

## POSITION PAPER: YERBA BUENA COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS POSITION REGARDING EXPANSION OF MOSCONE CENTER

Adopted by the Yerba Buena Alliance Board of Directors  
March 12, 2014

### PREAMBLE

After giving full consideration to the proposed Moscone Center's Expansion Project as presented to date, the Yerba Buena Community's primary objective is to ensure that no one use dominates Yerba Buena.

The Gardens and Cultural Facilities were built to be a permanent part of the City. Today, the gardens, cultural facilities, business enterprises, affordable housing, entertainment, childcare facilities and family amenities, and the convention center can and should coexist in a cohesive manner to continue to provide a superlative community amenity for Bay Area residents and visitors from around the world. Yerba Buena Gardens are highly acclaimed not only by a wide diversity of local residents and visitors by urban planners and cultural leaders around the world. It is successful because it was intentionally designed so that *no one use would be allowed to dominate the area*. As a result, Gardens, Cultural Facilities, Retail, Housing and the Convention Center successfully coexist, catalyze and cross-fertilize in this physically constrained urban area.

### COMMUNITY POSITION

After fully considering the Moscone Center's Expansion Project proposals as presented to date, we have the following feedback.

- The primary priority is to ensure the original intention that no one use dominates Yerba Buena.
- We support the underground convention space expansion beneath Howard Street as it satisfies the original intention for a below ground convention center that does not dominate the neighborhood.
- We accept expansion of the North and South lobbies to Howard Street, so long as the access to and openness of the Gardens are not impaired.
- We do not support the addition of any new bridges or changes to the existing bridge that disrupt public access, circulation and, most importantly, the design integrity of the Gardens. The current proposal has the potential to position two new bridges as extensions of the convention center as opposed to key design elements that ease circulation and facilitate connection in the public realm.
- Visibility must be enhanced for all existing businesses and nonprofits. The current proposal has the potential to impair visibility and have negative

impact on operations.

- We believe that any above ground development of the convention center on the Garden blocks should be limited to the corner site of Third/Howard Streets and/or above the existing Esplanade Ballroom on Third Street, assuming environmental impacts from these proposals on the Gardens are minimal. Potential convention center expansion on the Third Street Moscone Garage site and the Fifth and Mission Garage site might also be considered. The proposal to build additional convention space in taller structures on top of the North and South lobbies creates significant and permanent impacts on the Gardens amenity.
- We advocate for an enhanced public realm with activation and pedestrian amenities on Howard Street.
- The Expansion Project must include desirable improvements to the Children's Garden to offset its remaining impacts there. In addition the Expansion Project must not impair the security of the garden and the children facilities. The new Children's Garden must continue to provide a safe and protected area for the children who use the facilities.
- All construction must be done in a manner that ensures seamless and uninterrupted operations for all events and performances in all existing cultural entities. Any impact, cancelation or disruptions from construction must be mitigated in a way that ensures the non profit entities do not experience loss of business or revenue.
- For the long term, the transfer of all of Yerba Buena Gardens from the Redevelopment Successor Agency (OCII) to a new entity established by the City must include the guarantee that any further expansion of Moscone Center not encroach any further into the Gardens and the cultural facilities.

## BACKGROUND

Yerba Buena Gardens is the solution to a long and costly legal battle to resolve the need for a downtown public open green space and cultural venues for the use of the entire city. Yerba Buena Gardens was created as an integral part of an ongoing community process and settlement of a 10-year lawsuit that resulted in the Convention Center being put *underground*, in order for its impacts on the Gardens and Cultural Facilities to be minimized. A key agreement in the settling of the lawsuits and the master planning of Yerba Buena is that *no one use would be allowed to dominate the area*. Gardens, Cultural Facilities, Affordable Housing, Recreational Uses, Children and Family Uses, Commercial Uses and Convention Center would coexist in this physically constrained urban area.

The Gardens, were built to be a permanent part of the City. Today, they are highly acclaimed not only by a wide diversity of local residents as a superlative

community amenity for the entire Bay Area but also by urban planners around the world.

## **CONVENTION CENTER EXPANSION**

Contravening the original agreements, the Convention Center has already expanded several times, compromising the Gardens and Cultural Facilities with above-ground structures such as the Esplanade Ballroom, intrusive fire exits at sidewalk level, elimination of underground service access to the cultural buildings, and so on.

Today the Convention Center proposes to add a 150,000 square-foot above-ground expansion. Not only does the proposal violate the basic premise that the convention facilities would be constructed underground, but ongoing study has demonstrated that this will cause major damage to Yerba Buena Gardens.

The Yerba Buena community recognizes that the Convention Center generates economic and other benefits for the City and needs to be successful. The Convention Center management believes to maximize its success it periodically needs to expand. In addition to the currently proposed expansion, the documentation before us indicates that the Convention Center is looking 20 years out for further expansion.

## **SHARED MULTIPLE USE**

We do not challenge that more convention space may be desirable or that in an ideal world, from the viewpoint of the Convention Center, it would all be contiguous. However, the Convention Center must realize it is located in a constrained urban area and must adhere to the original premise to share the space equitably with the other users so that no one use dominates.

During the years of initial planning and extended community dialogue, those who wanted dense commercial development championed an above-ground Convention Center. That concept was ultimately strongly rejected by the community and the City. The compromise agreed upon by the parties is the present Gardens plan that balances revenue-producing uses to support ongoing operations of the public Gardens and other amenities that make the neighborhood the special asset for the whole city and region that it has become.

## **CONCLUSION**

Over the past months we have been happy to work with the Convention Center planners and appreciate their efforts to address our concerns. We continue to have concern that the current proposed expansion of the Convention Center has the potential to dominate and have significant negative impact on the Yerba Buena Gardens site. We cannot support expansion that compromise the Gardens' openness, uses, views and community objectives. Therefore we ask the City, through the property owners of the site, the Office

of Community Investment and Infrastructure, and ultimately the Planning Commission, to address the concerns we laid out above to ensure that we maintain the original intention that no one use dominate Yerba Buena Gardens.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the following organizations pending final adoption by each organization's Board of Directors:

Yerba Buena Alliance  
Yerba Buena Gardens Child Development Center  
YBAE/Yerba Buena Gardens Festival  
Yerba Buena Skating and Bowling Center