

**To: Mayor and Santa Cruz City Council**

**From: *Don't Morph the Wharf!* Submitted by Gillian Greensite 11/10/2020**

**Re: Item 28 Agenda November 10, 2020**

**Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf Master Plan and Environmental Determination**

Dear Mayor Cummings and City Council members:

Please accept the following as you deliberate and vote on this issue of vital importance to the community:



**A. A brief history:**

In 2012 the City Manager and Economic Development staff applied for Federal Assistance and a Disaster Relief Opportunity Grant with the claim on ED Form 900 that the Santa Cruz Wharf was “*severely damaged by the tsunami*” of 2011. However, the Wharf was undamaged by the tsunami. The Engineering Report of 2014 documents that fact as does the YouTube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHjtUAiWS3k>.

- B. The city was awarded a federal grant of \$850,000 augmented by \$170,000 from Parks & Recreation funds. The money was used to fund the SF Design

firm ROMA to draw up the Wharf Master Plan (WMP) and for an Engineering Report. The 2014 Engineering Report found: *"The Wharf in good structural condition, due to its location, material of construction and continuous maintenance performed on the structure."* (Engineering Report 10-2). Ninety-one percent of the pilings were in good and excellent condition. Those under the now demolished Miramar were the most concerning. Some stringers and joists needed replacement or repair and the decking was found to be in poor condition. These latter conditions have not been fixed since that time.

- C. In 2016, the Wharf Master Plan was on the city council agenda. A petition with 2,600 signatures protested the Wharf Master Plan and called for an EIR. The lack of an EIR was addressed in a legal opinion on behalf of *Don't Morph the Wharf!* The city attorney advised council to suspend the hearing in order to do an EIR.
- D. Four years later, the Wharf Master Plan and its EIR is before council. The Plan is unchanged from its earlier iteration despite widespread opposition to many of the changes proposed for the Wharf, especially the 40+ feet tall new buildings; the covering of the sea lion viewing holes by the massive proposed Landmark Building and the lowered walkway on the western side. The EIR is evaluated as inadequate by community groups and legal opinion.

**E. Staff comments that concern us:**

The Agenda Report makes frequent reference to *"the Wharf has always changed"* and *"the one constant is change."* No doubt designed to convince us to accept the current changes as the norm, the statements are nonetheless misleading. Certainly the Wharf has changed its function over the past 106 years as the fishing industry gave way to tourism and recreation. However the only major structural changes to the Wharf in the last 45 years have been the additions made in the 1980's. Thousands have expressed their desire to keep the low-key feel and character of the Wharf. They reject the new tall buildings, the loss of the sea lion viewing holes and the transformative addition of a lowered western walkway and their voices have been ignored.

- F. Staff claims the Wharf Master Plan is needed to secure grants to fix some structural problems ( deck, stringers, small # of pilings). This is not necessarily the case. The city secured the grant in 2012 without a Wharf Master Plan and EIR, albeit with a false claim of *"severe damage."* There are grants available for historic structure renovations that don't require a radical new design. In fact such changes to a historic structure may invalidate such grant applications. The cost estimate of the needed repairs is overstated in the staff report even allowing for inflation. The Engineering Report puts it at about half what the city is claiming. The Engineering Report also notes that the Western walkway is mainly as a fender if boats moored or anchored on the western side break adrift and collide with the Wharf. There are easier

solutions such as limiting or banning anchoring or mooring on the weather side of a Municipal Wharf.



- G. Pictured is the Dolphin restaurant at the southern end of the Wharf. The 5 sea lion viewing holes are to its left or east. The Dolphin is about 14 feet high. The view (which would be lost) is from upstairs at Stagnaro's. Imagine if you will a 40+ foot- building at 6,000 square feet, 50 feet wide and 120 feet long (bigger than a single family lot) crammed next to the Dolphin. How long before the Dolphin is viewed as expendable? And what of the public bathrooms behind? When there was little else on the Wharf, the large warehouse at the end had a function. Imposing it on today's Wharf is seen as asinine. Exactly where will 5 new sea lion viewing holes be created when the current ones are covered over, should the Landmark Building be approved?
- H. **Birds:** The Wharf is considered a birding hot spot. Biologists for the EIR conducted surveys of species and counted nests. Outside of construction, which will be mitigated, the EIR concludes "less than significant impact" on the much beloved Pigeon Guillemot (a member of the Auk family). These

plucky birds migrate from the far north to nest under the Wharf each year. We watch for them to arrive and wish them well when they leave. Despite acknowledging that the birds *"often require multiple attempts at landing in the confined cavity spaces under the Wharf"* and despite acknowledging that with all the people intruding on their nesting areas *"they could be deterred from nesting near the western walkway"* the biologists are silent on the birds' ability to **access** the Wharf from the south and the east. Both of those access areas will be newly filled with ten 27 foot outriggers, a lowered south deck, a large new boat landing with people embarking and disembarking; increased boat rentals etc. That there may be increased area underneath the Wharf is not the issue we raised. Nesting habitat is irrelevant if the birds cannot **access** nesting sites. This specific impact needs evaluation and study.

While it was considered irrelevant for an EIR response, it is not irrelevant to visitor delight that the snowy egret pictured below perching on the current west railing will be a sight forever lost to Wharf visitors should the western walkway be approved. Such loss is incalculable.

On behalf of our group, *Don't Morph the Wharf!* and the thousands who support our concerns, please do not approve the Wharf Master Plan and Environmental Impact Report. Rather, return them to staff to evaluate better the impacts both Aesthetic and Biological, apply proper Mitigations and most importantly, drop the unpopular Landmark building, the lowered western walkway and keep other new structures at 30 feet with proper Standard historic design criteria. Thank you for your attention.

