



San Francisco Tomorrow

Working to Protect the Urban Environment

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Will you want to live in San Francisco – Tomorrow?

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Recreation and Park Department makes Another Bad Deal

On August 15, the Recreation and Park Department (RPD) fired every Recreation Director in San Francisco. That's because the needs of San Francisco's citizens who pay for and use the parks are now secondary to the Department's stated need to generate more revenue from the parks.

RPD's General Manager Phil Ginsburg is not firing higher-paid RPD management employees, however. They are being kept because of an RPD salary multiplier program that asks higher-paid employees to generate revenue of 5 to 10 times their paid salary. RPD says that it has no such *formal* program; it's just the way they "refer to their salaries in comparison to the revenue that they are helping to bring to the department. Often it is indeed 5 to 10 times their salaries. . .but there is no *formal program* associated with it."

Thus, without the public's knowledge and with no formal policy guidelines, the RPD has turned its entire administration into a sales force with everything in the parks pretty much negotiable. Staff understand implicitly that they had better bring in their informal multiplier revenue, or they may be formally fired.

Let's take a look at the RPD's new priorities: The Mayor's proposed budget (page 374) for Fiscal Year 2010–2011 decreased RPD services for children by \$1.5 million — from \$11.2 to \$9.7 million — a 13.4 percent change decrease, and at the same time increased the RPD's planning, development, and privatization budget by \$1.9 million — from

\$300,000 to \$2.2 million annually — a 633.3 percent change increase.

While the Recreation Directors (who are among the lowest-paid workers), and the employees who work directly with the community were being fired, Ginsburg found the money to hire six-figure bureaucrats, friends of the Mayor, and fund raisers. This year's RPD budget will be adding even more revenue-generating staff, and the parcel tax that the RPD will be peddling to the public in the November 2011 election will pay the salaries for even more "revenue-generating staff."

Privatization

George Orwell would be proud of Phil Ginsburg. With absolutely no employment experience in Recreation or Parks, Ginsburg was appointed the RPD General Manager by his good buddy Gavin Newsom in July 2009. It is believed that Newsom ordered Ginsburg to start privatizing the parks by mid-July, two weeks later. The word "privatization" means that the RPD assets, which are owned and paid for by the public, will now be used to generate as much revenue as possible for the RPD. What few people understand is that much of this privatized money will end up in the City's General Fund rather than in RPD's budget.

Under Ginsburg's short tenure, City parks and clubhouses, including JP Murphy Park on upper 9th Avenue, and Golden Gate Park, are now viewed as revenue generators. The RPD

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has increased fees and inaugurated new fees (arboretum admission); pushed higher-paying contracts with private operations on park land, such as at the Stow Lake Boat House; charged higher permit fees; scheduled more blockbuster events that close public access to park land, sometimes for as long as ten days (Outside Lands festival); licensed more vendors and services that compete with local private businesses (Dolores Park and Golden Gate Park); and aggressively pursued private donations, some of which come with strings attached.

If you make a large enough donation or pay enough rent to the RPD, you can build practically anything you want, anywhere you want, in Golden Gate Park. Watch what will happen with the proposed five-field, synthetic turf soccer complex in the west end of the Park that is being pushed by the Fisher family.

The privatization of City parks and leasing of public clubhouses is especially troubling, because San Francisco residents have always voted to support the parks. San Franciscans paid \$110 million for the *2000 Neighborhood*

Park Bond and \$185 million for the *2008 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond*. With that money, for example, the JP Murphy Clubhouse was remodeled for \$3.8 million but then closed and padlocked for want of a Recreation Director! *Fait accompli*. Then RPD gets to label the renovated facilities as "underutilized" and tries to lease out the clubhouses to non-recreational, profit-seeking businesses. Implicit with the passage of these capital improvement bonds was that the City would continue staffing them after they were renovated but with these staff firings, that is clearly not possible.

The RPD is going to place a parcel tax on the November 2011 ballot. The tax will be paid by renters and homeowners who are often not receiving the benefits of the prior bonds they have supported.

This is what should happen: *the RPD should rehire the Rec and Park Directors and hire more gardeners, restore services and stop privatization of our parks before asking the public for any more money.*

NOT QUALIFIED

When Proposition J passed in 2008 creating the Historic Preservation Commission, the measure specified that commissioners shall be selected who have certain demonstrable qualifications and not, as is often the case, chosen as political payback. Specific professionals, including architects, architectural historians, contractors and a full-range historian have seats on the commission specifically set aside for their special expertise. It was believed at that time that describing in the legislation the qualifications for each seat would prevent appointments to the commission from being strictly political. Now it has become necessary for the Prop. J Committee and longtime preservation activist GeeGee Platt to say that mayoral appointee Richard Johns does not have the proper qualifications to hold a seat designated for a historian and to sue to have Prop J upheld.. "Mr. Johns was a college English major. His lengthy and

detailed resume does not list a single course taken in history, any article written on an historical subject, or any indication that he is 'an authority' on any historical subject," reads the lawsuit filed recently in San Francisco County Superior Court. Platt said that it was a poor precedent to allow the appointment of an unqualified person to the historian seat when there are so many professional historians in our midst.

Johns is a lawyer who was president of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society for four years and instrumental in fundraising, entirely commendable efforts. However, it does not seem as if showing interest in historic preservation is the same as having the professional background of a historian, as described in the law. Johns was approved by a 6-5 vote at the Board of Supervisors in January. He is married to Eleanor Johns, a longtime aide to former Mayor Willie Brown.

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Whether Peripheral Canal or Subterranean Tunnel, Plan to Export Massive Amounts of Delta Water a Bad Idea

In 1982, Governor Jerry Brown and the state legislature approved the Peripheral Canal, an aqueduct to export vast amounts of water out of the San Francisco Bay Delta. The Canal's biggest supporters included Southern California water agencies and Central Valley agribusiness corporations. Citizens of the Bay-Delta region saw a water grab and feared the canal would decimate the Bay-Delta environment. Immediately following the canal's approval, over 1 million voters signed a petition to force a statewide referendum on the canal. That November, Californians rejected the Peripheral Canal with parts of the Bay Area voting 90% against the bond.

Now the Peripheral Canal has reemerged in subterranean form. Last December, the state proposed constructing two tunnels to export water from the Bay Delta at a cost of \$15-\$30 billion. The tunnels are being crafted by corporate agriculture interests such as the Westlands Water District and by Southern California water agencies such as the Metropolitan Water District. While the details of the proposal are still being worked out, battle lines are being drawn as a coalition of environmental, consumer, fishing, and taxpayer groups are preparing to defend the Bay-Delta once again. Just like their Peripheral Canal predecessor, these tunnels have three main problems.

FIRST, the tunnels could worsen environmental conditions in our already beleaguered Bay Delta. California's salmon populations have recently plummeted from over-pumping the Delta. The population of Chinook salmon dropped from over 800,000 in 2002 to 20,000 in 2000, while water exports rose to a record high 6.3 million acre-feet in the same period. As a result, the salmon fishing seasons in 2008 and 2009 were cancelled for the first time in history, taking a \$2 billion toll on the Bay Area's local fishing economy. Tunnel or canal, taking more water from the Delta will decimate our scarce fish populations and the jobs that depend on them.

SECOND, these tunnels could lead to greater privatization of our state's water. Paramount Farms, owned by Beverly Hills billionaire Stewart Resnick, controls a massive underground aquifer known as the Kern County Water Bank, which receives Delta water. The water bank holds approximately 1 million acre-feet of water, which is more water than San Francisco and Los Angeles combined use in a single year.

While Paramount specializes in almonds and other specialty crops that are largely exported out of California, current law allows companies like Paramount to sell their taxpayer-subsidized water at a profit and skip farming altogether. The buyers of this water are often real estate developers, who

are required to demonstrate an adequate water supply before new projects can be built.

Last year, a San Joaquin Valley farm water district sold rights to approximately 14,000 acre-feet of water to the Mojave Water Agency in San Bernardino County for \$73 million for use towards new developments. In another complex scheme, housing developer DMB has purchased water from a Kern County farm to supply a proposed 8,000-unit housing development on Bay marshes in Redwood City.

FINALLY, like the canal, the tunnels threaten our public services and leave taxpayers footing the bill to subsidize private water. Footing a \$15-\$30 billion cost would likely require a bond, placing the state in even greater debt. California, now in a \$28 billion deficit, has already made drastic cuts to public services such as education and housing. Paying for tunnels would only make things worse.

Rather than wasting \$15 billion on new tunnels to shuttle more water to special interests, California needs to invest in rebuilding and upgrading our public water infrastructure, to the benefit of all. Perhaps with the 1982 defeat of the Peripheral Canal in mind, tunnel sponsors are looking for a way to approve their project and avoid a vote of the people. Will the people of the Bay Area again rise up to demand a vote of the public and protect our state's environmental and fiscal health?

LIGHTS OUT FOR BIRDS

This spring over 250 species of birds will migrate through the Bay Area, some of which fly from South and Central America all the way to the Arctic tundra. Most migrate at night and use the stars and moon to navigate, which leaves them prone to being attracted by bright lights on tall buildings and communication towers. Some *(continued on next page)*

Lights out for Birds *(continued from previous page)*

birds are compelled to fly toward the lights, resulting in confusion, exhaustion, injury and sometimes death. "Lights Out for Birds" is a simple, sensible way for people to help birds just by turning off lights or drawing shades," said Michael Lynes, Conservation Director of the Golden Gate Audubon Society. "Collisions with windows, lit buildings and towers, and other manmade structures kill nearly 1 billion birds each year, including many migratory birds whose populations are already suffering significant declines. Starting in 2008, San Francisco partnered with Pacific Gas and Electric Company and Golden Gate Audubon Society to become one of the first cities to implement a Lights Out program. The program, which kicks off this week, focuses on voluntary guidelines and recommendations for building owners and operators to turn off lights or draw window coverings **during the migration period from February 15 – April 30 of each year and again from August 15 through October 31** for the fall migration. Participants conserve energy, reduce carbon emissions, and save birds.

NO MORE ARBORETUM FEES?

As you know if you've tried to enter the Botanical Garden since last August (Strybing Arboretum in Golden Gate Park), there are big green boxes located at the entrances with teller's windows to compel you to show identification (if you're a city resident or pay a fee. The boxes are unanimously hated and the folly of the fees decried; non-residents are already paying for so many other attractions in the east end of the park that they are just turning away. The Botanical Garden is not making the money it thought it would, and furthermore, the legislation that instituted the fees has a sunset clause. If the General Fund receives more tax money that can be allocated to the Recreation and Park Department, the fees would expire within 90 days after the effective date of the new tax. In November, San Francisco voters approved a real estate transfer tax increase on properties worth more than \$5,000,000. This tax is bringing in more money to the General Fund and thereby money that can be allocated to the

Recreation and Park Department. On February 1, 2011 Supervisor Avalos introduced legislation #110113 to appropriate \$80,000 of the General Fund Property Transfer Tax to the Recreation and Park Department to remove the fees for the Arboretum. Co-sponsors of the legislation are Supervisors Mikarimi, Mar, Campos and Kim. More supervisors need to get on board to pass this legislation.

Please contact Mayor Edwin Lee and Supervisors John.Avalos@sfgov.org, David.Chiu@sfgov.org, Carmen.Chu@sfgov.org, Malia.Cohen@sfgov.org, Sean.Elsbernd@sfgov.org, Mark.Farrell@sfgov.org, Scott.Wiener@sfgov.org and ask them to provide the Recreation and Park Department with the \$80,000 from the General Fund that will sunset the fees at the Arboretum.



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