

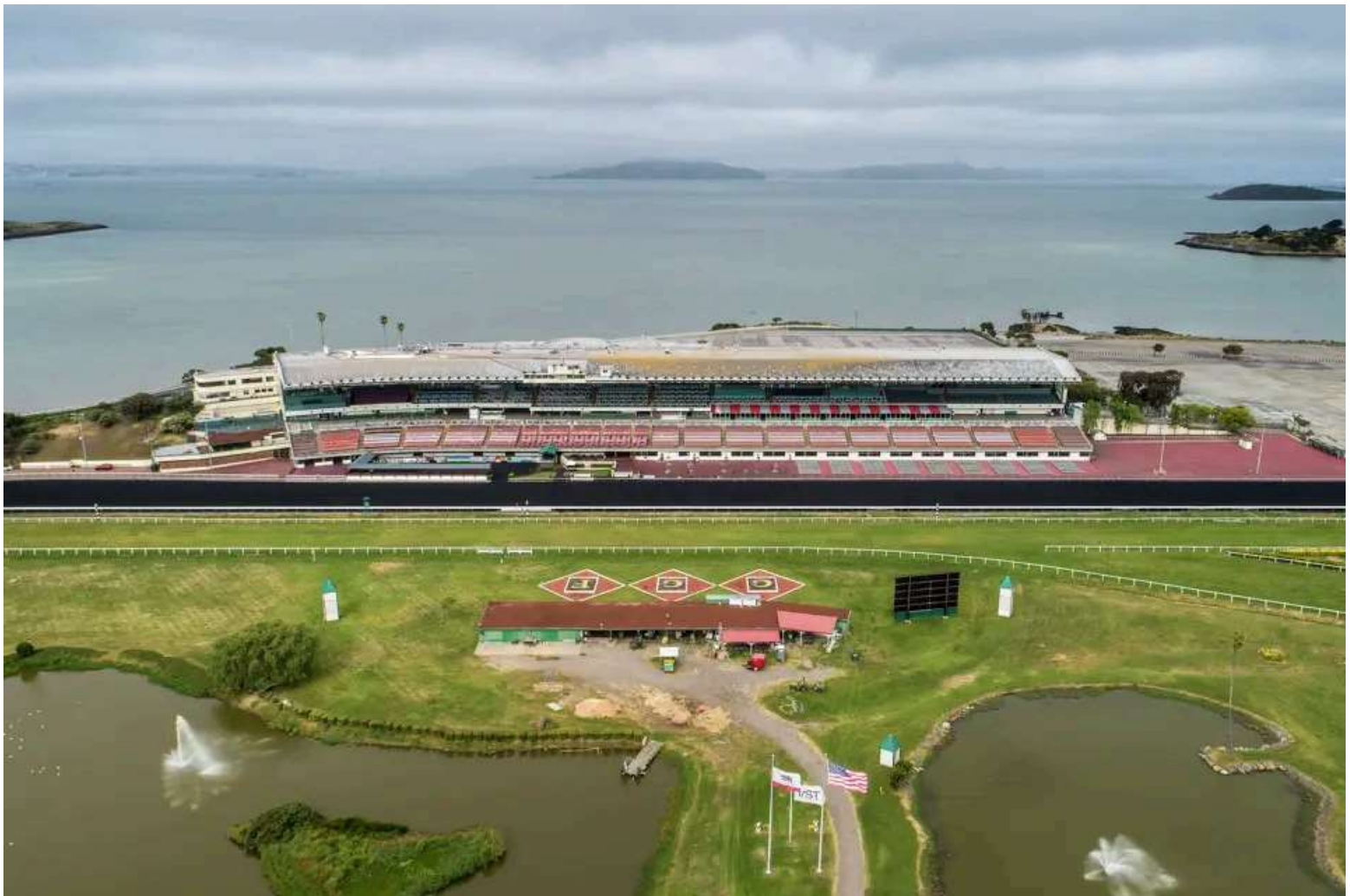
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BAY AREA // EAST BAY

Newsom's budget would help turn Golden Gate Fields horse track into park

By **Kurtis Alexander**, Staff Writer
May 14, 2026



The site of Golden Gate Fields in Berkeley, which closed in 2024, would become a waterfront preserve and recreation hub under Gov. Gavin Newsom's proposed budget.

Carlos Avila Gonzalez/The Chronicle



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Newsom's budget would help turn Golden Gate Fields horse track into park

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The state budget that Gov. Gavin Newsom proposed Thursday will include \$125 million to help close the deal on the acquisition of the East Bay's Golden Gate Fields, for creation of a new waterfront park.

The storied racetrack along San Francisco Bay shut down two years ago, prompting an ambitious plan to put the 161-acre property into the hands of the East Bay Regional Park District. Funding for the transaction, however, has remained elusive.

In the draft budget known as the May Revise, Newsom proposes steering money from California's voter-approved 2024 Climate Bond toward the \$175 million purchase of the racetrack, state officials told the Chronicle.

The \$50 million balance for the acquisition is expected to come from the East Bay park district, which is slated to take title of the property, and the Trust for Public Land, the nonprofit group that initiated the exchange and is raising money for its completion.

"In California, we don't shy away from big ideas," Newsom said in a statement to the Chronicle. "That's why we're all in on making Golden Gate Fields an iconic public space for the East Bay — opening up new recreation opportunities, connecting Bay Area communities to the waterfront and strengthening climate resilience for generations to come."

Golden Gate Fields, along Interstate 80 on the border of Albany and Berkeley, was once a major draw for horse-racing fans — and the last dedicated space in the Bay Area to the sport.



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It provided 83 years of thoroughbred races along with cheap hot dogs and beer and prized views of downtown San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge. Famous horses Silky Sullivan and Lost in the Fog were among the champs that ran there.

Declining interest in the sport and concern about the welfare of horses, however, sparked numerous proposals to transform the site. Bids for hotels, shopping malls and housing ultimately lost out when the property's owner, the Canada-based Stronach Group, offered an exclusive option to the San Francisco-based Trust for Public Land to buy the acreage for a park.

"People are just so excited about this" purchase, said Guillermo Rodriguez, California state director for the Trust for Public Land. "You've got a mile of bayfront property with 200,000 people that drive by this facility daily."

Rodriguez said state funding would mark a "huge milestone" in making the park a reality.

The thinking is that the site will be managed for a range of interests, from restoring bay wetlands and preserving wildlife corridors to building soccer fields and maintaining hiking trails.

The site is near several parks and recreation facilities, including the Albany Bulb, Tom Bates Regional Sports Complex and McLaughlin Eastshore State Park. The holdings together will create a nearly 10 mile-strip off contiguous public shoreline, where the San Francisco Bay Trail runs.

California Secretary for Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot, who is helping find funding for the initiative, likened the future park to San Francisco's Crissy Field. The former military airfield was turned into a popular destination of beaches, trails and restored marsh managed by the National Park Service.

"I think it holds the same potential," Crowfoot said. "We view this as a once-in-a-generation opportunity."

The Legislature must approve the state budget, including the money proposed for the purchase of Golden Gate Fields, before it takes effect July 1.

Under the purchase option secured for the racetrack, the Trust for Public Land has until December to come up with the funding. The organization's goal is to close on the sale early next year.

The East Bay Regional Park District is already talking to city officials in Albany and Berkeley about ideas for the property. The agency plans to solicit public input once the sale is finalized.

"We will begin a very robust community engagement process," said Elizabeth Echols, a park district board member who represents the area that contains Golden Gate Fields. "We will certainly move as quickly as possible because there is a big demand and a lot of excitement about public access to the site."

May 14, 2026



Kurtis Alexander

REPORTER



Kurtis Alexander is an enterprise reporter for The San Francisco Chronicle, with a focus on natural resources and the environment. He frequently writes about water, wildfire, climate and the American West. His recent work has examined the impacts of drought, threats to public lands and wildlife, and the nation's widening rural-urban divide.

Before joining the Chronicle, Alexander worked as a freelance writer and as a staff reporter for several media organizations, including The Fresno Bee and Bay Area News Group, writing about government, politics and the environment.

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