Operation Clean Sweep" event that conducts volunteer shoreline cleaning, generally in August of each year. The applicant has explained that surveying the bay bottom for debris by scuba divers is impractical in this location due to the depth of San Diego Bay – up to 60 feet – and resultant low visibility, strong currents due to the proximity of the bay mouth, and the presence of commercial and recreational boat traffic. Nevertheless, it is known from other nearby fireworks operations such as at SeaWorld San Diego in nearby Mission Bay Park that not all fireworks debris floats on the water surface or

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subsequently moves onshore but can also accumulate along the bay bottom.¹ If diving is not feasible following the event, the comparison survey of expected debris versus collected debris required by **Special Condition No. 7** will still aid in evaluating potential impacts of the event.

¹ Mackenzie Elmer, [What Lies Beneath SeaWorld's Fireworks Launch Pad](#), Voice of San Diego, January 10, 2025