



Noyo Center for Marine Science - Noyo Headlands Property

Background

After the Georgia Pacific lumber mill closed in 2002, the City of Fort Bragg conducted a community visioning & planning process for the Mill Site that identified two primary community priorities:

1. Public access to the 3-1/2 miles of coastline that had been behind locked gates for the last 100 years
2. Establishment of a marine science center that takes advantage of the extraordinary opportunity offered by the former mill site property, that helps transition our community from an extractive to a restoration economy, and that creates living wage jobs to help replace those lost when the mill closed.

In 2005, with a \$4.16 million grant from the State Coastal Conservancy and a generous donation of land from Georgia Pacific, the City of Fort Bragg entered into agreements to acquire approximately 95 acres of land comprising the entire coastline of the former mill site for use and protection as Noyo Headlands Park. In 2009, the property was transferred to the City, after receiving environmental clearance from the State Department of Toxic Substances Control. Subsequently, in 2014, the park was expanded to approximately 135 acres with the acquisition of the "Johnson Property," this too funded by the Coastal Conservancy. These acquisitions included recordation on each deed of an Irrevocable Offer to Dedicate Title in Fee and Declaration of Restrictive Covenants ("OTD") for the purposes of restricting use of the property to public access and natural resources, open space and scenic protection.

In 2011, with another grant from the State Coastal Conservancy and funding from the City's Redevelopment Agency, the City acquired an additional 11.64 acres from Georgia-Pacific to:

...develop the currently undeveloped Property as the "Noyo Center" to promote the study of and educate the public with regard to marine and terrestrial environments in the Mendocino Coast Region of California or, alternatively to develop the Property for marine education and research, open space, public access, or passive recreation uses (the "acquisition purposes").¹

When title to the 11.64-acre parcel was transferred to the City, an OTD was recorded in favor of the State Coastal Conservancy which requires that the City and its assigns and successors in interest:

...permanently dedicate the real property for open space, public access, passive recreation and marine education and marine research.²

¹ Agreement to Repay Grant and Pledge of Tax Increment Revenue; signed by City of Fort Bragg, Fort Bragg Redevelopment Agency, State Coastal Conservancy, dated March 9, 2011.

² Irrevocable Offer to Dedicate Title in Fee and Declaration of Restrictive Covenants, dated November 15, 2011.

The OTD further describes the use of the property for "marine education and research" purposes as follow:

...use of the property for "marine education and research" purposes extends to the development of improvements and facilities that will provide for increased access to and awareness and knowledge of marine and coastal resources. Such improvements and facilities include: an education center such as a museum, visitor center, or classroom building; a research laboratory with associated housing for researchers; and associated utilities and access infrastructure. These facilities and improvements are enumerated by way of example only and are not an exhaustive list of permitted or unpermitted improvement and facilities but may be used to illustrate the types of improvements and facilities contemplated as being consistent with "marine education and research."

In 2020, the City of Fort Bragg transferred title to the Noyo Center parcel to the Noyo Center for Marine Sciences, with a provision retaining a "power of termination" whereby title to the property could revert to the City if the Noyo Center fails to prepare new conceptual plans and raise at least \$3 million for construction of a marine science center building or buildings with a value of at least \$5 million by July 7, 2030.

Status of the Ocean Science Center Project

In 2024, the Noyo Center engaged the services of a talented design team led by the San Francisco-based architecture firm Esherick Homsey Dodge and Davis ("EHDD"). EHDD is well known for their work on aquaria and science centers throughout our country. For this project, they have teamed up with SCAPE landscape architects, Sherwood Design Engineers, and a team of other design professionals. Notably, EHDD is also preparing the Noyo Center Blue Economy Feasibility Study with that work led by Don Perkins, who recently retired as the founding executive director of the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. The deliverables for the process include an updated site master plan and conceptual design for the Ocean Science Center, basic schematic design plans, a construction cost estimate, fundraising materials for a capital campaign, a Blue Economy feasibility study and an operational business plan.

On September 23, 2024, the Noyo Center and its design team will provide an update to the City Council on the status of our ongoing work on the Ocean Science Center project. The presentation will include an update on the conceptual designs for the facility and the next steps in moving the project forward. We welcome your questions, suggestions, and input!

We are planning a community forum at our Marine Field Station in October to obtain additional community input on the conceptual plans for the Ocean Science Center.

The "Property Swap"

One issue that the City Council and the Noyo Center have discussed many times over the past several years is the need for a "property swap" between the Noyo Center parcel and the Noyo Headlands Park property. A reconfiguration of the parcel boundaries is needed for the following reasons:

- The Noyo Center Parcel does not extend to the "runway" which results in suboptimal access and siting for the Ocean Science Center.

- The Noyo Center Parcel is bisected by a linear wetland ditch that is a jurisdictional wetland requiring 100' buffers. This presents siting challenges for Ocean Science Center facilities.
- The Noyo Center Parcel includes a segment of the road that provides access to the City's wastewater treatment facility as well as property to the north of the road upon which a portion of the Coastal Trail is located.

Based on the above, in previous discussions, the City Council has voiced support for a property swap or boundary adjustment. Because both the Noyo Headlands Park property and the Noyo Center property have OTDs in favor of the Coastal Conservancy, the Conservancy must approve of such a transfer. In recent months, the Conservancy has confirmed that it is possible for them to sign off on a property swap whereby the City transfers land to the Noyo Center that is between the existing Noyo Center parcel and the former runway in exchange for the Noyo Center transferring to the City an equal portion of the Noyo Center property that can be restricted under the existing Park OTD. The Noyo Center property to be transferred includes a portion that is planned for wetland restoration that is located along the northern portion of the property adjoining the Park parcel.

Exhibit A shows the preliminary conceptual plan for the Noyo Center.

Exhibit B shows the constraints and wetland restoration concept overlain on a parcel map that shows a possible swap with the area within the green lines denoting the future boundaries of the Noyo Center campus. The polygon to the east of the runway (which is mostly pink) would be transferred from the Park to the Noyo Center. The triangle-shaped area to the north is the portion of the Noyo Center property that would be deeded to the Park.

The Process

As the Noyo Center wraps up its conceptual design process for the Ocean Science Center and prior to moving forward with the schematic design plans, we request that the City and the Coastal Conservancy work with us to formalize a property transfer agreement.

The property swap can be accomplished by the City and Noyo Center entering into a property transfer agreement that includes concurrence from the Coastal Conservancy. In this process, new surveyed metes and bounds property descriptions for the two parcels will be prepared. The transfer of property would occur through the recordation of new grant deeds for the Noyo Center and City parcels, with accompanying OTDs and legal descriptions, in accordance with Gov't Code section 66426.5 which governs conveyances of land to or from a public entity.

In conjunction with the property swap, the Noyo Center will also seek a partnership agreement with the City that enables the Noyo Center to perform wetland restoration and other restoration work on Park property adjoining the Noyo Center site.

Exhibit A - Preliminary Conceptual Plan for Noyo Center



Exhibit B: Site constraints and Wetlands Restoration Concept

