

SF Presidio's Controversial Hotel Proposal Topic of Dec. 8th Meeting

by Gary Widman

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The long battle to preserve the historic, natural+recreational character of San Francisco's Presidio, a national park, historic landmark+part of GGNRA, continues on Dec. 8 at a public meeting of the Presidio Trust Board, which is trying to change its Master Plan to allow construction of a 14-building, 88,000 sq. ft. hotel/restaurant complex on the Presidio's historic Main Post, c 1776. Concerned citizens are urged to attend+speak out against the proposal to transform the Presidio into a commercial district.

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For more information, contact:

Gary Widman, 415/435-0360, [gwidman \[at\] mindspring.com](mailto:gwidman[at]mindspring.com)

Whit Hall, 707/778-6975, [whithall \[at\] comcast.net](mailto:whithall[at]comcast.net)

<http://www.presidioassociation.org>

SF Presidio's Controversial Hotel Proposal Topic of Dec. 8th Meeting

In the long-running battle to preserve the historic, natural and recreational character of the Presidio of San Francisco, the Presidio Historical Association (PHA) is asking concerned citizens to speak out against a hotel proposal at a public meeting of the Presidio Trust Board scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 8 at 6:30 pm at the Presidio's Golden Gate Club.

The meeting, which includes time for public comment, is the culmination of efforts by the Presidio Trust, a federal agency charged with overseeing the Presidio National Park's real estate, to alter the Master Plan it adopted in 2002, which currently prohibits new, inappropriate construction on the Park's historic Main Post.

"This meeting appears to be the last opportunity for citizens to tell the Presidio Trust's Board of Directors that they oppose its plans to turn this unique, historic National Park into a high-end commercial district, while failing to protect its single most important historic site – the Main Post -- which is a designated National Historic Landmark," PHA President Gary Widman said.

If the Trust succeeds in changing the Presidio Trust Management Plan (PTMP), it will likely proceed with plans to build a modern, 88,000 sq. ft., 14-building hotel/restaurant complex and various other new structures in the Park's historic Main Post, which dates back to 1776.

"The Presidio Trust was chartered by federal law to support this National Park, not to transform the Main Post into a commercial district, which is precisely what it will become if the Trust's plans proceed," said Widman.

The Trust continues to advocate for the hotel complex despite the fact that San Francisco already has 33,000 privately owned hotel rooms. If approved, the hotel is expected to be built and managed with federal funding since a proposal by the Larkspur Hotel Group to construct the hotel has been quietly withdrawn.

The Presidio Trust appears to have spent more than \$1 million in public funds over the past three years to change its Master Plan in order to permit massive new construction within the Main Post. Last year, a public outcry led to the defeat of the Trust's costly two-year public relations campaign to build a 100,000 sq. ft. contemporary art museum on the Main Post.

At the Trust's last public meeting on Sept. 22, all speakers opposed the hotel proposal. History, environmental and neighborhood groups joined in opposition to the Trust's plan to demolish existing buildings and erect a new hotel on federal land with public funds.

"The Presidio Trust continues to ignore its duty to protect the Main Post from commercial construction and development. It proposes instead to create permanent scars on the Park's most historic site. Though the Presidio is both a National Historic Landmark and a National Park, the Trust seems to have abandoned the values and policies applicable to national parks," said Widman.

"The Main Post deserves to be preserved so that Park visitors today, tomorrow and in posterity can see the remnants of the Post's diverse historic periods, and better understand our history, as Congress intended," he said.

The Golden Gate Club, site of the Dec. 8 meeting, is located in the Presidio at 135 Fisher Loop, just east of the National Cemetery.

For more information, contact the Presidio Historical Association at <http://www.presidioassociation.org>.

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 Presidio's National Historic Landmark District, located in 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.