



San Francisco Tomorrow

Working to Protect the Urban Environment

Issue 317

Will you want to live in San Francisco – Tomorrow?

January 2008

Can this TRUST be trusted?

Last month, the Presidio Trust presented two proposals for development of the historic Main Post. One was the Fisher Contemporary Art Museum at the Presidio (CAMP), a multi-million dollar, 100,000 sq. ft. building displaying the art collection of Don Fisher, founder of Gap and one-time Director of the Presidio Trust. The other was a History Center at the Golden Gate (HCGG), a structure that would explain Presidio and American History to Presidio park visitors, proposed by a local nonprofit group, the Presidio Historical Association.

Shortly after it was formed, the Trust, in cooperation with the National Park Service, (NPS) hosted a conference articulating historical stories, themes and events that could be presented in a Presidio History Museum. But neither the Trust nor the NPS ever used those recommendations. The Trust itself, according to a letter from former UC Chancellor Heyman, a Trust director at the time, had an internal understanding that after the Lucas Digital Art Center and other leasing was complete, the Trust would create a history museum. But the Trust likewise did nothing to carry out that understanding. *(continued next page)*

On the February 5 Ballot, SFT recommends:

YES on A - It's Time to Fix Our Parks

NO on C - Non-binding resolution asks the City to take property away from the National Park Service.

NO on State Ballot Proposition 91

YES on Proposition 93

NO on Propositions 24-27

More about San Francisco Neighborhood Park Repairs Measure A:

With all the hub-bub from the presidential hopefuls, it would be easy to overlook an important measure on the same ballot that will fix up our ailing neighborhood parks. On February 5th, San Francisco voters will consider Prop. A – a \$185 million bond to repair and rebuild our neighborhood parks, recreation centers and park restrooms.

“Proposition A will preserve and restore San Francisco’s neighborhood parks,” says Glenn Snyder, president of the San Francisco Parks Trust Board of Trustees. “These are the parks we use every day for soccer and softball, for casual strolls and long distance runs, for pushing children in swings and watching birds in their nests.” Prop. A will replace unsafe playground equipment, protect open space along the waterfront, repair every freestanding neighborhood park bathroom, improve earthquake safety in our recreation centers, plant trees in our parks, restore hiking trails, resurface athletic fields and provide matching grants for smaller neighborhood park improvements.

Proposed by Mayor Newsom and the entire Board of Supervisors, the bond measure is the first step in a 10-year plan to restore the City’s declining physical facilities while holding property taxes steady. Prop. A bonds will only be sold as old bonds are repaid. According to City Controller Ed Harrington, this city policy results in “keeping the property tax imposed by general obligation bonds approximately the same over time.”

Prop. A requires strict accountability standards, including: listing all major projects in the bond ordinance and setting their budgets, a new city website so the public can track bond projects and spending, monthly reports on the bond program and annual meetings at Rec/Park and Port Commissions, annual independent audits by a citizens’ bond oversight committee that can stop the sale of bonds if anything is amiss.

TRUST (continued from page one)

After years of inaction on "history interpretation", during a 2004 Congressional oversight review, the National Academy of Public Administrators, (NAPA) criticized the Trust for its inaction. It suggested that if the Trust could not do better in this area, then the Trust statute should be amended to more clearly mandate such action. Over those same years, the Trust sought and received millions of philanthropic dollars for trails and ecological concerns, but has not designated a site where a history museum might be built, has not spent or sought funds itself, or even authorized others to solicit funds for a history museum.

In this setting, Don Fisher, a former member and chairman of the Presidio Trust Board, offered to move his private contemporary art collection into the Presidio. His chosen site was not the Crissy Field border area, now zoned for large museums, or Ft. Scott, a beautiful setting where almost any development would be welcome. *Instead, he prefers to demolish the buildings on a square block in the heart of the Presidio's oldest, most sensitive and significant historic district, the Main Post, part of the National Historic Landmark District (NHLHD).* Over that entire block, he would erect a bright white stone and glass building approximately 50 feet high, with over 100,000 square feet plus a floor for parking, and with a display area larger than that of the SF Museum of Modern Art.

Local landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin, was quoted in the Chronicle saying "The design...is absurdly inappropriate. It would ruin the unique architectural character of the Presidio..." Charles Fracchia, Founder and President Emeritus of the San Francisco Museum & Historical Society stated, "The intrusion of a large hotel and museum in a contemporary style of architecture into this delicate space would be a desecration, both to the aesthetic and historic importance of the site. Such a mistake, if allowed to continue, will be looked upon in ages to come as eyesores built by the unfeeling and the insensitive."

The Presidio Trust, apparently forgetting its responsibilities for protecting the NHLHD, nevertheless gushed over the Fisher proposal, calling a news conference to publicize it. It then announced an RFP (a Request For Proposals inviting others to bid and compete for the same space chosen by Fisher), which even described the Fisher Museum in its RFP advertisement in The New Yorker magazine, and which apparently tailored the RFP specifications toward the Fisher art museum. (For example, any competing proposal, whether or not an art museum,

was required to have a flat roof for the display of art.)

As a needless complication, the Presidio Trust invited proposals for a large hotel in the Main Post area. The Trust has now selected one, at 80,000 sq. ft., and named a contractor for the project. But the Trust has not yet entered into a contract for construction of the hotel.

The Presidio's history watchdog, the Presidio Historical Association, (PHA) recognized that if nothing were done, the Main Post NHLD would be destroyed by the Trust's hotel and Fisher's CAMP. It also saw a chance to open a public dialog on a History Museum, an idea it had supported for years. The PHA, a small, nonprofit organization, (and a David compared to the Fisher Goliath), used its limited funds to promptly hire a museum consultant and submit a proposal for a combination Visitors Center and American History museum, (the HCGG), responding to the specifications and 90 day time limit set by the Trust's RFP. There were no other RFP responses. (continued, back page)

Prompted by the San Francisco Bay oil spill earlier this month, the California Coastal Commission has created a web page about oil spills for teachers and students. Click on the link from www.coastforyou.org <http://www.coastforyou.org/> or go directly to <http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/oilspills.html> <http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/oilspills.html>

Congestion Pricing Going Awry in San Francisco

Thanks to the gas tax and the Highway Trust Fund, America has long over-funded its roads and highways and under-funded all other transportation modes. This out-of-whack allocation process is based on the myth that because of gas taxes the users of America's roadways pay their own way. They don't. Gas taxes no longer pay the full cost of roadways, and they don't even begin to pay for the public health, social, criminal justice, land use, environmental and geopolitical costs required to sustain our national driving habit. Various government agencies and private think tanks place the full public cost of driving on America's roadways at between \$3 and \$9 a gallon, only \$0.50 of which, on average, is paid for at the pump.

Despite the heavy public subsidies lavished upon America's motorists, no politician has yet been willing to remind us that paying into an American transportation fund would be preferable to sending hundreds of billions of dollars a year overseas to hostile oil-producing countries and petroleum oli-

gopolies. So the heavily subsidized practice of driving expands, the price of gasoline rises, the congestion in America's metropolitan areas worsens and the globe warms.

A few cities have taken matters into their own hands. Congestion pricing, if properly applied, is a system for directly charging those who drive in congested areas. Cities do this by ringing their congested areas with cameras capable of reading license plates and electronically assessing motorists who drive within the ring. This system has worked well in London, Stockholm and Singapore. Congestion pricing as applied in these cities has generated new public transit funding and it has cut traffic, in Stockholm by over 20%. It appears that New York City might be the next city to adopt a meaningful congestion pricing plan.

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) has taken a different tack. SFCTA wants to impose a surcharge upon drivers who use Doyle Drive. The charge would vary throughout the day, depending on the amount of congestion at that time. It would be higher during peak commute hours. While the SFCTA calls its plan 'congestion pricing', it actually has little in common with the more comprehensive and certainly much fairer approach adopted by the above-listed cities.

Let's examine the effect of the SFCTA's scheme. To avoid paying a higher the surcharge, auto-commuters unable or unwilling to pay the higher surcharge might switch to using a bus, but more likely they would simply alter their schedules, thereby stretching out the morning and afternoon commute periods. People untroubled by the extra cost of the higher peak period surcharge, having discovered that driving into the city during peak periods had become easier, would likely shift their schedules in the opposite direction to take advantage of the temporarily shorter peak period driving times. The net effect of this odd interpretation of 'congestion pricing' would therefore likely be a reduced level of peak period congestion (for a time) coupled by an increase in driving just before and just after the peak periods. By encouraging people to use Highway 101 during more hours of the day the SFCTA's plan would make driving into the city easier and therefore more popular, thereby leading to an actual increase in the total number of daily automobiles entering San Francisco from the North. In uncrowded downtown areas like those of Sacramento or Oakland this might not matter. But San Francisco is already plagued with excessive off-peak traffic during many hours of the day. Given San Francisco's heavy off-peak congestion, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what's going to happen if the SFCTA succeeds in pushing open the northerly auto-gate into the city

by spreading out the commute hours.

London, Stockholm, Singapore and New York are looking at their congestion problems in a smart way. What wrong with San Francisco?

Both the David and Goliath proposals were heard at the Trust's December meeting. The contemporary art museum was presented by Don Fisher and his professional team, including his New York architect and his attorney, another former Presidio Board member, Mary Murphy. He also offered the Trust an additional \$10 million for landscaping the Parade Ground in front of his CAMP, if the trust approved his proposal.

JEAN KORTUM Jean Kortum, a San Francisco civic activist and historian who helped preserve the city's northern waterfront and was a key figure in San Francisco's 'freeway revolt,' died October 1 at the Kaiser hospital in Terra Linda. She was a co-founder of San Francisco Tomorrow and served for many years as a member and then president of San Francisco's Landmark Preservation Advisory Board. In addition to her work on the Landmarks Board, she meticulously documented a number of San Francisco historic districts, neighborhoods, and buildings, and mentored many others in the field of historic research.

'Jean Kortum was an unsung hero of the Bay Area environmental movement,' said Harold Gilliam, a former Chronicle columnist. She preferred to work behind the scenes. She liked to marshal facts that would support her point of view, use the telephone to rally her troops, and deluge political leaders with calls and letters. She was indefatigable, and she knew her stuff. The late Sue Bierman, a San Francisco supervisor who worked with Mrs. Kortum on many issues, called her 'an expert on landmarks' and 'a dedicated historian.'

MAKE IT A BIG YEAR *Golden Gate National Parks is home to nearly three dozen endangered species. To spread the word about the incredible diversity in our backyard, Bay Area non-profits have created the **BIG YEAR 2008 Endangered Species campaign.** Big Year is a race against time to see each of the 33 endangered and threatened species found in the parks, while taking 33 conservation actions that will help prevent these species from going extinct. Anyone can participate in this competitive event. The person who sees and helps the most species between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2008, will win the Big Year. Explorers can report their sightings on the Big Year website and blog about exciting discoveries. Big Year also includes guided trips and walks, presentations, volunteer days, and even happy hours. For complete details visit the **BIG YEAR 2008 website** <<http://www.ggnrbigyear.org/>> .*

TRUST (continued from page two)

In contrast, the Presidio Historical Association proposed what the Trust might have, and no doubt should have, years ago. Their history museum proposal would be less than half the size of Fisher's CAMP and consistent with the scale, size and feeling of the historic Main Post District. Its goal is to attract the full range of Presidio visitors to a visitors' center and to encourage them to understand Presidio and American History.

Mayor Newsom and others hoped that the Presidio Trust would find a way to build both museums. Theoretically, that could easily be done, but not if the hotel and Fisher CAMP were to remain located in the historically sensitive Main Post. There appeared to be no reason why those two structures could not be located elsewhere. However, Fisher stated, for reasons unclear to the audience, that only his chosen site, placing his CAMP at the center of the historic Main Post District would be acceptable to him.

Fisher's attorney rubbed salt in a wound, perhaps insulting the intelligence and experience of the activist audience by saying that "after all these years no one had proposed a History Museum", when it was the Presidio Trust Board on which she and Don Fisher sat that had failed to build, or encourage others to build such a Museum, during "all those years".

And it is there that matters stand at the moment. Craig Middleton, Presidio Trust CEO has stated that the Trust will make its decision on the RFP, picking one of the two museums, in January, 2008. The Chronicle reports that Don Fisher has hired San Francisco's premier crisis manager, Sam Singer, to fight the PHA History Museum.

In the meantime, the PHA has nominated the Main Post portion of the Presidio National Historic Landmark District (NHL) for the list of the Eleven Most Endangered Historic Sites in America, (a list created and publicized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation). The PHA notes that the Trust's proposed Main Post hotel and the Fisher CAMP will destroy the integrity of the most historically valuable site in the Presidio, a site that the Trust is obligated to protect as part of the Presidio NHL.

If the unique historic resources of the Presidio are destroyed, that destruction will have been at the hands of the agency charged with protecting them, the Presidio Trust.

'There can be no purpose more inspiring than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us.'

E. O. Wilson

You can help protect our urban environment as an up-to-date member of San Francisco Tomorrow. Celebrate SFT's 37th **Year of Action** by sending in your dues check as a 2008 member. Your choice: \$15, \$25, \$35, \$50 or more. Make checks payable to "San Francisco Tomorrow" and mail them to SFT at 41 Sutter Street, #1579, San Francisco 94104-4903.

Visit www.sanfranciscotomorrow.org to stay current on San Francisco Tomorrow positions on SF issues!



PRESORTED
STANDARD MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SAN FRANCISCO CA.
PERMIT NO. 9615

Change Services Requested

**CAN THE PRESIDIO TRUST
BE TRUSTED TO PROTECT
THE PRESIDIO'S HISTORY?**

Will you want to live in San Francisco Tomorrow?

Recycled Paper