

PRESIDIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

January 15, 2011

TO: Nancy Bechtle, Chair, Presidio Trust Board
Members, Presidio Trust Board
Craig Middleton, Executive Director, Presidio Trust
Rob Thomson, Presidio Trust
John Pelka, Presidio Trust

RE: Comments on Trust's Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Final Programmatic Agreement and Final Main Post Update

We have tried to work with the Trust since the beginning of its proposed Main Post construction program in 2007. We are deeply disappointed in the Trust's continuing development plans for the Main Post as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Final Programmatic Agreement, and recent Main Post Update. As an organization that originally supported the Trust, we (and you) must now understand the realities of frustration and failure that will follow if the Trust approves these documents.

Our suggestions, and those of other organizations, restated many times throughout this three-year process, go to the foundation of the Trust's policies. Our most basic concerns have gone unanswered, and remain unanswered in the new Trust documents. For example, concerns about scope of the Trust's power, proposals outside the scope of the Presidio Trust Act, failure to satisfy basic NEPA requirements, failure to avoid easily avoidable adverse impacts on the NHLD by moving the hotel out of the most historic area, are only a few. Some less significant questions are answered in part by these documents, but the major issues continue to be ignored. That said, there are also numerous problems arising from misleading and inappropriate statements contained in many Trust "responses". If more time were available, and if the Trust were interested in hearing and acting on them, they could be set out in more detail. But in view of the Trust's apparent position that it will not act upon further EIS comments, there seems to be no point in delineating more of the problems with these "responses".

As we all know, the official period for EIS comments ended in June. We understand that you have the right to ignore the comments made at this point in the process, but your responsibilities demand more of you. Unless the Trust now undertakes to become more far-sighted, in short, more "trustee-like" in the eyes of its public, its approval of these documents will become a major step toward its failure to carry out its "Trust" functions.

We urgently suggest that the Trust implement straight-forward readings of the policies and restrictions expressed in the Presidio Trust Act and NHPA, and exercise the managerial balance and expertise with which its Board members are so well qualified.

But unless it does so, its approval of these documents will make it necessary for the far-sighted and responsible members of the public to support whatever means may be appropriate to respond to the Trust's clear failure to adequately safeguard the sites, structures and history entrusted to it for the purpose of supporting a National Park and National Historic Landmark District within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

With the millions of federal and private dollars wasted advocating major, new and unnecessary construction in the small area "off limits" to major construction, (Main Post), the Trust could have created a remarkable National Park and historic landmark destination in the Main Post, one that would by now be a first-class, leading edge Park for history and education, -- urgently needed in the western United States. But by offering to take future steps, such as "considering" a Visitor Center and Heritage Center, only after first degrading the very space it is legally required to preserve as a historic site without major new construction, the Trust will destroy the potential for the best possible Presidio park.

Trust boards of recent years have failed to take a balanced approach to those responsibilities requiring them to preserve the best of their entrusted property in a National Park and National Historic Landmark District, (NHLD). Instead, they have apparently given top priority to leasing and revenue opportunities even in the most historically important sites. Leasing buildings is a task they may have done well in some ways, but it is a simpler, more mechanical task than the larger, more challenging, "Trust" task envisioned by Congress, that is, the balancing needed to support and protect the most important parts of the National Park and NHLD entrusted to it.

We in the PHA stand ready to meet and work with the Trust Board to co-operate in solving problems. Together we could make the Presidio into the first class historic park it was meant to be, without significantly compromising Trust revenues, and without violating the clear guidance of the Presidio Trust Act or other laws. We urge you to take what may be your last chance to halt the large Main Post construction projects, to halt the attempts to modify the PTMP, and to choose new policies and plans that will protect, rather than degrade, the Main Post.

With all our hearts, we encourage you to take that opportunity now.

Gary Widman, President
Presidio Historical Association

Cc:
M. Wayne Donaldson
Frank Dean
Barbara Goodyear
Amy Meyer

David Bancroft
Louise Bea
Neil Desai
Rebecca Evans
Anthea Hartig
Boyd DeLarios
Michael Buhler
PHA Board of Directors