



October 1, 2019

Dear Ormond Beach Wetlands restoration project partners,

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct focus groups of South Oxnard residents and submit comments on the draft restoration plan. Along with the Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), our focus groups engaged 37 local residents in a range of age groups in English, Spanish and Mixteco.

These focus groups resulted in several learnings for us, which will be detailed below:

1. While participants wanted to access the area, they also wanted to do so in close proximity to their neighborhoods without traveling through the industrial areas or the outskirts of the city. They wanted to see an enhanced entry point at Hueneme Road, which may require significant pedestrian safety improvements on the street.
2. Participants repeatedly expressed a need for more benches, tables, and shade, demonstrating that many desire a place for rest and relaxation, not strenuous outdoor exercise. These facilities are critical to a culturally competent green space for a community where extended family intergenerational social gatherings are important and many individuals work long hours in outdoor manual labor.
3. Participants envisioned a much more expansive role for a visitor center, showing the overall need for more community space in South Oxnard for cultural and educational programming particularly for young people, as well as the community's desire for Ormond Beach as a place for learning about this unfamiliar habitat in their backyard.
4. With many participants' families including young children, they often mentioned a need for children's facilities. An Ormond Beach themed children's playground could meet this need while providing an educational experience to engage younger visitors.
5. Participants often stressed the need for more restrooms in the plan, and in particular noted a need for restrooms with individual enclosed stalls or doors for safety and privacy rather than the open design which some parks and beaches feature.

Other interesting ideas included a mural or public art piece that would cross language and literacy barriers to depict community engaging with the wetlands, cutting trails through the interior of the wetlands rather than along the edge between the wetlands and surrounding industry, and hiring local young people as bilingual staff for safety, stewardship and community education.

Sincerely,

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Policy and Communications Director  
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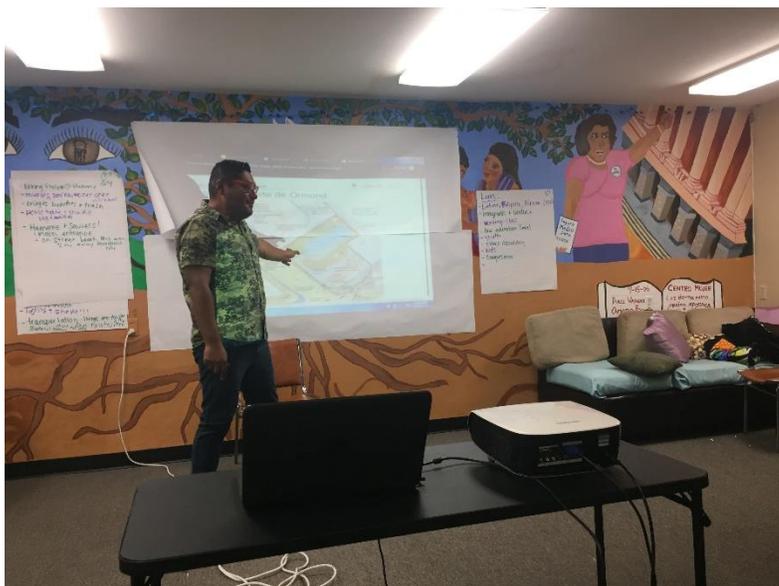
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## Ormond Beach Focus Group Results

From September 20-27<sup>th</sup>, CAUSE and MICOP held focus groups engaging 37 South Oxnard residents in discussions about the draft restoration plan for the Ormond Beach Wetlands. The focus groups included 13 Spanish-speaking adults, 10 Mixteco-speaking adults, 8 bilingual youth, and 6 bilingual young adults. Participants were given a brief presentation on the importance of the coastal wetlands, the current state of the area, the benefits for the community of the restoration, the timeline and process, and the current plans for access points, trails, features, and facilities.



Focus group participants were then asked a series of questions, including “What do you like about this plan?”, “What would make it better?”, “What would make you want to go there?”, “Where and how would you be most likely to get there?”, “What would most appeal to people like you there?”, “What would make you feel comfortable and welcome?”, “What kind of activities should be promoted there?”, “What specific facilities would you like to see more of?”, “What would you like to see moved or in a different location?”, “What barriers are there to you going to or enjoying this area that need to be overcome?”,

“When you close your eyes and imagine a perfect world here, what do you see?”, “What are the 3 most important ideas to you?”.

Focus group members shared ideas of how to make the Ormond Beach Wetlands restoration plan more engaging, accessible, safe and family-friendly. Below are some of the most common themes, followed by a description of each of the focus groups.



## More visible and safer entrance at Hueneme Road

The vast majority of focus group participants mentioned this area as the best entry point for South Oxnard residents, due to its proximity to residential neighborhoods and not needing to travel through industrial areas that feel unpleasant and unsafe. However, many participants also raised a need for improvements here such as crosswalks, signage, and parking. Hueneme Road is a wide street with fast traffic at a 45 mph speed limit, some missing sidewalks, railroad crossings, and few stoplights, which serves as a major freight corridor for heavy duty vehicles. Pedestrian safety is a serious issue throughout the entire restoration area if streets that have primarily been used for industry, often without sidewalks or other basic infrastructure, are going to be frequently used by community members to access green space. The project partners will need to work with the city of Oxnard to redesign this area to provide a safe entry point for local residents. Participants also frequently mentioned the idea of a high visibility mural at this entry point, depicting the South Oxnard community enjoying Ormond Beach, serving as a kind of universal welcome sign across language and literacy barriers.



## More shaded rest areas and picnic tables and benches

Many local residents in South Oxnard see the potential for the Ormond Beach Wetlands as a place of rest and refuge to spend time with their families after a long week of work. Focus group participants repeatedly pointed out a lack of tables and benches in the design as well as a lack of shade or trees.

While many recreational users and naturalists who have participated in the process may be seeking more strenuous hiking, local families often simply want to relax in the shade. Many South Oxnard residents work in physically demanding outdoor industries such as agriculture, construction, and landscaping, and find another day under the hot sun unappealing. Many are also part of intergenerational extended families where social gatherings on the weekends are important. While many participants may be accustomed to a typical park with community grills and trees that may not be compatible with the wetlands habitat restoration, the need is clear for areas with shaded benches and tables in order to meet the needs of local families.



## More planning of programming and staffing of visitor center



A visitor's center is briefly referred to in the plan at Edison and McWane, with little detail about the services it would provide. Focus group participants often envisioned a much more expansive role for a visitor center, including ideas like hiring local youth to serve as multilingual guides, offering community space for events, partnerships with educational institutions to host classes and video screenings, and even an affordable café inside to purchase food.

This expanded visitor center concept was a particular focus among the youth and

young adult focus groups, who saw it as a gathering place to hang out after school and provide more recreational and educational opportunities in South Oxnard. While many of these ideas could take significant resources, many could be met via partnerships with existing organizations and educational institutions.

Additionally, programmatic staffing of a visitor center aligns with the clear need for staffing to provide a feeling of security at Ormond Beach, another of the most common themes mentioned particularly by adult focus groups. While some participants expressed discomfort with police or armed security, many felt that some level of official bilingual staff around would be important to make the area feel safe.



## Ormond Beach themed children's playground and recreational area

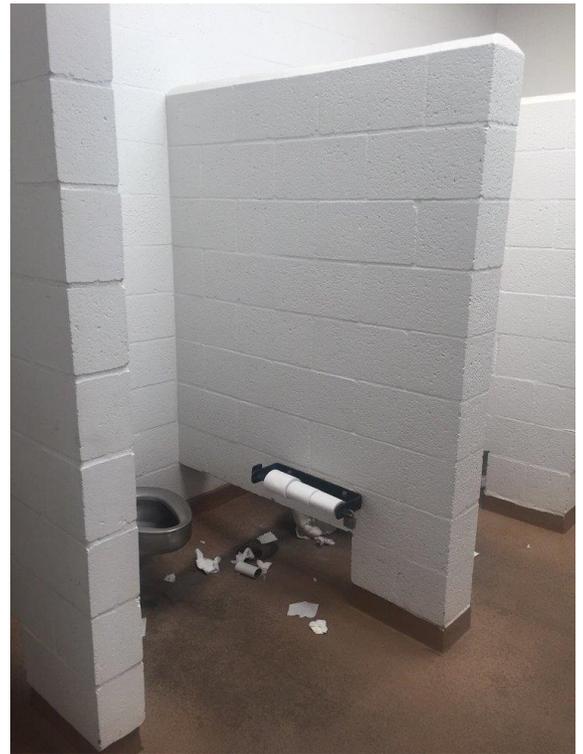
Many of the focus group participants spoke about the need for facilities to engage different age groups, particularly young children. In particular, the adult focus groups often seemed primarily focused on Ormond Beach as a place to bring their children so they could run around outside and play. Ideas for a play area ranged from soccer fields to a place for children to ride bicycles, but one of the lowest impact and most compatible ideas that emerged was an Ormond Beach themed playground.



Play structures shaped like birds, dunes, and other wetlands habitat and species could create an area for children that would be both interactive and educational, and create an unforgettable experience for small children that would keep them returning to Ormond Beach as adults.

## Restrooms that feel enclosed and safe featuring hydration stations

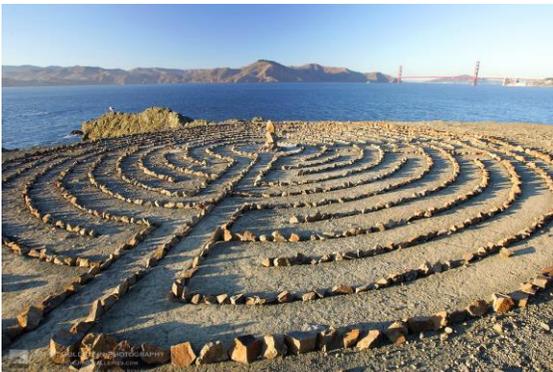
One of the common themes mentioned in making the design more family friendly was more restrooms. Particularly for families with young children, a close accessible bathroom is a necessity. However, focus group respondents repeatedly mentioned a need for doors in the bathrooms. Many have had unpleasant experiences with nearby parks and beaches with open stalls without doors which make them feel unsafe and exposed. Bathrooms with individual enclosed stalls in convenient places throughout the area were particularly important for the adult focus groups. Youth groups also mentioned a desire for hydration stations to refill reusable water bottles, which are becoming increasingly common at local school sites.



## Youth Group (English, 8 participants)

Youth focus group participants focused on design that would be engaging, culturally competent, accessible and educational.

Participants spoke often about what would make the Ormond Beach Wetlands compelling to youth and feel comfortable and welcoming to them. They suggested murals where South Oxnard residents saw themselves represented, with farmworkers, immigrant families, and their community and culture interacting with the ocean, wildlife, and natural habitat, rather than only showing animal and plant life. Some youth saw the restoration of Ormond Beach as part of a broader trend emerging of growing Oxnard community pride by young authors and artists, taking back the negative stigma that has been associated with the city. They spoke to this growing Oxnard pride being expressed in recent years through youth-oriented social media, and felt that design could emphasize a few key places such as murals or scenic vistas that local youth would be likely to snap pictures and promote through social media. Museums and other public spaces are increasingly designing installations for this purpose such as “Instagram Walls”, which not only help provide a more interactive experience for younger audiences but result in organic promotion and advertisement.



Youth also expressed a desire for some places that could be sites of solitude, reflection and relaxation, away from the stress of their daily lives. Whether from the fast pace of daily life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the constant stream of information, or the anxiety of tumultuous social, political, and economic conditions, youth in the focus group expressed a desire for places designed to calm anxiety. They shared ideas including a gazebo for meditation, a rock labyrinth, a space for yoga, or even hanging hammocks.

Local youth also expressed a need for more family-friendly activities. Many shared that they spend weekends as part of large extended and intergenerational immigrant families who lack adequate access to parks and other green space in their neighborhoods for social gatherings. They wanted more areas with benches and picnic tables that were at least partially shaded along with trash and recycling bins. Although the youth focus group understood that higher impact facilities such as barbecue pits could hurt nearby species, they emphasized the need for large family-friendly gathering areas as an important element in designing public space that would be culturally competent for the local community.

The high school aged youth in the focus group also suggested a playground for younger children such as their siblings that could be fun and engaging while being educationally themed around Ormond Beach wetlands habitats and the species that live there.

This focus group also expressed a community need for facilities that would encourage more physical activity and health, such as exercise equipment, or volleyball nets at the beach area. They also loved the idea of a bike repair station pictured in the powerpoint presentation.



When asked where they would access, the focus group strongly favored the entry point along Hueneme Rd. because of its accessibility, known location, and less presence of heavy industry. They said the Arnold Rd. entrance is the least likely place they would visit because of its distance, obscurity, and lack of accessibility. However, they expressed concerns that the entrance along Hueneme Rd. would need to be designed to be more obvious and welcoming. Participants suggested creating signage directing people towards the entrance, particularly signage that is bilingual, as well as more visual, such as depicting local families enjoying nature, noting that many local residents have limited literacy. They also suggested more crosswalks along Hueneme Road. Participants also noted the lack of parking at this location, suggesting the city potentially redesigning Hueneme Road to allow street parking. Other suggestions for a more welcoming entry point included a kiosk with maps showing the different hiking trails to the coast, and coin-operated public binocular stands.

They noted that the unappealing heavy industry surrounding the area, which they described as ugly and scary, would require the Ormond Beach Wetlands to be especially welcoming to compensate and make the area feel like a place local families should go. This could be achieved through improved design of entry points or by steering trails more towards the interior of the area rather than the edges where they are currently proposed adjacent to industrial sites. Participants advocated for trails to have some level of shade from trees, and liked that the proposed design includes some paved and some unpaved. They emphasized the need for at least some trails to be wheelchair accessible.

Another obstacle mentioned by youth was transportation to reach the area. They wanted to ensure that local bus routes and bike lanes would connect to Ormond Beach, even suggesting city bike share programs and electric scooters.

The youth focus group also shared a desire for local businesses that would draw young people to hang out, emphasizing the need for affordability to be accessible to the nearby community. This could take the form of a restaurant or café in the visitor center or assisting local businesses along Hueneme Road.

Some facilities mentioned by the focus group included hydration stations to refill water bottles, bags for dog poop, free parking, and more restrooms. They also suggested infographic signs that depicted a foot crushing eggs in the dunes to help educate the public.

Regarding safety, the youth stressed the need for bilingual educational staff supervising rather than police or armed security, and spoke about the demeanor of staff needing to feel friendly rather than strict to make the area feel welcoming for youth.

## Adult Group (Spanish, 13 participants)

The adult Spanish-speaking focus group heavily focused on safety, restrooms, and family friendly design.

Many participants worried significantly about safety and expressed fear regarding the current presence of homeless encampments. They placed a high emphasis on the need for security and well-lit areas, although some also expressed fear of police-like authorities that may feel threatening to immigrants. Some suggested a fence or tree line of some kind around the area to make it feel enclosed.



However, the participants of this focus group also wondered about the fenced off areas for bird habitat. They suggested if some areas are inaccessible that the plan could still emphasize ways to see or hear about what is going on inside, such as guides or audio recordings in Spanish and indigenous languages for those with limited literacy, or viewing areas. They wanted educational opportunities to learn about the animals and the wetlands.

Adult focus group participants were strongly focused on activities for their children, at least equally to their interest in the restoration for their own enjoyment. Many had younger children and wanted facilities such as playgrounds that would be ideal for them. Others expressed struggles with their teenage children and worried about them getting into trouble, saying they needed more places for them to get out of the house where they knew they would be safe.

Many in the adult focus group wanted soccer fields and expressed this was the biggest need in their community. Although this may be incompatible with the restoration, there may be ways to achieve similar goals with a smaller footprint or impact.

Finally, adult participants expressed that the biggest barrier to accessing the beach is that many in the local community do not know how to swim. They suggested that the area could host swimming classes and that this could attract many people in the community and allow them to enjoy the beach more.



A major emphasis for facilities in the adult focus group was restrooms. In particular, they wanted to ensure there would be working doors on the restrooms to have a feeling of safety, which seems to be an issue in some Oxnard parks. Other issues with restrooms in local parks that were raised included the restrooms not being open late enough for people who work long hours, and not being maintained with paper towels and soap. Adults in the focus group shared that this would make the area more family friendly, particularly given that those attending with small children would frequently need restrooms throughout.

They also put a significant focus on shade. Many of the adult participants felt this was missing from the current design and that on hot weekends it would not feel like a place to relax without greater shade cover in some areas. Adults in our focus group seemed to place a greater emphasis on peaceful relaxation at Ormond Beach as opposed to active recreation. They often spoke about wanting more benches and tables.

## Young Adult Group (English, 6 participants)

The young adult focus group, made up mostly of local college students or recent graduates from Oxnard, expressed many similar themes to the youth, but placed a greater emphasis on the use of facilities for community events and activities, particularly partnerships with local educational institutions.

The young adult focus group echoed ideas that we heard in the youth focus group such as outdoor exercise equipment, and an affordable restaurant or café in the visitor center. This group specifically made mention of the longstanding vision to convert the empty parcel of land at Hueneme and Saviers into a Gateway Park, and said that this would be the ideal place for a visitor center, some parking, and some commercial space for restaurants etc.

They imagined a visitor center more as a multipurpose community space, including study spaces for students, with a room where movies could be screened or other educational or community programming could be held, to offer free or low-cost activities to local residents. It could partner with local colleges such as Oxnard College to hold classes there, particularly those related to environmental science, but also recreational classes such as swimming, surfing, or yoga. Participants suggested that the visitor center should be physically high and visible to attract people. They also felt that the visitor's center could specifically aim to provide jobs to local young people, such as bilingual educational guides. Finally, they suggested that it could be reserved for events, and suggested in particular an annual bird festival like the Strawberry, Banana, or Salsa Festivals, that could highlight the importance of Ormond Beach.



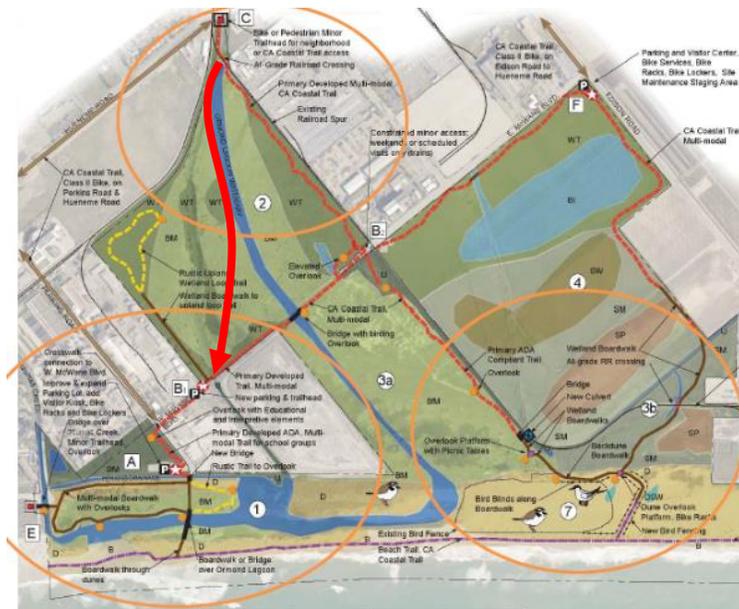
They believed the best access point would be along Hueneme Road. Young adult participants felt that the entrances down Perkins and Edison were not very accessible, and would not feel very safe or clean without removal of the industrial surroundings. In particular, they felt that Edison was not known or visible for the community, and that Perkins has long been stigmatized as dangerous. However, they felt that the entrance along Hueneme Road seemed small and not very visible along the train tracks, suggesting it should be made more noticeable and also include parking. They suggested a mural here, done by artists from Oxnard, featuring representation of South Oxnard specifically, that would act as a welcome sign. They also pointed out that Hueneme Road is a busy street with cars and trucks driving at high speeds, and that crosswalks would make it safer. Finally, it was suggested that signs in other parts of the city could direct people towards Ormond Beach, particularly along Saviers Road as a main corridor from the freeway and downtown that would end at the entrance to the wetlands.

Young adults mentioned the need for educational programming and materials to be multilingual, not just in Spanish but also indigenous languages.

Young adult participants mentioned the need for public transit to go to a main entrance, and more bike trails leading from the neighborhood to the restoration area. They said that parking should be free, with clear maps and directions like the kind which are often available at the heads of trails. They expressed concern with the

lack of sidewalks along many streets in the surrounding area and said the city would need to address this to make it more safely accessible by foot. They wondered whether you would be able to skate on the trails or what facilities might be conducive to skateboarding, as well as whether trails would be accessible by wheelchair.

Participants mentioned the length of distance from South Oxnard residential neighborhoods to the beach, and felt that in addition to trails, it would help to have some sort of open meadow-like area featuring native plants where people could rest and have picnics without walking all the way to the coast. They also suggested picnic tables with shade. They felt it was important for outdoor recreation to be accessible to people at all levels, from serious hikers, to local families wanting a more casual walk.



The young adults did appreciate that some areas were fenced off and reserved strictly for habitat (more than our other focus groups). However, they also felt that the way the trails clung to the edges of the restoration area left what felt like large “empty” spaces in the middle that could be used for resting places, picnic areas, children’s playgrounds, etc. They also felt that this made some of the trails very long and indirect, particularly the primary trail leading from the access point along Hueneme Road, and could be improved by more direct paths cutting through to the beach.

At the beach, the young adult focus group said they wanted to see a place to rent bikes like those that are available in some other beach areas, as well as lifeguards, and bathrooms with doors and a shower you could use to rinse off after getting in the ocean. They wanted to explore the possibility of having designated dog areas given the current restriction on dogs at Ormond Beach.

Participants also mentioned facilities including hydration stations for refillable water bottles and security lighting. Some suggested a statue or piece of public artwork that would represent community, such as people holding hands. Others suggested an interactive community garden with native plants where local residents could learn about and help contribute to the plants in the area.



## Adult Group (Mixteco, 10 participants)

The Mixteco-speaking adult group shared similar themes with the Spanish-speaking adult group, including a feeling of security, family-friendly facilities for all ages, and in particular shaded places to relax and rest.

Many expressed concerns about safety, people smoking or drinking, as well as the area being generally ugly and not well known. They suggested greater security and even security cameras as one of their top priorities. People also mentioned a need for signs that would both advertise the area as well as prevent littering and educate the public.



Like the other adult focus group, the Mixteco-speaking adults were primarily focused on what facilities would be best for their children, and a variety of options for different age groups. Some mentioned that their kids enjoyed water but expressed concerns about the safety of the ocean and wondered about the potential for other water features that were closer or calmer. Others mentioned a need for places for children to run around and get exercise, such as a field for soccer or a place where kids could ride their bicycles.

Participants often mentioned a lack of trees in the design compared to green spaces like local parks that they were familiar with, and particularly spoke about needing shade on hot days, and wanting a place to relax after work. An open space without shade seemed unappealing to a community who works long hours in physical labor outdoors in the sun. More benches to rest were a major suggestion to improve the plan, as were barbecues to spend time with the family. While large shaded trees may not fit the habitat and barbecues could cause issues for local species, some form of shaded areas with benches and tables was clearly missing for many focus group participants. Adult participants in this group also put a priority on water fountains as well as bathrooms with doors that would close for privacy and safety.



When asked where they would access the restoration area, most participants mentioned they lived near Perkins and Cuesta Del Mar and that area would be most accessible and easy for them to reach.