



San Francisco Tomorrow

Working to Protect the Urban Environment

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Will you want to live in San Francisco... Tomorrow?

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Open Space Committee Meets

“Livability” was the main theme on the minds of attendees at SFT’s Open Space Committee meeting in November. The word was dropped by Planning Commissioner Kathrin Moore at a November 5 hearing on the proposed Affordable Housing Bonus Program, and you will probably hear a lot more of it in the future.

Because of the recent influx of people into the city, and the resulting displacement crisis, there has lately been a lot of talk about affordability without commensurate discussion of livability. Open space, of course, is a big part of what “livability” means; urban geographers say there should be 5.5 acres of it per every thousand urban residents, though what the city’s current commitment is is less clear. Every building project requires a certain amount of open space; AHBP would give developers permission to short us on it (as well as allowing exceptions to height rules) in exchange for building more “affordable” units. Is this acceptable? SFT needs to research just what effect on open space the AHBP is likely to have so we can discuss it effectively at Planning meetings.

Also pertinent is the question of private versus public open space. A backyard or private atrium is not accessible to the public, yet it may provide habitat for plants and animals, and open space at least for the occupants of the edifice. How much, then, should one count against open space quotas? Such questions do not appear to have been well-considered by the city, and will require more research.

Another issue that requires more study is population growth. If we are expecting a million residents soon, what is the plan to give them sufficient open space? Again, there does not seem to be a lot of data here, and we may have to do a lot of research on our own. A number of possible ways to derive the pertinent information were discussed. One thing that we do know is that most of the available open space is on the west side of town, while most of the development is in the east. Much of the seawall development planning has included parks, but we need to look more deeply into ways to increase open space in the area, especially south of Market.

A desire was expressed for more signage in parks about such things as animal feeding. A large community of rats has grown up around the excess food thrown to ducks, etc.. The need for park benches needs more consideration in projects such as the Dolores Park revamp, since older people cannot sit on the ground. Also, an alarming number of street trees are being cut down because the city is no longer responsible for their maintenance.



Consideration of the two-year Park & Rec budget is currently ongoing – what priorities should SFT be lobbying on behalf of? We need some advice on this; a list of people is being developed to advise us at future meetings. Also, how can we get more citizen involvement?

The committee determined to support Jerry Hill’s two-year (state) moratorium on tire crumb fields while their effects are studied (SB47 excludes non-tire-crumb artificial fields from the moratorium). We also decided to push for the removal of Sharp Park funding from the new Rec & Park EIR, since we don’t want debate over it it to hold up other important projects. Meanwhile, we will continue to support Wild Equity’s efforts on behalf of preserving nature in Sharp Park.

The Open Space Committee will meet again soon – look for an email or visit the website for a date. And send us your suggestions at openspace@sftomorrow.org.

-- Jeff Whittington

A Chance to Know Who Really Pays for Political Ads

- Every ad for or against a ballot measure or candidate clearly disclosing the top three actual donors of \$50K or more on the ad itself - not just a misleading committee name.
- Enhanced collection and accessibility of campaign finance data through the Secretary of State's website.
- The banning of gifts from lobbyists and their clients.
- A waiting period of two years before elected officials can accept revolving-door job offers to become lobbyists.
- A citizen's right to campaign finance disclosure written into the California State Constitution.

These are some of the reforms in store for California if the Voters Right to Know Act, now being circulated as an initiative on a petition, becomes law.

You probably know the damage that's been done to our democracy since the Supreme Court's infamous Citizens United decision equating money with speech: billionaires and other moneyed interests spending unlimited amounts – most of it hidden, so-called “dark money” - to pass or defeat ballot measures and buy elections.

No matter which issue you care about - environment, health care, education, gun violence, food and water safety, workers' rights, civil rights, fair taxes and regulations – your voice is being drowned out by the roar of dark money. A constitutional amendment overturning Citizens United could take years, but we can stop hidden spending now.

As a volunteer who has been working for five long years, unsuccessfully, to pass the California DISCLOSE Act via the Legislature, I am thrilled at the introduction of the Voters Right to Know Act. It will do everything that the DISCLOSE Act would have, and more, to shine light on big money in California elections and fight corruption. It's time to bypass the compromised legislators and take it directly to the voters, who overwhelmingly want more disclosure of political spending.

The proponent and major funder of the Voters' Right to Know Act is Jim Heerwagen, advisor to startups and member of several non-profit boards. It's also sponsored by California Clean Money Campaign. Principal authors are Bob Stern, co-author of the Political Reform Act of 1974, and Gary Winuk, Chief of the Enforcement Division at the Fair Political Practices Commission from 2009 to 2015.

Before the fight to pass it can begin, the Voters Right to Know initiative needs 585,407 qualifying signatures to place it on the November ballot. Please sign the petition (not more than once!). If you would like to help by circulating one or more (5-signature) petitions, contact me at 415-648-6740 or jonieisen@sbcglobal.net

- Joni Eisen

Update: The CA DISCLOSE Act (AB 700) now with the exact same disclosure language as the Voters Right to Know initiative, has passed the Assembly and now goes to the Senate. The threat of a voter initiative has put the pressure on the Legislature! Let's get this thing on the ballot.

TPP Trades our Freedom for Corporate Control

Our iconic, coherent U.S. Constitution was written on four sheets of parchment, listing our obligations and responsibilities for governance. Counting the Preamble and all 27 Amendments, our Constitution comes to 20 typed pages. The First Amendment alone covers a multitude of freedoms: religion, press, assembly, speech, and the right to petition the government. This amendment is all of 45 words. In contrast, our Affordable Health Care bill has 2,032 pages.

The proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) beats all with 6,000 pages. The TPP is less a trade agreement than a handover of every aspect of our civic life to the control of various U.S. trading partners, foreign corporations, and multinational U.S. businesses.

This agreement can give corporations the ability to shred our Constitution at will. This agreement would violate protections offered to citizens by important articles of the Constitution. For example, Article III, which established the judicial branch of the U.S. government, assigns its powers and established the right of trial by jury. The TPP puts judicial decisions in the hands of an international panel of arbitrators whose decisions could not be challenged in U.S. courts.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) can also be dismantled. Private medical corporations control the ACA. But the TPP would make even this privatized healthcare act non-functional. One of the TPP's goals is to extend the patents on pharmaceuticals, to eliminate the less costly generic versions of drugs. We are already seeing runaway drug prices without the TPP. For instance, the hepatitis C drug Sovaldi, manufactured by Gilead Science Inc., costs \$1,000 for one pill.

Then there is the matter of copyrights, which can be for life plus 70 years. This simply amounts to a transfer of wealth from users to large, rights-holding corporations. It will make it more difficult for libraries and archives, for journalists, and for ordinary users seeking to make use of works from long-dead authors.

Our net neutrality agreements could be challenged.

The origin of food imports will no longer be listed. Our laws protecting us from outdated foods, toxic chemicals, and destructive environmental policies can be bypassed by unelected/unselected foreign arbitrators.

This agreement is too lengthy to cover all the egregious pitfalls. Our constitution and sovereignty are both in jeopardy. On February 4, President Obama and ministers from 11 other nations signed the Trans Pacific Partnership; but it isn't law yet because Congress must ratify this monstrous corporate giveaway. The best we can do is to call our representatives in Congress and tell them to oppose it. Call toll free 877-762-8762 and ask separately for Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein. Call Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi or Jackie Speier. Follow up by calling all three legislators' home offices, to make a bigger impact.

-- Denise D'Anne

Lee Administration Sidetracks DTX

Despite San Francisco's housing crisis, a faltering Muni, increasingly clogged streets and the homeless problem, SPUR, a local planning group, says that "things in San Francisco are going well." We are advised to let City Hall keep on bringing in more tall buildings, more transit, more jobs and more people because "it's going to be OK."

Really? Let's take transit for instance. The most important transit expansion to come along in over half a century is the long-awaited downtown extension of Caltrain (DTX). DTX consists of a 1.3 mile long tunnel from the existing 4th and King St. terminal of the 78-mile long Caltrain line to San Francisco's new Transbay Transit Center (TTC) at First and Mission. When completed, the new connection will attract tens of thousands of Peninsula and San Francisco motorists from car to train. So, one might ask, what is City Hall doing to advance DTX?

So far as we can determine, nothing.

On the contrary, instead of helping, members of the Mayor's staff are holding DTX hostage while they sort out the future of Mission Bay with all the speed of an ailing tortoise. This delaying action appears to stem at least in part from demands of influential Mission Bay developers that the full and profitable build-out of Mission Bay take precedence over all other considerations. In 1999, 2003 and 2010 the San Francisco voters overwhelmingly approved three successive propositions (H, K and G respectively), all expressing strong support for DTX. Prop H called on City Government to give DTX its highest fund-raising priority. These expressions of San Francisco public opinion have been lost on City Hall.

San Franciscans, as well as transportation experts in Sacramento, Washington DC, and elsewhere, have long recognized the importance of DTX. When Caltrain finally arrives at San Francisco's 340,000 person employment center, near tens of thousands of nearby transit-oriented housing units, four BART lines, six Muni light rail lines and over 40 bus lines, it will become North America's most important transit center west of New York City. As such, it will significantly reduce the need to drive into and through San Francisco. Here are six exasperating aspects of the Mission Bay program that are interfering with bringing the increasingly popular Caltrain line into downtown San Francisco:

1.) The Risky Delay: Because of strong past SF City Hall support, the DTX project is currently first in line for Bay Area federal New Starts funding. Despite this, the DTX project is currently stalled while the Lee Administration's inchoate and much delayed Mission Bay plans are defined, stewed over, sorted out, publicly vetted, environmentally-described, formally institutionally-reviewed and perhaps eventually funded. If DTX continues to be locally impeded in this way, it will sooner or later be knocked out of the New Starts running by a "ready-to-go" project in some other city. Current expectations are that, if the Mayor and his inexperienced Mission Bay planners persist, they will delay DTX by at least 20 years and increase the cost of getting Caltrain downtown by at least \$3 billion.

2.) Trip Times: One hears that Mission Bay planning will result in reduced train trip times. How? By how many seconds? And at what cost?!

3.) Criticisms of TTC/DTX: The Mission Bay planners have no experience in engineering design, passenger rail operations or construction cost estimating. Yet in the furtherance of their Mission Bay goals, they often take gratuitous slaps at the TTC/DTX program. Such criticisms are not helpful.

4.) Traffic Impact of Removing I-280: According to MTC, by 2035, 253,000 automobiles will be entering San Francisco from the south every day. I-280 currently carries a significant percentage of the load. If the entire north end of I-280 is removed as SPUR and the Mayor's planners desire, what happens to all that traffic? How would it affect the Mission and Potrero Districts? How would it affect Mission Bay?

5.) Traffic Impact of the Arena: The Warriors Arena, planned for a location east of 16th Street, has been eagerly promoted by San Francisco's politicians. Its backers boast that it will play host to no fewer than 225 major events a year. If things go ahead as planned each of these events would attract thousands of cars to Mission Bay, often during afternoon heavy rush periods. Despite City Hall efforts to obfuscate the fact, this monumental squeeze would create massive new traffic jams and parking agonies.

On January 8, 2016 the Mission Bay Alliance filed a lawsuit demanding that the Arena developers take the environmental impact of their facility seriously. This action has brought the project to a halt. On January 16th, just 8 days after the lawsuit was filed, the developers put their project on hold, in order to give themselves time to deal with environmental issues previously ignored.

6.) Impact of Eliminating the 4th and King Rail Yard: In accordance with the demands of Mission Bay developers that "there be no visible railroad tracks in Mission Bay", the Mayor's planners say they want to move Caltrain's north-end existing rail yard to some distant site outside San Francisco. This reveals an abysmal lack of understanding of passenger rail operations and the need for strategically-located, train marshalling and storage. Caltrain and the California High-Speed Rail Authority are understandably opposed to the idea. Mission Bay can be "built-out" without destroying San Francisco's end of Caltrain in the process.

Conclusion: DTX is by far the most important transit-integrating project to come along in the Bay Area since the original BART system was conceived in the 1950's. It's now been 16 years since the voters of San Francisco began expressing their strongly pro-DTX views. Instead of allowing themselves to be being swept up in Mission Bay development euphoria, members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors who care about San Francisco should turn their attention to resolving its worsening transportation and land use problems.

Beginning with getting DTX funded and built without further delay. If City Hall gets behind DTX, the Caltrain trains could be up and running in the TTC by 2023.

-- Gerald Cauthen, PE



SFT Work Program Priorities for 2016

It's a good idea to let the turning of the new year inspire you to renew your resolve and focus it on the most pressing problems of the City. These are necessarily very abstract objectives; we invite you to fill in the particulars and communicate with SFT, either by attending one of our Board meetings (second Wednesday of every month) or by visiting us online.

1. Improve accountability of San Francisco General Plan. It's supposed to be the path, the policy foundation, for San Francisco tomorrow and the next ten to twenty years. Our present version does not fully respond to State Law standards for General Plans. We need to work toward legislation that would make the San Francisco General Plan fully conform to State Law and be enforceable.
2. Prop M in the Planning Code. The voter mandated first purpose of San Francisco's Planning Code is known as "Prop M" and it has been criticized as too vague to stand up in the Courts. Study how Prop M (Code section 101) could be made more enforceable.
3. Environmental Sustainability. Support update of the General Plan with the more current paradigm of environmental sustainability rather than so-called "managed" growth.
4. Carrying capacity of the city. Seismic safety and climate change issues as very important limitations on growth as are transportation infrastructure and the need for new open space.
5. Displacement and affordability of Housing. Two measures will be on the ballot to address development of affordable housing. SFT will continue advocacy, in the spirit of Prop M, against displacement of affordable housing and small businesses.
6. Protect public property (such as the Palace of Fine Arts) from privatization. Use of public open space must be open public and not be raided away for private use.
7. Transportation. Monitor BRT (Bus Rapid Transit, proposed on Van Ness and Geary) and other transportation proposals for unintended neighborhood and commercial adverse impacts. Oppose degradation of service to most vulnerable transit-dependent populations.
8. Regional Planning. Articulate appropriate balance of regional and local controls (vs. San Francisco Bay Area Plan).

-- Mary Anne Miller

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