



PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

TO: Planning Commission **DATE:** November 12, 2025

DEPARTMENT: Community Development Department

PREPARED BY: Sarah Peters, Associate Planner

PRESENTER: Sarah Peters, Associate Planner

AGENDA TITLE: Receive a Report, Hold a Public Hearing, and Consider Adopting a Resolution Approving Coastal Development Permit 7-25 (CDP 7-25) and Design Review 5-25 (DR 6/25) to Install Scenic Viewer Binoculars in Two Locations in Noyo Headlands Park Along the Fort Bragg Coastal Trail

APPLICATION NO.: Coastal Development Permit 7-25 (CDP 1-25), Design Review 6-25 (DR 6-25)

OWNER / APPLICANT: City of Fort Bragg

LOCATION: Noyo Headlands Park – South End and North End of Coastal Trail

APN: 008-010-35 and 018-430-11

ZONING: Parks and Recreation

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: Categorically Exempt from CEQA Pursuant to §15303(e) (New Construction of Small Accessory Structures), §15311 (Accessory Structures), and §15061(b)(3) (Common Sense Exemption)

SURROUNDING LAND USES:
NORTH: State Parks
EAST: Millsite and Park
SOUTH: Park
WEST: Ocean

APPEALABLE PROJECT:
☒ Can be appealed to City Council
☒ Can be appealed to California Coastal Commission

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution approving Coastal Development Permit 7-25 (CDP 7-25) and Design Review 6-25 (DR 6-25) for the installation of scenic viewer binoculars in two locations along the Coastal Trail.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Coastal Development Permit to install Scenic Viewer Binoculars in two locations:

- North end of Coastal Trail next to Kelp bench at the trail loop
- South end of Coastal Trail between the westernmost picnic table and bluff edge

Coastal Trail North at Loop Out

Parking Lot



Coastal Trail South at Picnic Table



These are the preferred locations, however staff is consulting with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and locations may be adjusted, if necessary, by a short distance at either of the above spots. Viewers would be bolted to an approximately 3'X5' concrete pad which would be placed approximately five inches deep for a level surface. The machines would not be coin operated and are available with a magnification of 10X or 20X. Both the Dual Viewer Model and the Non-Coin standard viewing model are 60 inches in height at the eyes of the standard viewing head. The dual viewer model weighs 120 pounds. The viewing head has a 360-degree rotational angle and a vertical angle of 30 degrees up or down. The main column is powder coated aluminum, with a 0.1875" wall thickness, support arms are aluminum, the base is powder coated aluminum and the viewing head is painted aluminum.

BACKGROUND

At the March 3, 2025, Community Development Committee (CDC) meeting, members expressed interest in the possibility of installing scenic viewer binoculars on the Coastal Trail, and directed staff to include Binoculars as a subject for one of two Blue Zones Demonstration Projects that Blue Zones had allocated to the City of Fort Bragg. A Blue Zones Demonstration Project which can be similar to a pop-up event and typically includes a semi-permanent change to the physical infrastructure to prove a concept or need. It is a short-term project, typically research, that feeds into something permanent. CDC directed staff to move forward with a Demonstration project that would allow participants to use temporarily provided binoculars for viewing birds and scenery along the Coastal Trail near Glass Beach. Participants would also take a survey, which would subsequently be posted digitally for community-wide participation.

Depending on the feedback obtained from the event and survey, the binocular project could be considered for prioritization as a Blue Zones Marquee project. A Marquee project typically

includes a permanent change to the built environment that encourages active transportation and living and that applies best practices for creating vibrant, livable communities and engaging people in collectively reimagining public spaces.

The Demonstration Project was held in coordination with the City of Fort Bragg, Blue Zones and Audubon, during the March 15, 2025 Whale Run, and the survey was launched. Survey results were positive (Attachment 2), and staff was directed to take the binocular project City Council (in conjunction with the Fitness Stations project concept) on June 9, 2025. At that meeting, Council directed staff to coordinate with the Blue Zones Project team to determine if the binocular project could become a Marquee project, and if so, to bring it back in more detail for Council consideration.

The Blue Zones team embraced the concept and on August 25, 2025, staff brought the project concept to City Council for a determination on whether or not to pursue a Coastal Development Permit for the installation of the viewers (Attachment 3). City Council directed staff to move forward with the project for two non-coin operated sets of viewers – one at each end of the Coastal Trail.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Scenic viewer binoculars are often found at tourist destinations. Typically, the binoculars swivel side to side and are mounted on solid pedestal that keeps the view steady, unlike hand-held binoculars that can be difficult to hold still. Often the pedestal base will have steps to ease access for children and shorter adults. The purpose of these binoculars is to provide a more immersive and engaging way to enjoy the landscape by allowing users to see boats, birds, sea-life and other scenery more clearly and in greater detail than they otherwise could. They can be used as an educational tool as well, as well as contribute to a positive recreational experience for visitors.

Regulatory Issues

A Coastal Development Permit (CDP) is required for any development in the coastal zone. Development means:

On land, in or under water, the placement or erection of any solid material or structure; discharge or disposal of any dredged material or of any gaseous, liquid, solid, or thermal waste; grading, removing, dredging, mining, or extraction of any materials; change in the density or intensity of use of land, including, but not limited to, subdivision pursuant to the subdivision map act (commencing with Government Code Section [66410](#)), and any other division of land except where the land division is brought about in connection with the purchase of such land by a public agency for public recreational use; change in the intensity of use of water, or of access thereto; construction, reconstruction, demolition, or alteration of the size of any structure, including any facility of any private, public, or municipal utility; and the removal or harvesting of major vegetation other than for agricultural purposes, kelp harvesting, and timber operations in accordance with a timber harvesting plan submitted pursuant to the provisions of the Z'berg Nejedly Forest Practice Act of 1973 (commencing with Public Resources Code Section [4511](#)).

Installation of binoculars falls within this definition. This staff report will analyze consistency with the Coastal Land Use and Development Code (CLUDC) and impacts to coastal resources, such as visual, biological, and cultural.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE ZONING CODE

Land Use

The proposed scenic viewer binoculars are small structures that would be accessory to the existing park's multi-use trail, and as such, are permitted by right in the Parks and Recreation Zone (PR) situated within the Coastal Zone (CZ).

Zoning Standards

There are no zoning standards for setbacks and height in the Parks and Recreation zone.

Fencing

The project would not include fencing.

Landscaping

The project will not include landscaping. There are no landscaping standards (17.34.060) that apply to parks.

Outdoor Lighting

The project will not include outdoor lighting.

Parking

The Coastal General Plan includes the following policy:

Policy LU-5.7. Adequate parking should be provided to serve coastal access and recreation uses to the extent feasible. Existing parking areas serving recreational uses shall not be displaced unless a comparable replacement area is provided.

The Coastal LUDC does not include parking requirements for passive recreation areas. The City must ensure that sufficient parking is provided for the facility. The City's two parking lots function adequately to serve existing demand. The South Trail Parking Lot has 66 parking spaces and typically is half full. During summer months, the North Trail parking lot (64 parking spaces) is heavily utilized and frequently filled by 10:00 or 11:00 am due to the many visitors to Glass Beach.

The scenic viewer binoculars will not displace any existing parking spaces. It is not expected that there will be an increase in traffic to the trail specifically for use of the viewers, rather that trail users already accessing the trail will be provided with this additional opportunity for scenic viewing.

COASTAL RESOURCES ANALYSIS

Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area

The proposed project would have no impact on any ESHA. The binoculars would be located on heavily disturbed portions of the Coastal Trail Headlands. Botanical reports have been prepared for the Headlands on multiple occasions and rare plants have never been found in the proposed binocular placement areas. The north site is on a loop-out trail, and the installation would be done on an existing developed area consisting of compacted gravel where there is an existing bench and interpretive sign. The south site gets heavy foot traffic due to its proximity to an existing picnic table with views to the ocean. There is a small amount of ruderal vegetation that has grown in around the concrete slab that the picnic table is mounted to. As this location is near the bluff edge, Special Condition 1 is included to ensure that appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) shall be installed to prevent any soil or other materials such as concrete slurry or concrete water run-off from leaving the work area.

Special Condition 1: Best Management Practices (BMPs) shall be employed during construction activities to minimize any potential negative impacts to, and protection of, nearby biological resources. BMPs shall be submitted with the building permit for approval by the Director.

Visual Resources

The site is part of a scenic visual corridor. However, the project will largely improve the existing visual quality by providing the public with opportunities for greater visual access to scenic elements. The proposed improvement is limited to placement of two concrete pads to which binocular post will be affixed. The binoculars have a relatively low profile, given their 60-inch height, 28" diameter base (standard non-coin operated model) and slim column (Attachment 4). Staff have selected sites with or near existing structures to avoid the addition of structures to less developed locations. They would not significantly detract from the visual impression of the area within which they will be placed and would contribute to the overall view experience of the site.

Northern Location

The viewers at the northern end of the trail would be located far from any vehicular access and will have no impact to vehicular views to the coast. They would be sited in the loop-out in close proximity to the existing kelp bench and would not be visible from the main trail.

Southern Location

The viewers at the southern end of the trail would be located just off the picnic table and may possibly be seen from the north end of the existing parking lot but would have no impact on vehicular views to the coast. Here, the structures would be visible from the northernmost entrance to the trail, but less so from the main entrance. While the structure would be visible from the trail, the picnic table would be the most visible feature, and the binoculars would not significantly detract from the view experience of the site.

Cultural Resources

The proposed binoculars would be mounted on small concrete pads, which would entail minimal excavation. Additionally, an extensive archaeological study was prepared for this entire property as part of the permitting process for the Coastal Trail project and no arch sites were identified in these locations, which allowed for the existing development (bench and picnic table). Thus, the project would not have an impact on cultural resources. Staff referred the project to the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo, and they only requested the inclusion of the discovery clause that is a standard condition of all City development permits that involve disturbance of the ground (see Standard Condition 6).

Accessibility

The scenic viewer binoculars come in a standalone model with a standard viewer and a dual viewer model which includes a standard viewer head and an accessible viewer head. Staff will strive to place the dual viewers in both locations, however if infeasible, staff recommends installation of the dual, standard + accessible model at the southernmost site and installation of the standard model at the northernmost site which is located off the main trail in a loop-out that is significantly further from a parking lot or trail entrance. Special Condition 2 is included to ensure the accessible option meets building code requirements:

Special Condition 2: The concrete pads shall provide the minimum accessible route clearance and maneuvering space in accordance with the most current California Building Code, and the top of the concrete surface shall be flush with the existing pathway.

Coastal Access

The scenic viewer binoculars would be placed in locations that experience intense public access to the coast, which is visited by thousands of tourists yearly. The locations would be within at least 40' of the main trail where there are existing recreational amenities. They would be 980' from the north parking lot and 106' from the south parking lot. The surrounding headlands offer exceptional coastal access, which would not be impeded by the binoculars. The proposed binoculars are public amenities which would facilitate public access for people who wish to enjoy the views of the ocean, cliffsides and birdlife more closely.

DESIGN REVIEW AND VISUAL ANALYSIS

Design Review approval requires the Planning Commission first find that the project, as proposed or with changes resulting from the review process and/or conditions of approval, complies with all applicable criteria identified in ILDUC Subsection 18.71.050.F *Project review criteria*:

1. *Complies with the purpose and requirements of ILUDC Subsection 18.71.050.F;*
2. *Provides architectural design, building massing, and scale appropriate to and compatible with the site surroundings and the community;*
3. *Provides attractive and desirable site layout and design, including building arrangement, exterior appearance and setbacks, drainage, fences and walls, grading, landscaping, lighting, signs, etc.;*

4. *Provides efficient and safe public access, circulation, and parking;*
5. *Provides appropriate open space and landscaping, including the use of water efficient landscaping;*
6. *Is consistent with the General Plan, any applicable specific plan; and*
7. *Complies and is consistent with the City's Design Guidelines.*

As analyzed below, these findings can be made.

The following Design Guidelines are not applicable to this project: Massing, elevations & articulations, architectural form and detail, roof form, windows doors and entries, lighting, site planning, materials, landscaping, fencing, site amenities, pedestrian circulation and circulation and parking standards. The table below analyzes the project relative to colors per the Design Guidelines:

Design Review Analysis Table	
Citywide Design Guideline (2022)	Compliance Analysis
Colors – Applicable Preferred Standards 2. <i>Colors west of Highway 1 should recede in the view shed or be subordinate to the view shed. Dark earth tone colors are preferred where the view shed is dark and lighter earth tone colors may be preferred where the background is lighter.</i> 3. <i>Colors should visually relate building elements to each other, and also individual facades to each other. The colors chosen for a building façade should complement neighboring facades (but should not replicate).</i> 4. <i>Color should be used as an important design element in the development's appearance.</i>	There are no mandatory standards for color. The scenic viewer binoculars come in a range of colors. The color choice that best complies with the lighter earth tone colors of this view shed is the Sierra Tan. (Attachment 5)

Site Furniture

The project will not include site furniture.

Fencing

The project would not include fencing.

Landscaping

The project includes no landscaping.

COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PERMIT FINDINGS

1. The proposed development as described in the application and accompanying materials, as modified by any conditions of approval, is in conformity with the City of Fort Bragg's certified Local Coastal Program and will not adversely affect coastal resources;
2. The project is in conformity with the public access and recreation policies of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act of 1976 (commencing with Sections 30200 of the Public Resources Code);
3. Feasible mitigation measures and/or alternatives have been incorporated to substantially lessen any significant adverse effects of the development on the environment;
4. The proposed use is consistent with the purposes of the zone in which the site is located;
5. The proposed development is in conformance with the City of Fort Bragg's Coastal General Plan;
6. The proposed location of the use and conditions under which it may be operated or maintained will not be detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, or materially injurious to properties or improvements in the vicinity;
7. Services, including but not limited to, water supply, sewage disposal, solid waste, and public roadway capacity have been considered and are adequate to serve the proposed development;
8. The project, as proposed, will neither be subject to nor increase instability of the site or structural integrity from geologic, flood, or fire hazards due to project design, location on the site, or other reasons;
9. The project, as conditioned, will not have significant adverse impacts on site stability or structural integrity from geologic, flood, or fire hazards due to required project modifications, landscaping, or other conditions;
10. There are no alternatives to development that would avoid or substantially lessen impacts on site stability or structural integrity;
11. The resource as identified will not be significantly degraded by the proposed development;
12. There is no feasible less environmentally damaging alternative; and
13. All feasible mitigation measures capable of reducing or eliminating project related impacts have been adopted.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS

1. Best Management Practices (BMPs) shall be employed during construction activities to minimize any potential negative impacts to, and protection of, nearby biological resources. BMPs shall be submitted with the building permit for approval by the Director.
2. The concrete pads shall provide the minimum accessible route clearance and maneuvering space in accordance with the most current California Building Code, and the top of the concrete surface shall be flush with the existing pathway.

STANDARD CONDITIONS

1. This action shall become final on the 11th calendar day following the decision unless an appeal to the City Council is filed pursuant to CLUDC Chapter 17.92 - Appeals.

2. The use and occupancy of the premises shall be established and maintained in conformance with the requirements of this permit and all applicable provisions of the CLUDC.
3. The application, along with supplemental exhibits and related material, shall be considered elements of this permit, and compliance therewith is mandatory, unless an amendment has been approved by the City.
4. This permit shall be subject to the securing of all necessary permits for the proposed development from City, County, State, and Federal agencies having jurisdiction. All plans submitted with the required permit applications shall be consistent with this approval. All construction shall be consistent with all Building, Fire, and Health code considerations as well as other applicable agency codes.
5. The applicant shall secure all required building permits for the proposed project as required by the Mendocino County Building Department.
6. If any person excavating or otherwise disturbing the earth discovers any archaeological site during project construction, the following actions shall be taken: 1) cease and desist from all further excavation and disturbances within 25 feet of the discovery; 2) notify the Fort Bragg Community Development Department within 24 hours of the discovery; and 3) retain a professional archaeologist to determine appropriate action in consultation with stakeholders such as Native American groups that have ties to the area.
7. This permit shall be subject to revocation or modification upon a finding of any one or more of the following:
 - (a) That such permit was obtained or extended by fraud.
 - (b) That one or more of the conditions upon which such permit was granted have been violated.
 - (c) That the use for which the permit was granted is so conducted as to be detrimental to the public health, welfare, or safety or as to be a nuisance.
 - (d) A final judgment of a court of competent jurisdiction has declared one or more conditions to be void or ineffective, or has enjoined or otherwise prohibited the enforcement or operation of one or more conditions.
8. Unless a condition of approval or other provision of the Land Use and Development Code establishes a different time limit, any permit or approval not exercised within 24 months of approval shall expire and become void, except where an extension of time is approved in compliance with CLUDC Subsection 17.76.070B.
9. The applicant shall defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the City, its agents, officers, and employees from any claims, actions or proceedings, damages, costs (including without limitation attorneys' fees), injuries, or liabilities against the City or its agents, officers, or employees arising out of the City's approval of the CEQA determination (list); and following approvals (list). The applicant agrees to defend the City at the City's request and with counsel satisfactory to the City. The City shall promptly notify the applicant of any claim, action, or proceeding and the City shall cooperate fully in the defense. The City may, at its sole discretion, participate in the defense of any action with the attorneys of its own choosing, but such participation shall not relieve the applicant of any obligation under this condition, including the payment of attorneys' fees.

FISCAL IMPACT/FUNDING SOURCE

Up to \$16,000 excluding site work, installation and permitting costs. This includes two stations with the accessible option. The City would need to install two small concrete pads, which would likely be contracted out, thereby increasing the cost by approximately \$5,000. Shipping and Handling is factored in at a roughly estimated \$815. Blue Zones Project (BZP) would contribute the cost of the equipment. For approval, they would require a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Fort Bragg to ensure equipment maintenance after purchase. The MOU would include term/date details, costs, binocular details, City project planning approval, Blue Zones promotion requirements, i.e. donation plaque, etc. To receive funds, the city would be set up as a vendor with BZP, unless they purchase the equipment directly from the manufacturer. Costs over and above the equipment amount would come from the General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

CEQA Exemptions

This project requires discretionary approval from the City, therefore, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c), this activity is potentially considered a project under CEQA. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(a), the lead agency (in this case, the City of Fort Bragg) must determine whether the project is exempt from CEQA.

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b), a project is exempt from CEQA if:

- (1) The project is exempt by statute (see, e.g. Article 18, commencing with Section 15260).
- (2) The project is exempt pursuant to a categorical exemption (see Article 19, commencing with Section 15300 [of the CEQA Guidelines]) and the application of that categorical exemption is not barred by one of the exceptions set forth in Section 15300.2.
- (3) The activity is covered by the common sense exemption that CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA.
- (4) The project will be rejected or disapproved by a public agency. (See Section 15270(b)).
- (5) The project is exempt pursuant to the provisions of Article 12.5 of this Chapter.

The installation of the scenic viewer binoculars and associated concrete pad would be categorically exempt from CEQA as accessory structures.

Section 15303.e – Accessory Structures

Class 3 consists of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures; installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures; and the conversion of existing small structures from one use to another where only minor modifications are made in the exterior of the structure. The numbers of structures described in this section are the maximum allowable on any legal parcel. Examples of this exemption include but are not limited to:

- (a) One single-family residence, or a second dwelling unit in a residential zone. In urbanized areas, up to three single-family residences may be constructed or converted under this exemption.*
- (b) A duplex or similar multi-family residential structure totaling no more than four dwelling units. In urbanized areas, this exemption applies to apartments, duplexes, and similar structures designed for not more than six dwelling units.*
- (c) A store, motel, office, restaurant or similar structure not involving the use of significant amounts of hazardous substances, and not exceeding 2500 square feet in floor area. In urbanized areas, the exemption also applies to up to four such commercial buildings not exceeding 10,000 square feet in floor area on sites zoned for such use if not involving the use of significant amounts of hazardous substances where all necessary public services and facilities are available and the surrounding area is not environmentally sensitive.*
- (d) Water main, sewage, electrical, gas, and other utility extensions, including street improvements, of reasonable length to serve such construction.*
- (e) Accessory (appurtenant) structures including garages, carports, patios, swimming pools, and fences.*
- (f) An accessory steam sterilization unit for the treatment of medical waste at a facility occupied by a medical waste generator, provided that the unit is installed and operated in accordance with the Medical Waste Management Act (Section 117600, et seq., of the Health and Safety Code) and accepts no offsite waste.*

Section 15311 – Accessory Structures

Class 11 consists of construction, or placement of minor structures accessory to (appurtenant to) existing commercial, industrial, or institutional facilities, including but not limited to:

- a) On-premise signs;*
- b) Small parking lots;*

- c) *Placement of seasonal or temporary use items such as lifeguard towers, mobile food units, portable restrooms, or similar items in generally the same locations from time to time in publicly owned parks, stadiums, or other facilities designed for public use.*

The project is consistent with § 15303.e and 15311 and 15061(b)(3) because the scenic viewer binoculars are small structures that would be accessory to the existing Coastal Trail and will not significantly impact a sensitive environmental resource. Thus, the accessory structures exemptions can be applied.

Common Sense Exemption

The activity is covered by the common sense exemption because as conditioned, it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment.

STRATEGIC PLAN/COUNCIL PRIORITIES/GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

General Plan Policy OS-17.3 Recreational Facilities: Provide recreational facilities to meet the needs of all Fort Bragg citizens, especially children and teenagers.

Strategic Goal 4: Enhance public spaces, promote recreation, and cultivate civic pride.

Strategic Goal 4E: Expand, improve, and repair parks, green spaces, and urban forests to encourage nature-immersed recreation.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- CDC discussion March 3 and June 2, 2025
- Coastal Trail Binocular Demonstration Event on March 15, 2025
- Coastal Trail Binocular Survey initiated March 15, 2025
- City Council Conduct of Business Item on August 25, 2025, with opportunity for public input

COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Initiated through the Community Development Committee. See background section.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Continue the public hearing to allow for additional information or analysis prior to a decision.
2. Continue the public hearing to a date certain with direction to staff to bring a Resolution denying Coastal Development Permit 7-25 (CDP 7-25) and Design Review 6-25 (DR 6-25) for the installation of scenic viewer binoculars in two locations along the Coastal Trail
3. Provide other direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. CDP 7-25, DR 5-25 Approval Resolution
2. Community Wide Binocular Survey
3. City Council Staff Report 08252025
4. Pinnacle Scopes Models, Parts and Installation
5. Colors

NOTIFICATION:

“Notify Me” subscriber lists