

Sweeping plan for future of Ocean Beach opens to public Saturday

Ocean Beach Bulletin

Posted by [Tom Prete](#) on 1/13/11



What may be the biggest, broadest, most far-reaching effort to determine the future of San Francisco's Ocean Beach opens up for a freewheeling public forum Saturday. The [Ocean Beach Master Plan](#) will hold an open-house meeting at the San Francisco Zoo, where anyone interested in the future of the massive strand where the wild Pacific Ocean abuts urban San Francisco can come to learn about the planning effort and present their own ideas.

From 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, representatives from the agencies taking part in the master plan will be in the zoo's Great Hall, where anyone can ask questions about the plan and offer suggestions.

There won't be big speeches or presentations, said project director Ben Grant of San Francisco Planning and Urban Research, except perhaps a brief wrap-up talk at the end. Rather, people will be able to talk one-on-one about various aspects of the plan while SPUR collects thoughts and ideas from the conversations.

The Ocean Beach Master Plan is coordinated by the think tank SPUR, an organization that was chosen in part because it is independent from government agencies. But many other agencies and advocates are either participating in the master-plan process or will be affected by it.

The [Golden Gate National Recreation Area](#) has a role, as the branch of the National Park Service is responsible for the beach itself. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, which owns and operates extensive infrastructure in the area, including the Oceanside Water Pollution Control Plant and huge sewage-transport tunnels under the Great Highway, also has a large part to play.

City supervisors, most notably the Sunset District's **Carmen Chu** and the Richmond's Eric Mar, are involved, as are the Recreation and Park Department, the Department of Public Works, the Planning Department and the San Francisco Zoo.

Chu said she was hopeful that residents of the areas near Ocean Beach would take the opportunity to participate in the master-plan process, but that they needn't fear that Saturday's meeting will be their only chance to do so.

"It's not going to be the only meeting, it's going to be the first of many meetings to come," Chu said. "I can assure the public there will be future opportunities."

It's not just government agencies involved in the Ocean Beach Master Plan. Neighborhood residents and business owners are participating as well. One of them is Lara Truppelli of the Beach Chalet and

Park Chalet restaurants operating in the historic Beach Chalet building. For years, Truppelli has been a leading force in efforts to direct more official attention to the state of the beach and to try to synthesize a vision for its management.

The Ocean Beach Master Plan is intended to guide the management of the public land between the high-tide line on the beach and the start of private property on Lower Great Highway for the next several decades. It's not just a high-flying idea document, however. It's also intended to be a practical guide for putting into action whatever vision for the beach eventually emerges from the input gathered from the public and participating agencies.

"That's one of my biggest priorities, to see that this isn't a master plan that goes on the bookshelf," Truppelli said.



Issues facing planners run the gamut from ensuring public access to improving facilities for beachgoers, protecting rare and endangered species, law enforcement, maintenance of infrastructure, determining which activities are appropriate for the beach and which are not — and ensuring the very existence of the beach itself. As last winter showed, when the city temporarily closed a portion of the Great Highway due to erosion and then installed a large rock revetment to prevent further damage, ways to address a rising ocean and increased erosion are likely to be an important part of the master plan.

Some of those ideas are not likely to please everyone: "People might have to brace themselves for the idea of retreating" from the Great Highway or other infrastructure, said Peter Mull, a project manager for Ocean Beach with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps is responsible for dredging the channel that allows large ships to enter San Francisco Bay, and for "beach nourishment" operations that use dredged sand to shore up Ocean Beach.

One person who is watching the master plan with an eye toward a particularly practical matter is Ocean Beach surfer Han Ruangsinn. While much of the attention recently devoted to Ocean Beach has been focused on the badly eroding parts of the beach south of Sloat Boulevard, as the leader of the nonprofit OBSF Foundation Ruangsinn believes that there's an important problem on the north end of the beach. The lack of public restrooms on the north end near the Cliff House is not only inconvenient for surfers and other users of the Kelly's Cove area, he said, but it degrades the beach experience for everyone there.

"We haven't had a bathroom in over 25 years. Why did it take so long ... to do something about it?" asked Ruangsinn. "Over a generation of San Franciscans have been affected by us not having clean facilities."

The master plan has a budget of close to half a million dollars, with the lion's share of the funding coming from the California Coastal Conservancy. The City and County of San Francisco and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area also are major funders.

As with any project of its magnitude, rumors have followed the master plan and information isn't always distributed evenly. For example, one Ocean Beach Bulletin contributor found postcards advertising Saturday's meeting in abundance at the United Irish Cultural Center, but none at a nearby coffee shop. And neighborhood residents, when asked about the plan, often say they haven't heard of it and worry that it has something to do with new building or development of western neighborhoods.

But neighborhood rezoning "certainly is not something that's come up recently," said Chu.

Zoo admission is not required to participate in the open house, and people can stay for a few minutes or the full five hours.

What's next

Grant said that suggestions and ideas collected at Saturday's open house will be consolidated and later posted online with other information about the Ocean Beach Master Plan.

"The next meeting ... will be in the late spring, probably May," said Grant. "And that will be about presenting some initial ideas about solutions."

Over the summer, planners will narrow down the field of possible ways of addressing Ocean Beach issues.

Grant said he expects the Ocean Beach Master Plan process to conclude in January 2012.

Tom Prete worked at SPUR from April 2006 to October 2007, managing its publications. Since then, he has retained SPUR as a freelance editing client. He has never been involved with SPUR policy.

UPDATE: This article has been updated to disclose Tom Prete's business relationship with SPUR, information that was inadvertently left out of a previous version. That information has always been disclosed on the [Bulletin's staff page](#).

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