



# *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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## Norm Rolfe Dies: SFT's Voice for Sound Transportation Planning

For almost 50 years Norman Rolfe, transportation activist and dedicated San Franciscan, has been a strong and consistent champion of a more pedestrian-oriented and less car-oriented San Francisco. He died on Friday, January 15 at the age of 84.

Norm Rolfe could be called the voice of Sane Transportation Planning in San Francisco. With his well reasoned and strongly voiced arguments, he helped save the cable cars and the Muni J-Line. He helped prevent Upper Market Street from being converted into a San Jose style, 8-lane "boulevard". He helped block the Second Crossing (an ill-conceived scheme to build another transbay automobile bridge).

In the early 1960's, Mr. Rolfe joined others to keep a freeway from running through the Panhandle and Golden Gate Park and thus became an influential part of San Francisco's campaign to prevent the California Division of Highways from ripping the City to shreds with freeways. Years later, he was one of the first people to call for the removal of the Embarcadero Freeway. He supported removal of the Central Freeway after it was damaged in the 1989 earthquake and worked for voter approval for construction of Octavia Boulevard. He successfully fought against the auto tunnel proposed to run under Russian Hill.

In 1970 he was one of San Francisco Tomorrow's original members and has long served on the Board of Directors of this city's premier urban environmental organization as Chair of its Transportation Committee. In 1971, he helped write San Francisco Tomorrow's transportation policy, which remains largely intact and current

today. He also was active for many years on the Sierra Club's Bay Chapter transportation committee.

Mr. Rolfe studied every issue thoroughly and usually got to the crux of the matter while everyone else was still on the first page. He strongly supported the return of streetcar service to Market Street and later to the Embarcadero (both now highly successful Muni lines). In public hearings and in meetings with officials, he never minced words; he expected other people to be persuaded by his voice and was impatient when they did not see things as clearly, and with as much farsightedness, as he did. He was incapable of sugar-coating an issue, or spinning it or making it more palatable for his audience.

A strong but fair-minded passenger rail advocate, Mr. Rolfe was a steadfast supporter of the Tranbay Terminal/Caltrain Extension Project who also foresaw the weakness of the lightly-patronized and money-losing BART/SFIA extension. In recent years, he has strongly opposed the grandiose plan for building an unnecessary full-sized freeway through the Presidio of San Francisco. He also was an early opponent of the ultra-expensive, marginally useful Central Subway and worked with others to block MTC's ill-conceived scheme to expand Bay Area freeways in a major way under the guise of its so-called HOT lane program.

At the time of his death, Mr. Rolfe was a member of the Citizens Advisory Council for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, Citizens Advisory Committee for the Transbay Joint Powers Authority, and the Octavia Boulevard Central Freeway Citizens Advisory Committee.

## 2010: The year of WATER

This article is the first of a series that will explore problems, solutions, and new technologies that deal with water issues on a local and statewide level. Despite rainfall-to-date-this-season which is normal, California is in the midst of a multi-year drought. Some farms in the Central Valley have had to fallow their fields because of lack of water while California actually has a reliable supply of water. Our problem is allocation and lack of management.

**A NEW WATER BOND.** This Fall, California voters will be bombarded with drastic and frightening scenarios, spread by special interests and their "green" governor, aimed at scaring voters into approving an \$11 billion bond. This bond would worsen our already woeful debt for the benefit of a few corporate agribusinesses in a small part of the Central Valley.

**AGRICULTURAL USE OF WATER.** Agriculture overall uses about 80% of California's water. The Westlands Water District, an enormous irrigation district southwest of Fresno, is currently negotiating a contract for as much water as San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco combined use each year. Some of the crops they grow include cotton, alfalfa, and almonds-many of which are exported to China. The latest lucrative crop is the water itself as corporate ag companies, which receive taxpayer subsidized water, are looking to sell their water for a handsome profit. The buyers are usually real estate developers in Southern California.

Other topics that will be included in the series are San Francisco's groundwater (underlying the city is a triple layer of freshwater aquifer) which the City proposes to add to the potable water supply, and the City's new stormwater plan.

## SHINING THE LIGHT on Sunlight in Parks: Revisions Proposed

The Park Shadow or "Sunshine" ballot initiative was passed by an almost 62% majority of San Francisco voters in June 1984. The issue prompting this initiative was a project that would have shaded a very precious sunny playground in Chinatown, and the realization that like air and water, sunshine is a public resource. Peter Bosselmann of the University of California assisted in creating and scoping quantitative methods to create standards (and software) to measure the impacts of heights of new construction on parks. The measure pertained to Recreation and Parks properties and limited heights immediately adjacent to parks to 40 feet. Adding the measure to the Planning Code as Section 295, the Planning Commission later adopted a method for interpretation of Section 295.

Facing numerous applications by developers who want to build highrise structures that would exceed the current interpretation guidelines, this fall the Planning Department prepared a proposal to update the Implementation memo. Staff cited substantial improvements in the technology of

sunlight measurements in the last two decades – a non-controversial finding. But the memo went further. It divided parks into classes by size and by existing shading and created new, and less protective, standards for the amount of shading to be allowed.

The concepts for the new memo were presented in three public workshops and then sent to the Planning Commission on November 12, 2009. Inexplicably, the policy changes with their potential for increased shadows on parks and open space throughout the city were found to be "categorically exempt" from environmental review, meaning no environmental evaluation needed to be done. But the reported changes reached other quarters with shock. Board of Supervisors President David Chiu responded in mid-January with language for a proposed ballot initiative that would close up the loopholes and create a very tight standard: NO new shading. A development proposal that would cause new shading was yanked from the agenda of Recreation and Parks joint meeting with the Planning Commission. The Planning Department is said to be working on a compromise.

# Plastic-paved soccer fields in Golden Gate Park?

**WHAT'S PROPOSED** The Soccer Complex that Recreation and Parks is proposing in the western end of Golden Gate Park, near the Beach Chalet and Ocean Beach, would replace the existing grassy practice fields with artificial turf; expand these fields in size; add one more field to the existing four fields, and a sixth one in the future; configure one field as a championship field for major soccer matches; add eight-foot wide paved sidewalks around the fields; add bleachers to the north of the championship field, further expanding the paved area, resulting in the loss of large trees; expand the parking lot to allow for more cars; install extensive night time lighting, including intensely bright sportsfield lighting on top of 60-foot poles which will be on from before sunset until 10:00 p.m. most nights of the year; cut down an unknown number of the trees and plants that currently surround the fields.

Amazingly, no environmental impact report has been done for this project. Outreach has been limited to a few meetings with some community groups at the western edge of the Park. The soccer complex project violates the San Francisco General Plan, the Department of Recreation and Park's own Golden Gate Park Master Plan (1998) and National Register of Historic Places application (2004). These documents state that the western end of Golden Gate Park is to remain pastoral, characterized by meadows surrounded by groves of trees. Also, many questions remain as to the long-term costs involved in this project.

The opposition to the project does not oppose soccer in Golden Gate Park; in fact, a grassy, meadow-like athletic field of some type has been in this location for many years. But SFT believes that a project that will change forever the character of the western end of the Park and Ocean Beach requires a full Environmental Impact Report so that the public and decision-makers can be well informed before proceeding.

**LIGHTING** Bright lighting has many impacts on wildlife, including affecting migration patterns and nesting patterns, and opening up smaller birds and animals to easy predation. *Golden Gate Park and Ocean Beach are vital sites on the Pacific Flyway - a migratory route extending from Alaska and Canada to South America which birds take each spring and fall. Night lighting can cause birds to become confused and disoriented because birds that migrate at night navigate using the moon and stars. Night lighting will also negatively impact birds that roost and nest in this part of the park.*

In addition, bright lighting causes massive insect deaths, resulting in the loss of food supply for song birds. In addition to the potential impact of degraded habitat, this project will result in a loss of trees and a grass meadow, an increase in traffic in

the Park and the neighborhoods, decreased visitor parking at Ocean Beach and Beach Chalet, bright lights at Ocean Beach with decreased night sky darkness, and infringement on the wild nature of Ocean Beach and the natural landscape of the Park's west end.

**COSTS** Rec and Parks considers grass fields costly to maintain but there are questions about the long-term cost effectiveness of artificial turf. When a field wears out, who will pay for its replacement and the removal of toxic materials to the landfill? The top soil will have been removed permanently; what remains under the plastic will be a barren, unplayable surface. Has revitalizing the current grass fields been considered and costs for the two types of playing surface compared side-by-side?

Little by little citizens across the city are learning about this project and making the case that a natural landscape is as valuable as a playing field. Learning to appreciate nature is as valuable for children as playing sports. Enjoying Ocean Beach at sunset without light pollution has value for everyone. Keeping Golden Gate Park true to its original design intent preserves it as an historical landscape and also retains the Park's prime function as a retreat.

The Golden Gate Park Master Plan was arrived at after 10 years of deliberations involving extensive outreach, City departments, consultants, and citizen input. If Rec and Parks are going to violate these carefully crafted planning documents, it should be with the full knowledge and consent of all the citizens of San Francisco.

Apparently no effort has been made by RPD to allocate funding to repair the existing grassy fields and restrooms, or for finding another location for these artificial turf fields.

*(Continued on last page)*

## Golden Gate Park *(continued from page three)*

Many players prefer grassy fields, but parents and players have not been given the choice of upgrading and funding well-maintained grass fields.

If a parent is concerned about the possible dangers of artificial turf, this project will remove one more choice for their children.

These are just a few of the issues involved in the

possible loss of open space in Golden Gate Park.

There must be a full environmental impact report and thorough outreach about this project to all San Franciscans so that the project can be carefully evaluated. Golden Gate Park is too valuable a resource for our City and too important to San Franciscans to be altered so drastically without these steps being taken.

## NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR SFT AWARDS

Each year, San Francisco Tomorrow recognizes those who have made a significant contribution to preserving and improving San Francisco's unique character. This year we'd like to invite you to submit nominations for our annual awards ceremony to be held in May.

**The Jack Morrison Award**, named for one of our best-known and most active board members, former Supervisor Jack Morrison, is a lifetime achievement award that recognizes the total contribution made by an individual over many years. Former winners include Assembly member Tom Ammiano, Amy Meyer, G. Bland Platt, and Norm Rolfe. **The Unsung Hero Award** recognizes an individual or organization which has had a significant victory or accomplishment over the past year to make San Francisco a better place.

You are welcome to join the discussion at SFT's March 10 Board meeting at which the nominations will be voted. Send your nominations to [jenclary@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jenclary@sbcglobal.net) by March 1, 2010. Please include the achievement for which the nominee should be recognized and brief biographical information.

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