CITY OF BURLINGAME
PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item: 7b	**Hearing Date: August 14, 2026**
Project No.	DSR21-0040
Location	410 Airport Boulevard APN: 026-363-600 and 026-363-610
Applicant	The SPHERE Institute and San Mateo Resource Conservation District
Property Owner	State Lands Commission
Staff	Erika Lewit, Senior Planner
General Plan Designation	Bayfront Commercial
Zoning	Bayfront Commercial (BFC)
Lot Area	10.23 acres

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Review of an application for Major Design Review and Variance for parking to construct an 8,564 square foot education center building and a public nature and recreation park on a 10.23 acre site in the Bayfront Commercial (BFC) zoning district.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission, by resolution:

1. Adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration, NP-610-P, and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program ("MMRP") for the project .

2. Approve the application for Major Design Review and Variance for parking, as conditioned.

BACKGROUND

The 10.23 acres (9.4 acres of land area and 0.83 acres in Sanchez Channel) project site is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Airport Boulevard and Bay View Place. It is comprised of two parcels leased from the State Lands Commission (SLC) that together border Sanchez Channel and San Francisco Bay. The project site has an existing FAA tower, two substandard parking surfaces (one gravel and one concrete), and two unimproved sections of the Bay Trail (one along the bay side and one along Sanchez Creek).

The project site is bordered on the west by Kincaid's Restaurant (60 Bay View Place); the Sanchez Channel along the east side of the site; and the San Francisco Bay shoreline along the north side of the site. Uses in the area include offices, office/life science uses, hotels and long-term airport parking uses.

The proposed project is a collaboration between a not-for profit entity, The SPHERE Institute (SPHERE) and the San Mateo Resource Conservation District to transform the underutilized bayfront parcel into a public nature and recreation park with an education center building. The project would also restore natural tidal marsh ecology to this portion of the San Francisco Bay shoreline.

In October 2019, SPHERE, in collaboration with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (together, the "Applicant"), secured a short-term lease from the SLC to complete due diligence, design development,

community outreach, regulatory agency coordination, and CEQA review. SPHERE submitted the long-term lease application (for the maximum 49 years) to the SLC on July 23, 2021 and currently holds a lease for the property.

The proposed project is a public nature and recreation park that will include the following features and uses:

- An 8,564 square foot education center building to host educational programming and community and private events;
- A restored marsh and marsh-upland transition zone;
- A 16-foot-wide improved Bay Trail across the entire site;
- A 600 sf emergency water rescue equipment storage structure;
- Recreational areas that include picnic and lawn areas, a boardwalk and overlook area, a kitesurfing ramp, and a kayak and water rescue ramp,
- A drop-off loop and one-way drive entrance at Airport Boulevard and exit onto Bay View Place;
- Twenty-nine (29) on-site parking spaces plus 3 bus spaces;
- An existing FAA tower.

The proposed water rescue storage structure is required by the Central County Fire Department for their quick-response water rescue program, and it will house rescue vehicles (jet skis) and equipment. It is located near the site's driveway entrance and the kayak ramp for quick access to the bay.

The project's open space component includes re-alignment and paving of the Bay Trail on site, as well as a system of secondary trails, walkways, viewing platforms, lawns and a restored marsh and a marsh-upland transition zone.

The project requires a Major Design Review application to construct an education center building (BMC Sections 25.12.090 and 25.68.020.C.3) and a Variance to reduce the on-site parking provided (BMC Section 25.40.30-Table 24.40-1).

As required by the Zoning Code in effect at the time, the Planning Commission held a study meeting on February 14, 2022 to provide suggestions regarding the project and voted to place this item on the Action Calendar when all information has been submitted and reviewed by the Planning Division. The Applicant submitted revised plans, dated October 27, 2025, to address the Planning Commission's comments from the 2022 study session. For reference, a summary of the Commission's February 2022 comments and the Applicant's proposed changes made to the project is attached.

ANALYSIS

The analysis below evaluates the proposed development for compliance with the General Plan, the BFC zoning district, and other pertinent development standards and requirements established in the Municipal Code.

Bayfront Commercial General Plan and Zoning Designation

The project site has a 2019 General Plan land use designation of Bayfront Commercial and is located in the corresponding Bayfront Commercial (BFC) zoning district. The Bayfront Commercial land use designation provides opportunities for both local and visitor-serving commercial uses and publicly accessible recreation, while emphasizing access to and enjoyment of the Bay. The proposed public nature and recreation park, education center, restored tidal-marsh habitat, Bay Trail improvements, and water-oriented recreation directly advance those objectives. The use is also consistent with the purpose of the BFC zoning district, which supports places where residents, employees, and visitors can walk, bike, enjoy nature, and access the waterfront (BMC Section 25.12.010.C).

Design Review

The applicant requests Major Design Review approval to construct a new, single-story 8,564 square foot education center building as part of the proposed project.

Major Design Review is required for new commercial and mixed-use buildings pursuant to BMC Section 25.68.020.C.3. The Applicant is required to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Planning Commission that the project complies with the applicable design considerations contained in BMC Section 25.68.050(D), and the design principles for the BFC zoning district contained in BMC Section 25.12.060, as described below:

Design Considerations (BMC Section 25.68.050(D)):

a. Support for the pattern of diverse architectural styles in the area;

b. Respect for and promotion of pedestrian activity through building placement, off-street public spaces, and parking locations that do not dominate street frontages;

c. Compatibility of the architecture with the mass, bulk, scale, and materials of surrounding development and appropriate transitions to lower-intensity uses;

d. Architectural consistency through a single style that is coordinated among the primary elements of the project; and

e. Site features, including fencing, landscaping, and pedestrian circulation, that complement the development and enhance the aesthetic character of the district.

Design Principles for the BFC Zoning District (BMC Section 25.12.060):

The project must also be evaluated under the BFC-specific design principles in BMC Section 25.12.060. The applicable principles include:

1. Relating development to both the street and the Bay, maintaining view corridors, supporting architectural diversity, and reinforcing the shoreline network of open spaces;

2. Limiting obstruction along Airport Boulevard, supporting the Bay Trail and shoreline recreation, and maximizing public access;

3. Providing a readily identifiable entrance and pedestrian connection from the street, with landscaped areas leading to buildings set back from the frontage;

4. Providing ground-floor transparency and cohesive articulation, materials, and detailing on all sides of the building;

5. Locating and screening surface parking to minimize its effect on street frontages and maintaining a pedestrian-friendly edge; and

6. Incorporating bird-friendly design, protecting the Bay environment, accounting for prevailing winds, and providing landscaping and pedestrian circulation that extend and enhance Bay Trail recreation.

The proposed building complies with the Major Design Review considerations and the BFC design principles. The proposed height of the single-story building is proportional to the size of the site and preserves view corridors to the bay and to the restored wetland areas. Deep overhangs and surrounding pedestrian walkways create a transition between the education center and the outdoor park. Repeated timber columns, low-reflective exterior surfaces, varied natural textures, and bird-safe glass establish a cohesive architectural vocabulary that complements the shoreline setting.

Exterior materials proposed include:

- Windows: an aluminum window system with bird-safe glass,
- Columns: timber columns and glulam beams with metal wrap,
- Doors: painted steel doors, custom steel gates with grass-like graphics,
- Siding: board formed concrete and weathering steel rainscreen cladding,
- Roof: Sure-Weld thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO) contour rib profile roof, and
- Deck Railing: metal railing with wood handrail and horizontal cables.

The asymmetrical massing and butterfly roof contribute to the area's architectural diversity. The project provides extensive pedestrian circulation, including a paved and realigned Bay Trail, secondary paths, viewing areas, and direct connections among the street, building, wetlands, and shoreline. These features support the BFC district's emphasis on interconnected open space and public waterfront access.

On-site parking is located adjacent to the street frontages but does not dominate the frontages because of the curved designs of the entry and parking lot and because the proposed landscaping screens the paved surface areas and vehicles from the street. The building entrance and walkways are identifiable from the public approach, and the design supports walking, bicycling, kayaking, kitesurfing, and other shoreline recreation. As conditioned, the project satisfies the applicable Major Design Review criteria and BFC design principles.

Use

Municipal Code Section 25.12.020, Table 25.12-1, permits both community open space and public park and recreation facilities in the BFC zoning district, by right without discretionary approval. Although SPHERE will operate the project under a lease from the State Lands Commission, the site is designed and operated as a public nature and recreation park. The education center, interpretive exhibits, café, water rescue structure, trails, viewing platforms, and launch areas are integrated components and amenities of the park use.

The primary use of the site will be as a nature and recreation park that is open to the public. The education center will have both permanent and temporary (movable) indoor and outdoor displays with information about the history of the site and local area, local ecology, climate change, sea level rise, and aviation. The open park space around the education center has pedestrian decks and viewing platforms, which will connect to the Bay Trail. The Bay Trail sections currently on the site are mostly unimproved (dirt) and run along the Sanchez Channel and San Francisco Bay. The project will pave and re-align the Bay Trail path to traverse the site between the education center and the two public streets. In addition to public recreation uses related to the restored wetlands viewing and general pedestrian activity, the project provides a public kite-surfing and kite-boarding launching area at the northwest side of the site and a kayak launch area at the northeast side of the site.

The Applicant submitted a Bay Rise Park Operations Plan dated May 2026 (see Attachments) that provides details about hours of operation, staffing, security, waste management, and event protocols. The Operations Plan establishes standard hours of operation for the education center from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., seven days a week and standard hours of operation for the park from dawn to dusk, seven days a week. A minimum of one SPHERE security staff will be on-site during standard hours of operation when the educational building is open to the public.

The Operations Plan includes events such as school group field trips, speaker series, weddings, and festivals. During these scheduled events, portions of the education center or selected walkways and viewing decks may be temporarily reserved. The on-site parking lot, restrooms, kitesurfing and kayak launch areas, and the Bay Trail would remain open to the public during all park standard operating hours. Conditions of approval regulate event size, hours, security, notice, access, and parking so that the accessory events remain subordinate to and compatible with the public park use.

The Operations Plan proposes extended evening hours for special events: Monday through Wednesday until 11:00 p.m. and Thursday through Sunday until 1:00 a.m. Additional security staff would be provided for events exceeding 75 guests and 200 guests and the maximum event attendance would be 300 guests.

The proposed park operations include:

- standard hours of operation for the educational center from 9 a.m.-5:00 p.m. daily; and
- standard park hours from dawn to dusk daily; and
- extended evening hours for special events for the education center and the public nature and recreation park from Monday through Wednesday until 11:00 p.m. and Thursday through Sunday until 1:00 a.m.

The education center includes a café that will operate from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. daily, with extended summer hours (June through August) from 7 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The café will serve grab and go items such as coffee, snacks, and light meals. The cafe space will also have capacity for catering operations for special events.

SPHERE will maintain a public-facing website or application-based park information page that provides hours of operation and advance information about special events that will affect public access to the site. There will also be on-site signage updated to inform the public of special events. The park will have CCTV surveillance and alarm systems installed. Alarm triggers outside the park hours will be received by the SPHERE designated on-call security contact.

Parking and Circulation – Variance Application

The proposed parking and circulation are concentrated on the south and west sides of the site, utilizing Airport Boulevard and Bay View Place for entry and exit. There is a semi-circular one-way drive with an entry from and an exit to Airport Boulevard that includes a drop-off area for approximately three vehicles. The semi-circular drive also serves a one-way parking lot with 29 standard passenger vehicle parking spaces and 2-3 bus parking spaces. Vehicles exit the parking lot onto Bay View Place. Gates at both ends of the parking lot will be closed after hours.

There are no requirements for off-street parking for community open space (BMC Table 25.40-1). Accordingly, the project's open-space and park acreage generates no minimum parking requirement. The education center, however, includes approximately 4,450 sf of interior gallery/assembly area with temporary or moveable seating. Applying the assembly-facility standard of one space per 60 sf results in a requirement of 75 spaces. The project provides 29 automobile on-site spaces plus 3 bus parking spaces, resulting in a 46-space shortfall for which a Variance for parking is requested.

The 2021 Parking Analysis (see Attachments) separately estimated a peak demand of 31 spaces during standard park operations, including 23 spaces for specific outdoor recreation uses such as kitesurfing and eight spaces for general public park visitors that might also access the educational center. The Parking Analysis indicates that the proposed parking supply of 29 standard and 3 bus spaces is generally sufficient for standard and routine use of the entire park, including the educational center, even though it does not satisfy the code minimum for the assembly area.

BMC 25.84.030 requires that Variance findings and decisions be based on exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property that do not generally apply to property in the same zoning district, that granting of the application is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right, and that the application will not be detrimental or injurious to improvements in the vicinity. Findings for the requested Variance can be made because the property is uniquely constrained and programmed for restoration of tidal march and marsh-upland transition habitat, public shoreline access, Bay Trail improvements, water-oriented recreation and an approximately 4,500 sf gallery/assembly area. The proposed wetland restoration and features of the nature park designed for public enjoyment are exceptional to this bayfront property and providing 75 on-site parking spaces would consume land necessary for restoration and public recreation. Below-grade parking is not feasible given the shoreline interface and soil on the site and providing 75 surface parking spaces would unreasonably constrain the development of the permitted park. The granting of the Variance application allows full development of the site for a viable wetland nature park and is not injurious to improvements in the vicinity as the public use supports the Bay Access - public and trail connectivity standards listed in BMC 25.12.050.

The Parking Analysis notes that the following public parking spaces are available within ¼-mile of the project site, including:

- 4 public shore parking spaces at 411 Airport Boulevard.
- 19 public shore parking spaces at Embassy Suites at 150 Anza Boulevard.
- 46 parking stalls (approximately) at Anza's Fisherman Park at 350 Airport Boulevard.
- 35 public parking stalls (including 15 parking stalls along Airport Boulevard and 20 public shore parking stalls) at Burlingame Point at 433 Airport Boulevard.

- 56 on-street parking spaces (including 42 on-street parking spaces on Beach Road and 14 on-street parking spaces) on Airport Boulevard.
- 10 public shore spaces along the Burlingame Lagoon, including 8 spaces on SLC land at the termination of Bay View Place and 2 spaces at 111 Anza Blvd.
- If approved by the City of Burlingame Traffic, Parking, and Safety Commission, approximately 22 public parking stalls will be installed on Bay View Place and paid for by the Applicant. Condition of Approval # 26 provides details for this process.

Special events create episodic demand beyond standard park operations. The Parking Analysis recommends 88 additional parking spaces for special events with up to 220 guests and 120 additional parking spaces for special events of up to 300 guests. The applicant proposes to address that demand through valet service and off-site overflow parking: 130 spaces at 500 Airport Boulevard for evening and weekend events and parking at nearby hotels for weekday daytime events. Conditions of approval require the applicant to document and maintain the applicable parking agreements in compliance with BMC 25.40.070(2) and implement the event-parking plan. These operational measures support the requested Variance application but do not count as on-site spaces satisfying the 75-space code requirement. Staff agrees with the recommended 31-space parking demand presented in the Parking Analysis because staff finds the on-site parking supply combined with the available nearby public parking to be sufficient to meet standard operations of the park. The proposed assembly uses, identified as special events for the site, are episodic and accessory to the primary use of the site as a public nature and recreation park, and therefore the parking demand generated for these occasional uses is met with the off-site parking agreements required as conditions of approval and on-site parking meets the stated purposes of BMC 25.40.010 for parking regulations, including minimizing the negative environmental and urban design impacts resulting from parking lots and encouraging bicycling and walking.

Landscaping

Proposed landscaping throughout the site is shown on the Landscape Plans (refer to sheets L1.0 through L5.4).

BMC Section 25.36.040 requires landscape material in areas not occupied by structures, parking, storage, trash enclosures, driveways, and sidewalks. BMC Section 25.40.070.D requires a five-foot landscape buffer where a surface parking lot abuts a public street, landscaping over at least 10% of the parking area, distributed planting, and screening. In addition, BMC Section 25.40.070.E generally requires one shade tree for every three parking spaces. The project provides landscaping over 52% of the site and 86.6% of the front setback, with planting along both sides of the driveway and parking area and within parking-lot islands.

View Corridor

BMC Section 25.12.060.B provides that structures shall not obstruct more than 75 percent of the street frontages. This is an irregularly-shaped lot with street frontages along Airport Boulevard and Bay View Place. The education building, trash enclosure, and fire rescue storage shed are located near the primary frontage on Airport Boulevard, where the one-way driveway enters the site. Based on the project's street frontage on Airport Boulevard, along with the width of the education building and the trash enclosure, the proposed project would comply with this requirement by preserving 80% of the view corridor.

Public Access and Bay Trail

BMC Section 25.12.050 requires public access and flood and sea-level-rise-resilient infrastructure along the Bay and designated creeks. Along the San Francisco Bay, the building is setback approximately 180 from the shoreline where the minimum required setback is 100 feet. The project also incorporates raised finished-floor elevations and shoreline infrastructure coordinated with OneShoreline. Conditions of approval require the professional certifications, surveys, maintenance obligations, and on-site stormwater retention called for by BMC Section 25.12.050.I through M.

Along Sanchez Channel, the project meets the required minimum 35-foot buffer from the top of bank, and a paved public-access trail is located within the buffer with its inboard edge averaging at least 75 feet from the shoreline. The proposed trail improvements connect through the site and to adjoining segments, consistent with BMC Sections 25.12.050.C through H.

The project would pave, improve, and realign these segments and provide public access from and through the site. Final alignment and design remain subject to applicable City, BCDC, and San Francisco Bay Trail Program review and approval.

Table 1: Project Information

Code Standards	Proposed	Allowed/Required
Use:	Open space, and public park and recreation facility with an 8,564 sf education center building [1]	Open space, and park and recreation facilities, public
SETBACKS:		
Front (Airport Blvd):	94'-6" to building 34'-2" to trash enclosure	10'-0"
Left Side:	623'-0" to building (trash enclosure is not adjacent to left side property line.)	10'-0"
Right Side:	242'-6" to building 151'-0" to trash enclosure from interior property line	10'-0"
Rear:	134'-11" to building (trash enclosure is not adjacent to rear property line.)	10'-0"
Shoreline Setback: (San Francisco Bay):	180'-0" to building (trash enclosure is not adjacent to San Francisco Bay.)	100-foot shoreline buffer

Code Standards	Proposed	Allowed/Required
BUILDING ENVELOPE:		
Lot Coverage:	3.4% 15,316 sf (14,034 sf education center + 682 sf trash enclosure + 600 sf fire rescue enclosure)	60% 267,294 sf
Building Height:	36'-10" to top of building roof 12'-6" to top of trash enclosure	65'
View Corridor:	80% unblocked	25% unblocked minimum
OFF-STREET PARKING:		
Number of Parking Spaces:	29 total on-site spaces 3 on-site bus spaces ——————— 130 spaces of overflow valet parking at 500 Airport Boulevard for special events in evenings and on weekends [2] Additional valet parking at nearby hotels for special events [2]	No parking required for community open space. 75 spaces required for 4,450 sf assembly area (1 per 60 sf) Parking variance requested to allow 29 on-site spaces plus 3 bus parking spaces [2]
Drive Aisle/ Clear Back-up Space:	14'-0" or greater	13'-0" for 45-degree spaces
Parking Space Dimensions:	8'-6" x 18'-0" (standard) 9'-0" x 22'-0" (ADA & EV parallel)	8'-6" x 18'-0" (standard)
LANDSCAPING		
Total Site Landscaping:	52% 232,118 sf	15% 68,824 sf
Front Setback Landscaping:	86.6% 21,025 sf	80% 19,408 sf
Parking Areas:	Landscaping provided on either side of driveway and parking area in excess of 10%	10%

Code Standards	Proposed	Allowed/Required
HOURS OF OPERATION		
Standard Park Grounds:	Dawn to dusk, daily	none specified
Standard Educational Center:	9 a.m. -5 p.m., daily	none specified
Grounds and Center for Accessory Use of Scheduled Events:	Extended evening hours of: 11 p.m., Monday through Wednesday 1 a.m., Thursday through Sunday	none specified

[1] The facility is a joint project of Sphere Institute, a public non-profit organization and the San Mateo Resource Conservation District.

[2] A parking variance is requested to allow 29 on-site spaces (plus 3 bus spaces) where 75 are required for the 4,450 sf assembly area. Off-site valet parking is required by conditions of approval for special events.

Environmental Review

The Initial Study (IS) for the proposed project was prepared by ICF Environmental consultants. Based on the IS, a Mitigated Negative Declaration[1] (MND) was prepared for the proposed project. Based on the environmental analysis, the project could have potentially significant impacts on air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology/soils, noise, and tribal cultural resources. However, each of these impacts can be reduced to a less-than-significant level with mitigation measures identified in the IS/MND.

The IS/MND was circulated twice for public review for 30 days each time: the first starting on December 10, 2025, and the second time starting on February 20, 2026. The City received comment letters during the public comment periods from the California Department of Transportation (dated January 8, 2026), the Federal Aviation Administration-Airports Division (dated March 23, 2026), the State of California Department of Fish and Wildlife (dated January 8, 2026), Pacific Gas and Electric Company (first letter dated March 2, 2026, and second letter dated March 6, 2026), and OneShoreline (dated March 23, 2026). A Response to Comments document (attached) has been prepared by ICF to formally address each comment contained in these letters. The City has also complied with Native American consultation requirements, however, the City received no requests for consultation from any of the Native American tribes contacted about the Project.

Based upon review of the comments received during the public circulation period, there is no evidence to indicate that implementation of the project, including the proposed mitigation measures, would result in a significant environmental impact under CEQA. Furthermore, based on the comments certain text revisions to the IS/MND were included. The text revisions clarify, expand, or update information presented in the IS/MND. The revised text does not provide new information that would result in any new significant impact

[1] The MND assumed that a conditional use permit would be required for the project as was required by the pre-2021 zoning for the site. The proposed use is permitted by right in the BFC zone and therefore, in greater alignment with the zoning than analyzed in the MND.

or any substantial increase in the severity of an impact identified in the IS/MND, therefore recirculation of the IS/MND is not required.

The IS/MND (ND-610-P) is attached for reference. The mitigation measures in the IS/MND have been incorporated into the recommended conditions of approval (in italics).

Attachments:

Area Map
Arborist Report by H.T.Harvey & Associates, dated May 1, 2024
Parking Analysis by Hexagon Transportation, dated July 27, 2021
Bay Rise Park Operations Plan, dated May 2026
Planning Commission February 14, 2022 comments and applicant responses
Project Resolution
Proposed Plans dated October 27, 2025
Environmental Resolution
Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (NP-610-P) with appendices
Response to Comments and MMRP