

Historical Association Seeks Endangered Status for San Francisco's Presidio

The Presidio Historical Association (PHA) announced today that it is seeking Most Endangered Historic Site status for San Francisco's Presidio park.

On Tuesday, the Historical Association formally requested that the National Trust for Historic Preservation include the Presidio on its 2008 list of the nation's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. The National Trust, a prominent nonprofit organization, provides leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to save America's diverse historic places.

PHA President Gary Widman said the move was necessary because the Presidio's management requested a proposal from Gap founder Donald Fisher to build a 100,000 sq. ft. modernistic stone-and-glass-structure showcasing his contemporary art collection on the Presidio's historic Main Post. The Presidio Trust, a federal agency, manages that part of the Presidio. It has already named a developer for another new building, an 80,000 sq. ft. hotel to be built nearby on the Post.

The Presidio was a military garrison from 1776 to 1994, and is designated a National Historic Landmark District, the highest possible designation, by the Secretary of the Interior. Its buildings and setting reflect 220 years of America's heritage.

The Presidio has not had a history museum since 1994. PHA submitted a plan for a History Center at the Golden Gate as an alternative to Fishers much larger art museum.

“This precious historical site must be preserved for future generations and protected from incompatible structures and uses that would destroy its integrity forever,” said Widman. Widman noted the location sought for the art museum lies in the heart of the Presidio, just yards from where the Spaniards built their garrison in 1776.

Preeminent San Francisco landscape architect Lawrence Halprin said of Fisher's proposed structure, "The design...is absurdly inappropriate. It would ruin the unique architectural character of the Presidio..."

Charles A. Fracchia, Founder and President Emeritus of the San Francisco Museum & Historical Society and author of three San Francisco history books, wrote that “...the [Main Post] should be preserved as it exists. 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.”

Boyd de Larios, speaking for the Descendants of the Anza and Portola Expeditions, whose ancestors founded the original Presidio garrison in 1776, supported PHAs request for endangered status to bring national

attention to the irresponsible proposals for large-scale, new, and inappropriately designed construction in the historic heart of an irreplaceable national treasure.

The controversy over building the art museum and hotel on the historic Main Post, when many more appropriate sites are available on the Presidio, has generated thousands of critical comments on the internet.

Founded in the 1950s, the nonprofit Presidio Historical Association (PHA) has worked in cooperation with the National Park Service and Presidio Trust since 1994 to advocate for preserving the integrity of the Presidios National Historic Landmark District, located within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). PHA created a museum for the Army when it was based at the Presidio. Earlier, PHA helped restore historic Fort Point at the base of the Golden Gate Bridge.

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