City Manager's Office

November 6, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Re: Berkeley Pier-Ferry Project Frequently Asked Questions

The Final Berkeley Pier-Ferry Project Environmental Impact Report has been published and will be considered by Council on November 17, 2026. The purpose of this off-agenda memo is to address frequently asked comments and questions staff have received during the public process.

A. Most Commonly Asked Questions

1. Has the City engaged existing Waterfront users and the public on this Project?

Yes.

Since 2021, the City has held more than 60 public outreach events to gather input from the public and stakeholders on the Project. During the feasibility phase in 2021, the City held three focus groups, three community workshops, an online public survey, and two City Council work-sessions. During the design phase (2024 - current), the City conducted seven in-person parking surveys of Waterfront visitors, which collected 455 responses. The City held more than 20 focus group meetings with community, business, environmental, and recreation groups, including three meetings with board sailors and swimmers regarding access at the Seawall Peninsula. The Project was presented to the Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Commission five times, as well as to the Transportation & Infrastructure Commission, the Facilities, Infrastructure, Transportation, Environmental & Sustainability City Council Policy Committee, the Youth Commission, BCDC's Design Review Board and BCDC's Engineering Criteria Review Board. All commission, committee and BCDC meetings were publicly noticed to encourage public participation. In May 2026, the City published the Draft Parking Management Implementation Plan and invited more than 150 members of the public, stakeholders, and regulators to comment. The City conducted targeted outreach to commercial and charter boat operators, held three focus group meetings with commercial tenants, slipholders, and Waterfront recreation organizations, and held two public meetings: one online and one at the

July 2026 Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Commission meeting. In addition, the City consulted with two Native American Tribes (Confederated Villages of Lisjan and Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area) as part of the Assembly Bill 52 process. The City met with representatives from these Native American Tribes several times and incorporated their recommendations as five mitigation measures in the EIR.

Public feedback has meaningfully informed the design of the Project from the feasibility stage continuing through detailed design, including the location and configuration of the pier, location and configuration of the ferry landing and ferry operations, plaza design and amenities, access and circulation improvements to the roadways and pathways, pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements, improvements to amenities for both shoreline and in-water recreation visitors, incorporation of public art, and parking management measures.

2. What is the public review process for the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and why is the timeframe between final publication and City Council review only two weeks?

The City began the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) environmental review process in April 2025 by publishing a Notice of Preparation and holding a public scoping meeting on May 5, 2025, to gather input on the scope of the EIR. The Draft EIR was published on February 27, 2026, for a 45-day public review period, as required by state law. The City extended the review period by 15 days, to April 28, 2026, for a total of 60 days. The City held an online public meeting on the Draft EIR on March 16, 2026, to allow for additional public comment.

The City published the Final EIR on the Project website on November 3, 2026[1]. There is no public review or comment period required for the Final EIR. A primary purpose of a Final EIR is to respond to public comments. The City published the Final EIR as soon as it was able to fully respond to all comments received on the Draft EIR, including comments from public agencies. As explained in the Final EIR, none of these responses indicated the need to revise any of the analysis or conclusions in the Draft EIR. Therefore, the Draft EIR's analysis and conclusions regarding the potential environmental impacts of the project remain current and the public has had ample time to examine them.

Additionally, the City's existing grant agreements require completion of CEQA review by December 2026 in order to comply with grant deadlines. Delaying until December 2026 City Council meetings risks failing to meet these requirements.

[1] https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/BWTPF_Final-EIR_Reduced-PRNT-FINAL.pdf

3. How does Measure L apply to the Project?

As discussed in the Draft EIR and in the Final EIR (see Topical Response 2.2.16), the proposed Project is consistent with Measure L. Measure L was passed by City of Berkeley voters in the November 1986 election. Measure L provides that public parks and open space owned or controlled by the City shall not be used for any other purpose without a vote by the public during a general election. "Public parks" are defined as City of Berkeley parks, public school playgrounds, or lands held in trust by a public entity that have been formally dedicated to permanent recreational use by the City of Berkeley and funded for recreational use by City of Berkeley public funds. "Public open space" is defined as all City of Berkeley parks, public school playgrounds, and vacant public land, whether formally dedicated to park use or being used de facto as open space with recreational use or potential use on or after January 1, 1985 (BMC Section 6.42.030).

The Project includes renovation of an existing parking lot, improvements to the existing public plaza, construction of a new segment of Bay Trail, the addition of a cycle-track on University Avenue, and the construction of a new pier and breakwater that will be open to the public. The landside improvements will not be within a public park: the parking lot improvements would be to an existing parking lot, the existing public plaza would be enhanced, and the Bay Trail would be extended. Similarly, the ferry facility and charging infrastructure are proposed within open Bay waters, which are State waters and not a City park or open space. Further, these improvements all facilitate and improve recreation and public access—therefore, the character of these areas will not change.

4. Will the project remove water access at the former HS Lordships building (199 Seawall Drive) or other shoreline locations?

No. The Project includes no construction that permanently blocks or degrades access to the existing shoreline, including the unimproved launch point at the southern tip of the Seawall peninsula. The Project adds amenities in this location to support the existing water access activities, including seating, bike parking, trash cans, a small boardsailing equipment laydown area, picnic tables, and rinse stations. Ferries will operate only north of the pier, away from this area. During Project construction access to this area may be temporarily impacted, but access will be maintained throughout construction to the maximum extent possible.

5. Will ferry riders take parking spaces currently used by recreation visitors?

No. There is sufficient parking for both recreation visitors and future ferry riders at the Berkeley Waterfront. In order to manage parking more efficiently, a shared parking management plan will be implemented, consistent with BCDC’s Bay Plan Recreation Policy #9. This Parking and Transportation Demand Management

plan clearly demonstrates that there is parking capacity for shared use among ferry riders and recreation visitors at the Berkeley Waterfront. It also identifies transportation demand management strategies that have been incorporated into the Project, such as the University Avenue cycle track, expanded bicycle parking, improvements to the AC Transit stop, safety improvements for pedestrians, and dedicated rideshare loading zones. To further address concerns over parking availability, the City proposes using time-limited parking as one of the shared parking management tools to further ensure that ferry commuters (i.e. all-day parking) do not occupy parking spaces needed for recreation visitors (shorter duration parking). Refer to the Final EIR, Topical Response 2.2.20, Parking for further discussion.

6. Did the EIR consider an in-Marina ferry alternative, and does that alternative reduce dredging or other environmental impacts?

The EIR considered a ferry terminal inside the Marina Harbor and rejected it. That option would remove at least eight existing boat slips, creating a new, permanent, direct adverse impact on existing recreational resources. This is based on an analysis conducted in 2008; detailed design of this alternative could require the removal of additional slips. The loss of boat slips would not only permanently reduce recreational boating opportunities but would also directly reduce the slip fee revenue that funds Marina operations and maintenance. Furthermore, an in-Marina alternative would relocate the parking demand from the under-utilized Seawall and Skates/N Parking Lots to the South Cove and J&K Parking lots, which are the parking lots most used by water recreation visitors. With such an option, the Project would no longer require replacement of the closed pier, so the old pier would remain closed with no new pier, plaza, or Bay Trail improvements. Ferries would have to maneuver inside a busy marina with a 5 mph speed limit, adding about 5 to 10 minutes to each trip and reducing reliability. Therefore, WETA has determined that an in-Marina terminal is operationally infeasible.

An in-Marina alternative would not reduce dredging or other environmental impacts. The San Franscico Bay outside of the Berkeley Marina Harbor is relatively shallow. A WETA ferry vessel serving any location at the Berkeley Waterfront, including inside of the Berkeley Marina Harbor, will require a dredged approach channel. A WETA ferry vessel would also need a widened dredged area outside of the Harbor to safely maneuver around other boat traffic entering and exiting the Habor. For these reasons, the in-Marina alternative would require about the same amount of dredging as the proposed Project.

In addition, an in-Marina ferry landing would not reduce structures placed in the Bay, because the old pier would remain and new ferry landing structures would be added. It would also create new conflicts with existing boaters inside the Marina Harbor.

7. How much will the project cost to construct?

The current total construction phase cost estimate for the Project is $139 million. This cost estimate escalates the construction cost estimate provided by design engineers in 2026 based on the 60% design to Spring 2028, and includes additional estimated costs for contingency, design adjustments, construction management, project management, and special inspections. The cost estimate does not include the cost of electric vessels or solar panels.

Construction funding has not yet been identified. The City anticipates that construction will be funded primarily through future grant awards from regional, state, and federal sources, and that the Project may be constructed in phases as funding becomes available. The EIR does not evaluate project costs, because state environmental law (CEQA) addresses environmental impacts, not cost.

8. Will the City have to pay for ferry operations?

No. City of Berkeley funds will not be used to subsidize WETA ferry operations.

9. How is the project funded, and what are the City's and WETA's cost shares?

The current design and environmental phase of the Project is funded through a combination of WETA and grant funding, including the following:

- $2,960,900 from the State Coastal Conservancy;
- $5,139,000 from the Alameda County Transportation Commission, and
- $3,000,000 of WETA RM3 funds under the City-WETA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

The current agreement between the City and WETA includes the funding plan for design and environmental review and permitting. Future funding commitments will be finalized in future agreements between the City and WETA, and depend on securing grant funding from local, state and/or federal sources.

In general, the City is focusing efforts on identifying external funding for public access and recreation elements, and WETA is focusing efforts on identifying funding for ferry-related parts of the project, including one-time dredging. The City has recently applied for a grant to fund all of the landside improvements including the plaza, University Avenue cycle track, Seawall Drive, and the Bay Trail. The City and WETA will coordinate to identify and pursue funding for the shared elements of the Project.

10. Is the City's current plan to implement paid parking at certain parking lots at the Waterfront related to the Pier-Ferry Project?

No. In 2025, City Council approved new parking fees for the South Cove East, South Cove West, and J/K Lots at the Berkeley Waterfront; the City is in the process of implementing this paid parking program as one of multiple strategies to address the Marina Fund's structural budget deficit. The Pier-Ferry Project does not rely on, nor influence this current paid parking program. This paid parking program would happen regardless of the Project.

B. Project Background & Status

11. What is the current status and next steps for the Pier-Ferry Project?

The Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was published on November 3, 2026. It includes responses to all comments received on the Draft EIR, and clarifying revisions to text. The City Council will hold a public hearing and consider the following actions: certification of the Final EIR (including adoption of the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Plan, Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations), issuance of a Use Permit, and approval of the Project. If the Project is approved, the City will complete final design and obtain permits from regulatory agencies, including but not limited to the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, before construction can begin. Construction funding has not been identified, and both the City and the San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA, which operates San Francisco Bay Ferry) are monitoring grant funding opportunities for construction.

12. What is the schedule for construction and start of ferry service?

The EIR assumed April 2027 as the start of construction for environmental review purposes. Based on permitting timelines, if funding is secured, construction could begin by spring 2028 and ferry service could start by the end of 2030. This schedule depends on funding, permits, final design, and the contractor bidding process. Due to the nature of grant funding sources, the Project may be built in several phases.

13. What is planned for the remaining portions of the existing pier?

The original pier, built for ferry service in 1927, extended about 3 miles westward from the shoreline. After ferry services ceased in 1937, the pier slowly became derelict. The first 3,000 feet of the Pier was rehabilitated for public access in 1961 and was closed in 2015 for public safety due to structural deterioration. This

Project would remove about 1,280 feet of the closed pier to build a new 1,080-foot pier in the same location. A Breakwater will also be constructed and available for public access. Additional portions of the closed pier may be removed, as approved by permitting agencies, so that the Project results in no net increase in Bay fill.

14. How does the project relate to the Draft Waterfront Specific Plan?

The Draft Waterfront Specific Plan (WSP) is a long-range plan (25 to 50 years) for the Berkeley Waterfront. The development of the Draft WSP began in 2020, and included a public process (questionnaires, focus group meetings, community workshops and City Council Work Session) between 2020-2024. The WSP remains in Draft form, and currently no funding has been identified for future updates or environmental analysis of the Draft WSP. Because the Draft WSP has not been adopted by City Council, its policies do not currently apply to the Project. Rather, this Project is advancing irrespective of the Draft WSP and does not rely on the implementation of the Draft WSP in any way. The two are separate projects for all practical purposes and for purposes of CEQA analysis.

Regardless, the Cumulative Impacts section of the Pier-Ferry Project EIR conservatively assumed adoption of the maximum development scenario described in the Draft WSP.

The Project Parking and Transportation Demand Management Plan also analyzed the maximum development scenario described in the Draft WSP.

15. How does the project address sea level rise?

The new pier and breakwater are designed for a 50-year life. After review by BCDC's independent engineering criteria review board (ECRB), the design was updated to plan for 3 feet of sea level rise using the Intermediate-High scenario established by the state's 2024 California Sea Level Rise Guidance. The elevation of the new pier will be approximately 17 feet, and the Pier Plaza will be raised to approximately 16 feet in elevation. Design engineers found that all Project structures remain functional and safe through 2100 under that scenario, with only minor wave splash. The ferry boarding floats rise and fall with the tide and are not affected by sea-level rise.

C. Ferry Service and Operations

16. What destinations, schedule, and service frequency are planned?

WETA has published a Business Plan for the Berkeley Ferry service[2] and will update this plan as the project proceeds. Based on the current plan, on weekdays, WETA plans to operate two electric ferries between Berkeley and San Francisco. Service would include at least three round trips during the morning and evening commute period, with ferries arriving at their destination about every 35 minutes in the peak direction. The trip to San Francisco takes about 25 minutes. On weekends, ferries would serve San Francisco about every 70 to 110 minutes. Special event service, such as for Chase Center or Oracle Park, may also be offered. WETA will set final schedules. Regarding the Berkeley to Larkspur route, although WETA's Berkeley Ferry Service Business Plan, Version 1.0 does identify weekend service to Larkspur, additional project planning by other entities (e.g. WETA, City of Larkspur, and/or the Golden Gate Bridge Highway & Transportation District) would be needed to provide this service. Specifically, the range of electric vessels may not yet allow for service to Larkspur and additional infrastructure may be necessary to dock electric ferry vessels in Larkspur. For these reasons, Larkspur service is not currently planned and would be subject to additional environmental review if it were to be proposed for implementation.

17. How many people are expected to ride the ferry?

WETA projects about 955 people making a round trip in the first year of service. Ridership is projected to grow to up to 1,160 round-trip riders in twenty years of service, including Mission Bay Service.

18. Will the ferries be electric?

Yes. The EIR evaluated only electric ferries. WETA has already launched an initiative to electrify their entire ferry fleet in San Francisco Bay over the next ten years. See the following webpage for more details about this initiative:

https://www.sfbayferry.com/wetas-transition-to-zero-emission-ferries/

19. Can ferries operate safely in Berkeley's wind and wave conditions?

Yes. Licensed coastal engineers designed the pier and breakwater using site-specific current and historical data on wind and waves. BCDC's independent engineering criteria review board (ECRB) reviewed the design twice. Ferries are built with backup propulsion systems, and crews are trained for emergencies.

[2] https://d262kwcyxl71on.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/20240926061356/Item-8A-Berkeley-Ferry-Service-Business-Plan.pdf

WETA operates under U.S. Coast Guard oversight and follows safety rules that suspend service when wind and wave conditions are unsafe. The design also includes pile fenders to protect the pier, shoreline restaurant (Skates), and dock floats during docking.

20. How does WETA ensure that ferries do not hit whales in the Bay?

WETA is committed to avoiding vessel strikes of marine mammals and collaborates closely with the Marine Mammal Center to ensure that they are employing protocols to minimize marine mammal disturbance and the risk of vessel strikes. These measures are informed by current scientific advancements and guidance from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Current protocols include monitoring and real-time reporting, speed reduction procedures when marine mammals are observed or reported, operator training, and communication with resource agencies. WETA continues to update and refine protocols as new information or technologies become available. In 2025 WETA initiated new protective measures in coordination with the US Coast Guard Vessel Traffic Service (VTS), and in 2026, WETA implemented a new pilot program with the San Francisco Harbor Safety Committee Marina Mammals Subcommittee and the Marine Mammal Center called Whale Smart that builds on existing protective measures with new training and practices. Refer to the Final EIR, Topical Response 2.2.28 for further discussion.

D. Alternative Projects

21. Why can’t the existing pier be repaired or replaced for recreation access only?

The City analyzed the cost to repair the Pier. Cost estimates for different alternatives ranged from $22 million - $65 million (in 2023 dollars) to rehabilitate or retrofit the Pier. The rehabilitation alternatives would have only provided an additional 10 years of life for the Pier before additional repairs were required, and this cost did not include any improvements related to accessibility, seismic safety, or emergency access. Since that time, the concrete and steel has continued to corrode, parts of the pier have collapsed, and current design engineers have informed the City that the structure has reached the end of its useful life.

The EIR considered a Pier-only alternative but rejected it because it did not meet the project objective of providing efficient, zero-emission ferry service at the Berkeley Waterfront. Based on the 60% design estimate, the construction cost to build just the Pier and Plaza (no breakwater or ferry facilities) is $29.8 million (based on the 2026 60% design estimate, escalated to 2028 dollars and inclusive of additional estimated costs for contingency, design adjustments, construction management, project management, and special inspections).

22. Why hasn't the City considered other ferry locations like Gilman Street, Eastshore State Park, Golden Gate Fields, etc.?

The City did consider these locations, and the EIR explains why each was rejected. For example, a ferry landing at the foot of Gilman Street would be inside Eastshore State Park, in more sensitive habitat that includes eelgrass, so environmental impacts would increase. Golden Gate Fields (Albany) and the Emeryville Marina are outside Berkeley, so the City has no authority to build or approve a project there. These sites also would not improve the existing derelict pier and would not restore public access to that pier.

E. Parking

23. Is there enough parking to accommodate both ferry riders and recreation visitors?

Yes. The Project's Parking and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan analyzed nearly three years of daily parking counts. It found that although some parking lots at the Waterfront fill up on busy summer days, other parking lots remain under-used even during peak visitation periods. As such, the Study concludes that Waterfront has enough parking for both ferry riders and recreation visitors, even during these peak visitation times. The City has developed a Parking Management Implementation Plan[3] to describe the specific locations where shared use will be allowed, and specific measures to ensure adequate spaces are maintained for recreation (i.e. non-ferry) parking demand.

24. How will parking be managed (time limits, full-day parking, Seawall Lot)?

From time to time, the City updates parking management rules at the Waterfront to best serve the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, needs of the public. The City has published a Parking Management Implementation Plan that outlines the initial and long-term dynamic management tools that will continue to be used to manage shared use among a wide variety of Waterfront visitors, including ferry riders. This Implementation Plan is a living document that will be adjusted over time as parking management needs change. The current plan proposes that full-day parking would be allowed at specific stalls within the Seawall Drive Lot, the Skates/N Lot and on both Marina Blvd. and University Avenue, and either permit or time-limited parking would apply elsewhere in the southern Waterfront parking lots. Time limits may vary, and more spaces can be converted between full-day and time-limited parking as the needs of the public evolve.

[3] https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/Pier-Ferry_Parking-Management-Plan_V2-Published-Nov-2026_FINAL.pdf

25. Will the project create a large surface parking lot on the shoreline, and is that consistent with the Bay Plan?

No new parking lot is proposed. The Project reconfigures the existing Seawall Drive parking areas, which have a total of about 404 spaces, to provide 400 to 450 spaces once the project has been completed. The reconfiguration is entirely within existing parking areas and roadways. The number of parking spaces along the Bay side of Seawall Drive will drop from about 84 spaces to about 33 to make room for the Bay Trail, public seating, picnic tables, and landscaping for both recreation and stormwater treatment. This design approach preserves a reasonable number of parking spots for “in-car Bay Viewing” while prioritizing non-motorized shoreline access along the shoreline area, consistent with the Bay Plan. About 39 trees, most in poor health, would be removed, and 50 to 70 new trees would be planted.

F. Recreation and Public Access

26. What does the existing City ordinance allow and prohibit in the water near the pier, and does the project change it?

An existing City ordinance (BMC 6.20.180) prohibits swimming, wading, and windsurfing in Marina waters, including around the pier, except at Shorebird Park and the South Sailing Basin. Jet skis are prohibited within 1,500 feet of the shoreline and pier, except in a designated corridor. This ordinance has been in place for at least 20 years, and this Project does not change these rules or add any new restrictions.

27. Will fishing be allowed on the new pier and along the shoreline?

Yes. The new pier and breakwater will be open for fishing. Some areas near the ferry boarding facilities may be reserved for passenger boarding. The new pier will include a fish-cleaning station, benches, waste receptacles, and fishing-line recycling bins. The shoreline will also remain open for fishing.

28. Will the project change wind conditions for sailors and windsurfers?

The Project involves removing a berm averaging 4 feet tall and some trees, mostly on the west side of the Seawall parking lot. While the South Sailing Basin, Cal Sailing Club area and public docks are not altered, some Waterfront visitors who use the South Sailing Basin have expressed concern that the removal of the berm and trees could change wind conditions within the South Sailing Basin. The coastal design engineers on the Project have advised the City that this is unlikely, because most of the existing trees on the east side of the Seawall peninsula will remain, 50 to 70 new trees will be planted, and the berm that is being removed is lower in height than most cars that park in the Seawall Parking

Lot. Given these factors, and the berm's height and its distance from the South Sailing Basin, the effect of the berm removal on winds within the South Cove are expected to be insignificant.

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