

CITY OF CORONADO



Q&A: History of the Hotel del Coronado Beach Boundary

How the Hotel del Coronado has come to own part of the beach in town is a fascinating question, one that has been raised in recent months because of a new service offered to hotel guests and the general public directly on the sand. “How can anyone own the public beach,” many have asked. The answer is simple and can be traced directly to the Hotel del Coronado’s early ownership of the entire peninsula. With their \$110,000 purchase of the peninsula in 1880, the Victorian resort’s developers owned all of Coronado, from North Island to just beyond the Coronado Cays and everything in between. They built the Hotel del Coronado, which opened in 1888, almost two years before the City of Coronado was incorporated.

Q. What does the Hotel del Coronado own now?

A. Nearly 126 years after the Hotel del Coronado was built, the only remaining land it owns today is the 28 acres of land that holds the hotel and surrounding grounds bounded by R.H. Dana Place to the north, Orange Avenue to the east, Avenida del Sol to the south, and a section of sand directly in front of the hotel to the west.

Q. Early photos of the shoreline in front of the Hotel del Coronado show a much different shape. What happened to enlarge the beach and who decided what is public versus private hotel property?

A. Since the 1880s, the coastline in Coronado has changed and the beach has widened. The growth was due mostly to deposits of sand dredged from the San Diego Bay entry channel in the 1930s and natural deposits of sand that still sweep northward along the Silver Strand. The Hotel del Coronado also helped establish and stabilize a wider beach through a rock breakwater placed near the hotel around 1900 and later along the curving line of rocks that were deposited in the early 1920s as part of a failed attempt to build a small boat harbor in front of the hotel. As the City of Coronado developed around the hotel, the need to formalize property boundaries grew. In 1966, a Boundary Agreement was drawn up, signed by the California State Lands Commission, Hotel del Coronado owners and the City of Coronado. The agreement authorized the establishment of the mean high tide line west of the Hotel del Coronado to describe and fix the boundary between State land and the hotel “to set at rest any and all questions relating to the location of said boundary,” according to the document dated December 29, 1966.

Q. What is the mean high tide line and what does the Boundary Agreement, which settles its location, mean for the City and the Hotel del Coronado?

A. The mean high tide line is the intersection of the tidal plane of mean high water with the shore. The State owns the sand and all the submerged land seaward of the mean high tide line, which the Boundary Agreement and survey maps show as a series of coordinates.

Basically, it's close to the water's edge. Setting the mean high tide line in 1966 formally delineated what was State property and what was the Hotel del Coronado property. Both the California Coastal Commission and State Lands Commission, which were formed in the 1970s, have both since officially recognized the 1966 Boundary Agreement.

Q. If the Boundary Agreement set the boundary of State and hotel property at the mean high tide line, why doesn't the Hotel del Coronado own all of the sandy beach in front of its property?

A. In exchange for greater development of the hotel property in recent years, the Hotel del Coronado deeded several parcels of its beachfront to the City. The most recent parcel measured 2.1 acres and was deeded to the City in February 2003 as part of a Hotel del Coronado Development Agreement and Master Plan to further develop the hotel. Through the Development Agreement, the City also gained the following additional public improvements and benefits:

- New public access stairs from Ocean Boulevard to the beach;
- The Paseo del Mar beach walkway with a permanent public easement for pedestrians, bikes and emergency vehicles from R.H. Dana Place over Hotel del Coronado property to Avenida del Sol, with benches, trash receptacles and foot washes;
- Opening up the previously fenced corner of R.H. Dana and Orange with the construction of an entry garden with fountain, which connects the hotel to the Village of Coronado;
- A pedestrian connection through the hotel property from the entry garden to the Paseo del Mar beach walkway;
- Widened sidewalks, street-edge landscaping and decorative street lights along R.H. Dana and along Orange to Grande Hall;
- A new landscaped median and additional street parking at the intersection of R.H. Dana and Ocean Boulevard; and
- A \$1.5 million cash contribution to the City of Coronado toward the cost of a future public improvement.

Earlier, the hotel had deeded to the City two additional parcels under similar circumstances. Both parcels are now public beach.

Q. How can someone tell where the boundaries are between the City's beach and the Hotel del Coronado's private beach property?

A. The Hotel del Coronado's portion of sandy beach lies adjacent to the hotel's property, which, incidentally, is located in a hotel-motel zone that allows for the transient housing of tourists and travelers and related conveniences, such as food service. The beach in question is delineated with a few unofficial markers. However, the City is in the process of installing more permanent boundary markers that will more easily identify what is hotel property and what is public beach property. The City monitors the area regularly to ensure hotel-related services do not encroach on public beach.

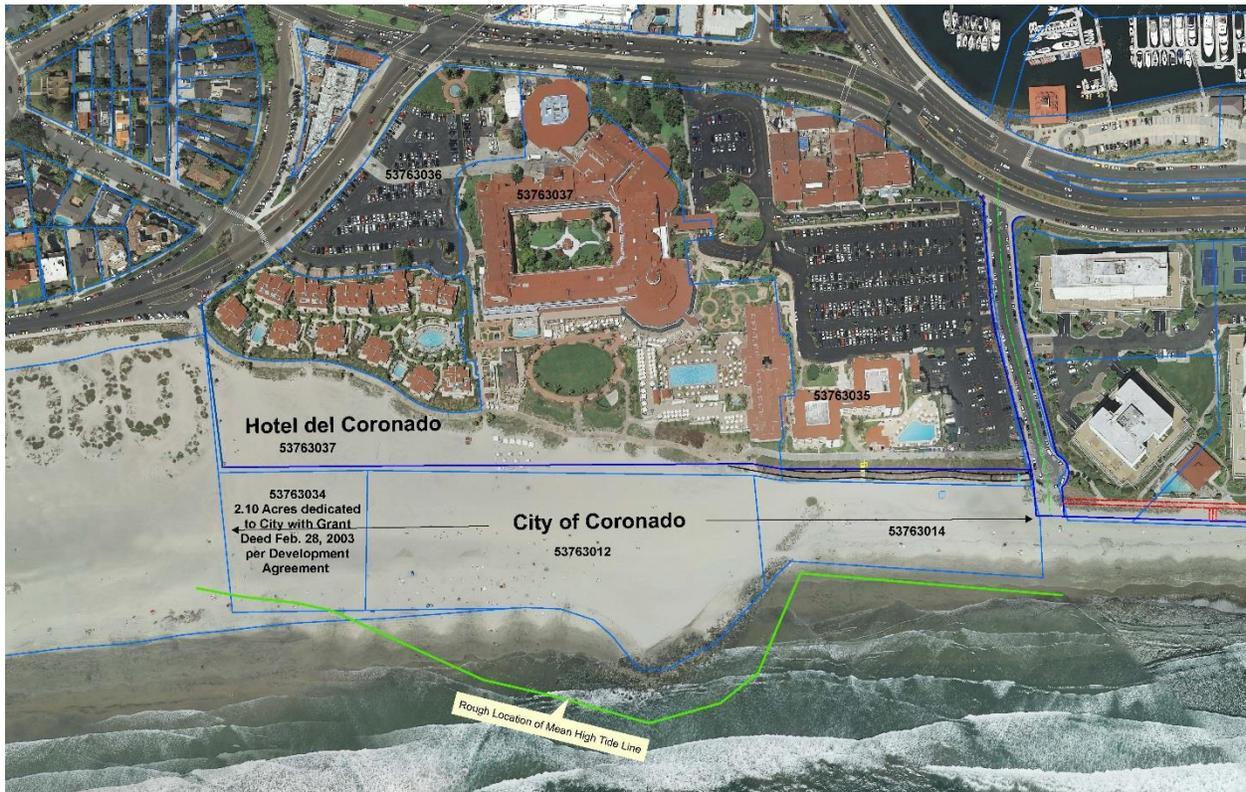
Q. Can beachgoers walk on the beach in front of the Hotel del Coronado?

A. Yes, there are thousands of feet of public sandy beach in front of the entire length of the Hotel del Coronado that is open for all to enjoy.

Q. Is the Hotel del Coronado private beach area subject to City ordinances? What enforcement measures are in place regarding alcohol service, smoking and dogs on the beach?

A. The Hotel del Coronado is on private property and is allowed to serve alcohol, subject to any conditions imposed upon it by the State's Alcoholic Beverage Control. The hotel also may permit smoking and dogs within its boundaries. In terms of enforcing the City ordinances, including drinking alcohol, smoking and dogs on the beach, Coronado works to ensure that what is allowed on all private property in Coronado does not extend onto public property. The City actively monitors public property and responds when notified of or City staff witnesses any ordinance violations.

The City of Coronado shares this history with the community in the hopes of settling the question about the hotel's private beach area. The City wants to emphasize that those portions of the beach deeded to the City by the Hotel del Coronado over the past century include roughly 1,800 feet of public beach, just west of the hotel's private property, that are open and fully accessible to anyone wanting to stroll, sunbathe or rest in front of the City's famous Hotel del Coronado.



The aerial photograph above of the Hotel del Coronado and the adjacent beach shows the boundaries of the private and public portions of the beach. The photo illustrates that portion of the beach which remains a private beach, owned by the hotel, and the public beach in three parcels owned by the City of Coronado.