

Pacific Heights News

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Neighborhoods Collaborate to Preserve the Presidio

PHRA is fighting hard to keep the Contemporary Art Museum of the Presidio out of the Presidio or at least out of the Main Post area. We were represented among the 500 citizens who attended a July 14 meeting to express opposition. However, the proponents are strong and politically well-connected. The next public meeting is July 28 concerning traffic.

Don and Doris Fisher have proposed a white, starkly modern 100,000 square foot building to house their collection of modern art. It would sit at the southern edge of the Main Parade ground, near the historic Officers Club. The west side of the Parade Ground is lined by the red brick Civil War-era Montgomery Barracks.

The Main Post is regarded as the most historic portion of the Presidio. Besides historic preservation, other concerns are parking and traffic. The museum is expected to attract hordes of visitors, but there is limited public transportation into the Presidio. Tour buses and private cars can be expected to jam streets leading to the Lombard, Presidio and Arguello gates. The museum would also mean removing the popular bowling alley, a YMCA and a child care center.

None of that has deterred Mayor Newsom, who on July 9 put out a letter enthusiastically supporting the museum and urging citizens to send an online letter to the Presidio Trust expressing support for CAMP.

PHRA Directors Margot Parke and Carola Shepard have been actively engaged with the 11 other neighborhood groups through NAPP, Neighborhood Associations for Presidio Planning. Here is Parke's assessment:

Development of The Presidio's Main Post

Development of the Presidio's Main Post has been in the news for several years. It began with the announcement that the Walt Disney family would be leasing and rehabilitating one of the historic brick Montgomery Street barracks to develop a Disney Museum. Then came a plan for the Parade Ground itself that would convert a vast, existing asphalted parking lot into a sloping grassy area that would host a multitude of outdoor activities and ceremonies. The Presidio Trust talks about the Main Parade Ground becoming the "hub" of the Presidio, attracting people day and night.

Next we were shown plans for a new 95,000 sq. ft. Lodge on Graham Street facing the Parade Ground.

In December 2007 along came plans for another new 100,000 sq. ft. building on the Main Parade Ground, an art museum to be known as the Contemporary Art Museum at the Presidio (CAMP), a permanent home for Don and Doris Fisher's private art collection.

Additionally, a small theater would be expanded.

There are arguments both for and against the new development plans proposed for this important location. Notably absent from the plans is how the design plans for each new component complement the historic importance of the location; The site is designated a Historic Landmark.

Also absent is how each one will impact traffic and parking both within the Presidio and outside its gates.

We maintain that the proposed Contemporary Art Museum does not need to be located inside the
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City's Planning Director To Speak at Annual Meeting

John Rahaim, San Francisco's new Director of Planning, will be the featured speaker at this year's annual meeting of the Pacific Heights Residents Association..

District 2 Supervisor Michela Alioto-Pier will also attend. Most of the PHRA area is within District 2.

The meeting is scheduled at on Wednesday, October 22 at 6 p.m. in the Schools of the Sacred Heart, 2222 Broadway. Cost is \$35 per member prior to October 15 and \$40 per member after that and at the door. Guests are an additional \$10 on those rates.

Rahaim will address a number of planning issues concerning the PHRA area. In addition, PHRA President Greg Scott will brief members on the actions of the directors in the past year, provide an update on activities across the neighborhood, and discuss some ongoing concerns.

During the reception preceding the meeting, wine and hors d'oeuvres will be served and information tables will be set up by local organizations.

Neighborhoods United Against Contemporary Art Museum

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Presidio, particularly not at the head of the Main Parade Ground. The full array of public transit options and the possibility of developing new, or accessing existing off-street parking, is available at numerous locations in the City of San Francisco. In addition, the Presidio is surrounded on the south, west and east by residential neighborhoods whose streets are not equipped to handle up to 4,000 additional visitor trips per day (estimated daily usage at the proposed museum). Offices and restaurants inside the Lombard Gate already impact adjacent neighborhoods with traffic back-ups and parking demand. The Lombard Gate is currently a bottleneck during peak hours.

We believe that before any new structures are approved, two basic tests must be met:

1. Will the historic significance of the Main Parade Ground be compromised architecturally by the size, color and design of the proposed new building(s), or by the level of activity that will be generated by the new use(s)?
2. Will the projects cause significant negative impacts on the environment both inside and outside the Presidio, particularly with regard to traffic and parking congestion?

The burden of proof to assess the impact of new development on the Main Parade Ground is on the Presidio Trust.

It is not acceptable for the Presidio Trust to ignore the negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods by a combination of the existing and proposed intense developments inside the Park. The Presidio Trust must interface with the City of San Francisco, CalTrans and community groups to resolve these problems. It cannot avoid these issues any longer.

The Pacific Heights Residents Association (PHRA) has been working with other neighborhood Associations through Neighborhood Associations for Presidio Planning (NAPP), a coalition of 11 neighborhoods located in the vicinity of the Presidio. Appropriate development on the Main Parade Ground is so important that we are reaching out to neighborhoods throughout the City to join us. The Presidio Trust has got to get it right. For more information, go to PHRA's website, www.phra-sf.org. You may let the Presidio Trust know what you think about the development of the Main Post by emailing them at mainpost@presidiotrust.gov.

School Volunteers Wanted

As usage of the Pacific Heights School at Webster and Jackson streets continues to evolve, PHRA is establishing a new relationship with the San Francisco Unified School District.

The goal is to ensure that the school remains a neighborhood asset and to forestall any student-resident friction.

On a short-term basis, PHRA is soliciting volunteers to assist the group that will follow the Metro Charter School into the building this fall. The new temporary tenant is jokingly referred to as Newcomer High School's young brothers and sisters. It is in fact a school for new immigrants, younger than the Newcomer student body.

Unsure of what will follow that group, PHRA is seeking to establish a volunteer relationship with the Cobb School, which is located between Pine and California streets just west of Scott.

Anyone interested in volunteering to help the transition into Pacific Heights School or in assisting at Cobb School should contact Lynne Newhouse Segal at Lynnenew@aol.com.

Library Grounds Under Review

The Civic Participation committee of the San Francisco Garden Club is working on a project to revitalize the landscaping around the Presidio branch of the San Francisco Public Library on Sacramento.

The club has two principal charges: education and the beautification of the city. One of the ways they do that is offering prizes to the students of landscape architecture at UC Berkeley. Combining the two aspects of its mission, the group found Sara Cohn, a graduate student who prepared what committee member Judith Taylor calls "a superb set of drawings." Because there are several nearby schools that use the library and its grounds, she focused on children.

The San Francisco Garden Club is working in cooperation with the library department. The Recreation and Parks department has given a tentative blessing, with the principal stipulation that the community be kept informed about the plans and be helped to understand them.

The Presidio library is due for major renovations next year and the city will be holding neighborhood meetings to explain the work. At a July meeting that included library authorities architects for the renovation and the community, the SF Garden Club's ideas were well received.

Negatives of 'Formula Retail' Become Positives with PHRA Help

While the mission of PHRA is to preserve the residential quality within our boundaries, the quality and uniqueness of the businesses on Fillmore Street are major factors in the ambiance of the neighborhood and, generally speaking, that means keeping chain stores out.

While there is no outright ban on chain stores, or "formula retail" as the city calls them, they must seek a Conditional Use permit to operate in some neighborhoods and that process provides an opportunity for community input.

PHRA directors are concerned about three factors: If Fillmore Street were to be dominated by chains – and more than a dozen are represented there now – there

Muni Considers Route Change; PHRA Has a Better Idea for #24

The #24 Divisadero bus would be reroute to continue into the Marina in Muni's Transit Effectiveness Program.

PHRA has a better idea. Muni proposes sending the trolley bus down Scott Street, an under-served route. However, that would mean northbound buses would make a left turn at the corner of Jackson and Scott streets, in conflict with the vehicle and pedestrian traffic at that corner where twice a day children are arriving or departing from the Town School. The Hillsdale School is a block away on Scott Street.

PHRA's alternative would bring the bus across Jackson to Fillmore, as it currently runs. Our proposal has several advantages.

- It would use the electric lines already in place.
- It would eliminate the problem of left turns at Town School.
- It would maintain service across Jackson Street in the event that the #2 Jackson trolley is abandoned, another active proposal.
- The #24 would no longer make a left turn off Fillmore onto Washington Street, which delays traffic, especially when poles come off the wires.

Both plans would ease congestion at the Jackson/Webster area when the #24 currently terminates.

The formal public comment period on the draft TEP proposals ended June 15. The project team is now refining the proposals to incorporate stakeholder input. Revised proposals will be submitted to the SFMTA Board of Directors in late summer, after a summary document is distributed to everyone on the project mailing or email list.

would be no reason for shoppers to come; they could get the same goods anywhere.

Another negative is that chain operations tend to have deep pockets. Their presence tends to drive up rents, making survival more difficult for the unique boutiques that characterize Fillmore.

Third, chain stores reporting to a distant headquarters tend to have no community involvement. A recent example is the Fillmore Street store that ran a fund-raising promotion for an animal shelter – in Provincetown, Massachusetts – ignoring a shelter a few blocks up the street.

When the Ralph Lauren organization announced plans to move into the space previously occupied by Smith & Hawken between Pine and California streets, PHRA was able to have considerable impact, thanks to Formula Retail legislation which required Ralph Lauren to get a Conditional Use permit. Ralph Lauren worked with PHRA directors to understand clearly the community concerns and needs. A board member described their willing collaboration as "impressive."

After hearing our concerns, Wayne Meichner, president of Polo Ralph Lauren Retail Stores, wrote to the Fillmore Merchants Association and PHRA to make many commitments. Among them:

"We will seek to adopt a local high school or similar educational institution in order to provide interested students with an opportunity to learn about potential careers in the fashion and retail industry. The program would be similar to Polo Ralph Lauren Foundation's "Adopt-A-School" program . . .

"Further, starting in 2009 we intend to partner with free-standing charitable programs that serve the local community that are in keeping with overall company philosophy. Ralph Lauren commits to hosting a minimum of two annual in-shop events to raise funds for reputable and non-profit organizations . . .

"Ralph Lauren is committed to building and running an environmentally conscious shop.

"Ralph Lauren would like to continue to the cohesive feeling on Fillmore Street through increased communication. To do this we propose using a local community board, which can be used by retailers and residents alike to post everything from local events to job postings, to open houses.

Meichner said the company, to promote diversity, would be willing to consider working with a non-profit or government-supported employment agency to identify potential employees who might not otherwise apply.

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Neighbors Continue to Oppose Modern Design

Plans for remodeling the home at 60 Normandie Terrace have been considerably revised from the original proposal that included piercing the retaining wall on Vallejo Street, but neighbors continue to oppose the project.

Property owner Ravi Kaza and architect Lewis Butler appeared before the PHRA directors in June to present plans that they said require no variances from the city's planning code. PHRA supports the city's code and normally takes no position when there are no variances.

Stephen Williams, attorney for the neighbors,

disagrees. Compatibility with the neighborhood is part of the planning code, he said, and the plans to not comply with the design issues. Further, he said, a previous owner extended the building above the height limit in front, so a variance is required.

Butler's plans, both new and revised retain the building's envelope, except for a small extension on the south side, but the four levels above grade would be reduced to three; the north and east sides would be sheathed entirely in glass to take advantage of views from its prominent, elevated site. The fact that the strikingly modern building will be so visible because of its prominent site is part of the reason behind what Williams calls "100% opposition."

The new plan includes excavation behind the retaining wall to accommodate a heating/air conditioning vault, but no longer calls for a dining room below grade with windows piercing the wall, or a garage with an entrance on Vallejo Street.

Butler said he expected to hear from the Planning Department in time to put out an official notice to neighbors in August or September.