



# *San Francisco Tomorrow*

## *Working to Protect the Urban Environment*

*Issue 345*

*Will you want to live in San Francisco – Tomorrow?*

*June 2011*

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## **APPLAUSE ALL AROUND**

Many who contribute mightily to maintaining our environment, our civic pride, our culture and our diversity, go unnoticed. San Francisco's Tomorrow's annual awards dinner is one of the exceptions. Our May 18 dinner honored Allan Jacobs, former City Planning Director (1967-1975) who received the coveted Jack Morrison Lifetime Achievement Award. Stalwart Planning Commissioners, Kathrin Moore, Christina Olague, and Bill Sugaya each received an Unsung Heroes Award. In their speeches to a sell-out dinner crowd of SFT members, the awardees offered their unique ideas and showed the special tenacity that gets them through piles of paperwork and hours of testimony to come to fair-minded decisions. It was SFT's desire to award them for that special devotion to civic duty that demands sacrifice of personal quality of life in the service of a better quality of life for our citizens.

The applause of the packed house at Castagnola's acclaimed the awardees themselves and also gave testimony to San Francisco Tomorrow, and our continued efforts to guard the urban environment so that we truly will want to live in San Francisco Tomorrow.

**Look for changes in the SFT website soon. Meanwhile, for essential information about San Francisco Tomorrow, go to [www.sftomorrow.org](http://www.sftomorrow.org)**

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## **The HANC recycling center has been in the vanguard**

The Haight-Asbury Neighborhood Council (HANC) recycling center at the edge of Golden Gate Park has been in operation for the past thirty years. Now the Rec & Park Department has issued it a order of eviction for June 30<sup>th</sup>. HANC has always supported the urban agriculture movement. In 1990 it sponsored the demonstration garden at Lawton and Seventh Avenue. It also runs the Native Plant Nursery at its present site at 780 Frederick Street. Ed Dunn, the Center's Executive Director says, "We're working with the City and various stake holders to develop a transition plan." But HANC fears there will be no resolution to the eviction because of the determination of certain neighbors and suspected retaliation for HANC's stand against the recent Sit/Lie ballot measure. As a possible resolution, Dunn has offered to move out HANC's collection program, in which trucks pick up

recyclables from off-site recycling bins and bring the materials back to the center. The freed up space would be used to start up a community garden at the 780 Frederick site. (The Native Plant Nursery would remain right where it is.) In return, he wants to keep the redemption and drop-off businesses going in order to fund the start-up of the community garden. "While we're still here we could do the whole community garden at no cost to the City," Dunn said. "But (Rec. and Park) is preferring to spend City money instead. We can do it on our own dime."

At this writing there has been no resolution to the ongoing drama and some see an intention to undermine not only HANC's recycling center but other recycling centers throughout the city.

# Golden Gate Park is Our Land

Golden Gate Park is a historic and cultural treasure and a resource for all San Franciscans.

Long ignored, the west end of Golden Gate Park will become the site of two large, intrusive, semi-industrial construction projects -- a sports complex at the site of the present soccer fields and a water treatment plant next to two historic structures.

## **Beach Chalet Soccer Fields Sports Complex**

The soccer fields project will remove over seven acres of living grass and replace it with artificial turf. It will also install 10 banks of 60-foot stadium lights, over one-quarter million watts, that will be lighted from sunset until 10:00 p.m. every night of the year. The second project, the water treatment facility (a factory), will be a 40,000-square-foot, 30-foot tall building with chemical processing, 24-hour lighting, and security gating. Both of these projects are located in the far western end of Golden Gate Park immediately across from Ocean Beach. This area has always been the most undeveloped and relatively wild area of the park, and it was designated as such in both the 1998 Golden Gate Park Master Plan and the 2004 National Register of Historic Places. Both of those documents were written by the Recreation and Park Department, but they are now being ignored.

## **The Water Treatment Plant**

It's hard to believe that the Recreation and Park Department and the PUC (Public Utilities Commission) actually want to put this water treatment facility in a park at all, and that they've chosen a site next to two City Landmarks, the historic Murphy Windmill and the Millwrights' Cottage in our *premier* park. The Murphy Windmill is currently being restored and will be completed in late 2011; the Millwright's Cottage is also being restored with a restaurant or pub to be installed there. Golden Gate Park Bond funding is being used for construction of both buildings -- \$5 million for the Murphy Windmill and \$1.4 million for the Millwright Cottage. Why would the Recreation and Park Commission spend that kind of money restoring these structures, only to allow the SFPUC to build a factory next door? AND, the water treatment facility will be a Homeland Security site! The United States government could require that the site be hardened -- that is, surrounded with barbed wire or paved extensively.

## **The Commonwealth Club Listens**

These issues and many others regarding our parks and how they are being managed were discussed in a program at the Commonwealth Club in May.

Jim Chappell, Interim Director of San Francisco Beautiful and Past Executive Director of SPUR, served as moderator. After presentation to the attendees of these two major threats to the Park, the financial and budget issues which have brought forth these drastic solutions were examined and their impact on Park and Recreation programs. It was stressed that the city Master Plan and the Golden Gate Park Master Plan in particular, should always provide the last word on whether projects in the park are legal and worthy.

Discussing the issues at the Commonwealth Club were panelists Anthea Hartig, President of Western Office National Trust for Historic Preservation; Katherine Howard, Golden Gate Park Preservation Alliance; Mike Lynes, Conservation Director and General Counsel for Golden Gate Audubon Society; and George Wooding, West of Twin Peaks Central Council.

## **Getting the facts in an EIR**

The Draft EIR for the Soccer Fields sports complex will be issued in August 2011. To have a copy of this document mailed to you as soon as it is available, contact Don Lewis at the Planning Department to be kept notified of all documents and notices for this project: [don.lewis@sfgov.org](mailto:don.lewis@sfgov.org) or Don Lewis, SF Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, SF, CA 94103. Once the DEIR is issued, there will only be a short public comment period before the document is returned to the Planning Department for further study.

## **SF Ocean Edge is in the fray**

San Francisco Tomorrow is keeping abreast of these projects with the help of the group **SF Ocean Edge** which supports renovating the soccer fields with natural grass and no night lighting. They point out that if this cheaper, and greener, solution is pursued, the remainder of the \$12 million budgeted for the very expensive soccer fields complex could be spent on other playing fields all over San Francisco. SF Ocean Edge has been meeting regularly with their attorney to review the EIR process and other issues related to the soccer fields. Despite the support of over 25 local and national organizations and a petition signed by over 1,200 San Franciscans, the Department of Recreation and Park initially refused to perform an EIR and called it just a simple restoration of the existing grass soccer fields. It was necessary for SF Ocean Edge to call it what it is, a full-strength, artificial-turf soccer complex, and to file an appeal with the Board of Supervisors. Two days after the appeal was filed, RPD decided that they would "listen to the public" and prepare a full EIR.

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VISION: Triangle Park at Columbus/ Lombard.



VISION: North Beach Library expanded.

## A TAPESTRY OF CIVIC SPACES, **Melding URBAN DESIGN with PRESERVATION**

Land is not merely a commodity for ever-larger construction. At strategic locations, urban land has the power to become grand civic space for the timeless enjoyment of future generations. But just a few years ago, the City of San Francisco seized the triangular lot at 701 Lombard by eminent domain for the express purpose of creating open space where there was nothing more than a parking lot. But this was a strategic site which spatially expanded the vista of Columbus Avenue and offered simultaneous public vistas to Telegraph Hill, Coit Tower, Sts. Peter & Paul Church, Transamerica Pyramid and toward hills, Bay and cable cars.

Now an EIR has been certified which would permit the construction of a 30-foot high library on the triangle lot, demolish an historic building, downsize the regional multi-purpose hardscape field, decrease net recreational square footage and eliminate Joe DiMaggio's Softball Fields. The proposed Triangle Library would be constructed 20 feet across the property line onto the Mason Street right-of-way, a preposterous grab of a public street, in contradiction of the San Francisco General Plan.

### **No taking of public streets**

The General Plan maintains a "strong presumption" against construction onto streets and the blockage of public view corridors. The Triangle Library is not code-compliant, requiring rezoning and spot zoning, while shadowing open space. Protesters who came flocking to all the public hearings on the issue brought up these impacts. Library construction on Mason Street would impact the economic interests of adjacent property owners, as well, blocking axial views to the bay, hills and cable cars.

The EIR should be objective and neutral but this sets the scene for construction on the Triangle and contradicts the long history of protecting open space on Columbus Avenue. Remember the battle to stop the Washington Square garage? It would be equally illogical to construct onto Washington Square, Joseph Conrad Square, Marina Plaza, Language of the Birds Plaza or Redwood Park.

On May 19, 2011, the State Historical Resources Commission (SHRC) recommended that the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) forward the North Beach Library to the Keeper of the National Register for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The recommendation and potential listing adds formal recognition of the Library's historical and architectural

significance, highlighting preservation designs that the EIR already gives preferential status.

### **The American library movement**

The North Beach Library is a perfect illustration of the social democratization resulting from the American library movement. The current North Beach Library represents 1950's national culture, its modernist aesthetics and the popular fascination with technology and democratic education in the face of the Cold War and the "space race". Serving as a neighborhood center that mixed a burgeoning diverse population, the residential-scaled building mimicked the domesticity of suburban homes with public "living rooms" and fireplaces, in which the idealized postwar family could gather and socialize. Red brick textures, exposed wood beams, outdoor terraces, diffused natural lighting, acoustical balance and an open spatial quality reinforced the suburban theme---reflective of the aspirations of the post-WWII middle-class family.

The North Beach Library has the highest architectural integrity of the remaining library buildings designed by the architectural firm of Appleton-Wolfard. Its rehabilitation and expansion could make it the showcase of mid-century San Francisco modernism. The Marina Library has already been designated a City Landmark, and the Library Department has scheduled others for

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landmark status. These mid-century modernist structures are a San Francisco first: this genre of mid-century modernist design could join San Francisco's legacy from other historic periods.

### **Why Don't They Try It?**

Rehabilitation and expansion of the present North Beach Library would be the most cost effective and sustainable design, far more bang-for-the-buck than the high-priced demolition and new construction of the proposed new structure. It would add several thousand square feet more than the new building construction, create more space for the next generation of technology and maximize the square footage of the famous Joe DiMaggio Playground.

But the enthusiasm for "something new", something new and shiny, a glassy new library where it will dominate the street scene of old North Beach, is too much for some officials to resist. Their enthusiasm for a new toy may have only temporarily discouraged the people who believe the current building can and should be reused, in the interests of good urban design and historic preservation,

Geographic beauty, great civic spaces and historic textures blend over time to shape unique urban compositions. Often this cannot be taken for granted. Must it come to this? Potential litigation may be the remaining avenue to honor past covenants and to preserve irreplaceable urban treasures.

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*(continued from page two)* Since it appears that the legal approach is necessary to get RPD's attention, SF Ocean Edge is committed to pursuing legal remedies to the extent required, to modify this project.

### **The soccer complex is about more than restoration**

The soccer complex envisioned by Recreation and Park Department was never just about restoration; this was always a project to launch a whole new level of high-intensity recreation venues for use by the soccer establishment, which now includes regional soccer clubs for both youth and adults. Many clubs include out-of-town users who have money for the whole new world of pay-to-play. Times may be tough, but this is not why San Francisco has created a world class system of local parks with active recreation programs. Our parks are for all our citizenry and pay-to-play is just nickels and dimes. San Francisco needs a better plan to finance its ongoing expenses in our parks.

SF Ocean Edge has a sensible and fund-able renovation of the Golden Gate Park soccer fields in mind: reconstruct the soil base with good drainage and gopher barriers, replant with natural grass and just use the hours of daylight (no night lighting to disturb bird and wildlife or interrupt our view of the ocean under the night sky.. )

SFT members should contact the Mayor, the mayoral candidates and the supervisors to let them know that Golden Gate Park is not the place for these two massive projects. More can be found at [www.goldengateparkpreservation.org](http://www.goldengateparkpreservation.org) and [www.sfoceanedge.org](http://www.sfoceanedge.org) . For past newsletter articles on Recreation and Parks, see SFT's website [www.sftomorrow.org](http://www.sftomorrow.org) (*Thanks to Katherine Howard of SF Ocean Edge for background information.*)