



## News from: **The City of Oakland**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 22, 2013

#### **Lake Merritt Channel Re-Opening a Milestone for Measure DD** *First 750-Foot Section Re-Opens after 140 Years*

*Oakland, CA* – A major milestone in the effort to reconnect Lake Merritt to the Bay was marked with the re-opening of a 750-foot section of the Lake Merritt Channel. The removal of the 12<sup>th</sup> Street dam, culverts and twelve-lane roadway is one of the premier Measure DD projects. Since 1869, Lake Merritt has been separated from the channel by man-made structures that altered what was once an open waterway to the San Francisco Bay.

“Lake Merritt is an Oakland icon and among the most beautiful walks in the Bay Area,” Mayor Jean Quan said. “I’m delighted to see the voters’ Measure DD investment developing so wonderfully, as we reach this first restoration milestone.”

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This phase of the Measure DD project included removal of the 12<sup>th</sup> Street dam, culverts, unsightly pedestrian tunnels and twelve-lane “mini-freeway” and construction of a new 100-foot-wide, free-flowing tidal channel bridged by a six-lane, tree-lined boulevard. The \$47 million project also includes improvements for water quality and wildlife habitat, creation of a new tidal marsh and construction of a new recreational trail that will eventually connect to the San Francisco Bay Trail. This is the first in a series of major projects to open the Lake Merritt Channel and once again connect Lake Merritt to the Oakland Estuary and San Francisco Bay.

“The work on the Lake Merritt Channel is an important milestone for the water quality elements of Measure DD,” said Council President Patricia Kernighan. “When voting to authorize Measure DD, Oakland residents made it clear that restoring Lake Merritt’s environmental health is important.”

In 1869, Samuel Merritt built a narrow dam across the channel, with gates to hold in the high tides, forming Lake Merritt. As time passed, the dam was widened, the surrounding marshlands were filled in, and the channel was squeezed into small underground pipes or culverts. The Measure DD restoration work is the culmination of years of effort to reverse the negative impacts of this urban encroachment upon the natural channel.

#### **Water Quality Enhancements Improve Wildlife Habitat**

One of Measure DD’s major goals is to improve the water quality in Lake Merritt, with an emphasis on increasing dissolved oxygen levels. The Lake Merritt Channel 12<sup>th</sup> Street project will help meet these goals by removing restrictive culverts and opening the channel to greater flows. The increased tidal exchange to and from the Bay will help mix and oxygenate the water, and provide more tidal flushing. Tidal flushing improves the water habitat for fish and birds.

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Opening the first 750 feet of the channel has already increased tidal flow by 50 percent, increasing the dissolved oxygen in Lake Merritt to the benefit of the rich aquatic life in the lake. In addition, the entire project includes vegetated swales and water quality basins that improve water quality by allowing water to naturally infiltrate thereby filtering the stormwater before it reaches the lake.

The creation of the two-thirds-of-an-acre tidal marsh restores an important type of mud flat habitat for migratory shorebirds, mollusks and fish. Much of this vital habitat has been lost around the San Francisco Bay as development spurred the filling in of wetlands.

### **Improved Public Access on Water and on Land**

The opening of this 750-foot-section of the Lake Merritt Channel is the first step in allowing unimpeded paddling from Lake Merritt to the Oakland Estuary and San Francisco Bay. In the future, kayakers and canoeists will be able to glide down the channel as the Ohlone People once did. The open channel will also allow Lake Merritt to become a stop on the Bay Water Trail.

Complementing the popular walking, jogging and biking course around Lake Merritt, the pathways under the bridge and the new pedestrian bridge across the channel will allow walkers, joggers and bicyclists to follow the channel downstream, with an eventual connection to the San Francisco Bay Trail.

### **Roadway changes**

The demolished twelve-lane “mini-freeway” was built in 1950 and had become structurally deficient and obsolete. Unlike the old structure, the replacement roadway – a six-lane, tree-lined boulevard and free-span bridge – is friendly to park users, pedestrians, bicyclists and wildlife.

### **Nearby project elements**

Other nearby project elements include the new 12<sup>th</sup> Street park, landscaping, an event plaza and restrooms, that will be finished this spring. This phase will also close the gap in the existing Necklace of Lights by adding 11 new lampposts. The public art element will be a series of light-based sculptures created by Oakland-based artists Todd Blair and John Colle Rogers mounted along the pedestrian pathway walls flanking the channel under the 12<sup>th</sup> Street bridge.

### **Next Phases for the Lake Merritt Channel Restoration**

Coming next are the Lake Merritt Channel Improvements at 10<sup>th</sup> Street. Construction on the improvements is scheduled to start this summer. This phase will replace the 10<sup>th</sup> Street roadway with a clear-span bridge, continuing the open channel further toward the Bay. This work will further improve the tidal flow into Lake Merritt by an additional 50 percent.

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## **Project Funding**

Funds for the 12<sup>th</sup> Street Phase were provided by the Oakland Trust for Clean Water and Safe Parks (Measure DD), the Federal Highway Administration, the California Coastal Conservancy and the California Wildlife Conservation Board.

Reconfiguration of the south end of Lake Merritt is one of the premiere Measure DD projects. In November 2002, Oakland voters approved Measure DD – the Oakland Trust for Clean Water and Safe Parks – a \$198 million bond measure to fund parks, trails, bridges, a recreation center, historic building renovations, land acquisition and creek restoration.

Measure DD work at Lake Merritt includes a variety of projects to expand parkland, renovate buildings, enhance Children’s Fairyland, improve water quality and wildlife habitat, calm traffic and improve pedestrian and bicycle access around the lake and down the channel.

## **Completed Measure DD Projects**

Other Measure DD-funded projects which have already been completed include:

- Numerous water quality projects such as fountain upgrades and underground trash collection devices, and rain gardens to improve water quality in Lake Merritt
- Renovation of the historic Municipal Boathouse (now home to the Lake Chalet Seafood Bar & Grill, Lake Merritt Rowing Club and Gondola Servizio)
- Renovation of the Lake Merritt Pergola
- The Lakeshore/El Embarcadero project, which calmed street traffic, improved pathways and renovated landscaping along the eastern shore of Lake Merritt
- Restoration of the historic East 18<sup>th</sup> Street Pier
- The 66<sup>th</sup> Avenue Gateway project, a restful pocket park on the Oakland Waterfront Trail
- Union Point Park, a new nine-acre waterfront park
- Two new sections of waterfront trail connecting High Street and Fruitvale Avenue
- A new section of waterfront trail connecting Derby Avenue and Lancaster Street
- Renovation of Studio One Art Center
- Construction of a new indoor pool and fitness center in East Oakland
- Creek restorations on Sausal Creek and Arroyo Viejo
- Acquisition of over 65 acres of open space to protect watersheds
- Several projects at Children’s Fairyland, including a new attraction called Fairy Music Farm, a new children’s theater called Aesop’s Playhouse, renovation of the puppet theater and improvements to the entryway and Chapel of Peace.

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## **Other Measure DD Projects Underway at Lake Merritt**

Four other Measure DD projects at Lake Merritt are currently in the design phase and slated to begin construction in 2013:

The **Lakeside Green Streets project** will reconfigure the intersection of 20<sup>th</sup> and Harrison streets to provide more parkland along the lake and at Snow Park, and will renovate the shoreline pathway and landscaping from 19<sup>th</sup> Street to Grand Avenue.

The **Sailboat House Shoreline project** will replace a failing seawall at the Sailboat House, move a parking lot away from the shoreline, treat street stormwater runoff through vegetated swales, add an attractive shoreline pathway and restore a section of shoreline to a natural soft edge with native upland and marsh plants.

The **Bellevue Avenue project** will improve parking, provide a safer pedestrian crossing at the Lakeside Park entry, and enhance the entrance to the Gardens at Lake Merritt.

As previously mentioned, the **Lake Merritt Channel Improvements at 10<sup>th</sup> Street** will replace restrictive culverts with a clear-span bridge, matching the improvements already completed at 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

For more details and updates on Measure DD progress, visit [www.oaklandnet.com/measuredd](http://www.oaklandnet.com/measuredd).

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