



San Francisco Tomorrow

Working to Protect the Urban Environment

Issue 368

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

June / July 2015

Annual Awards Dinner

San Francisco Tomorrow held its annual awards dinner on Thursday, May 21, at Delancey Street Restaurant on the waterfront. While turnout was a bit lower than expected, likely owing to traffic issues, many of our favorite special guests were able to make it by. As you can see from the pictures on our website, the room was gorgeous, and the dinner, as usual, was top-notch.

Local environmental activist Pinky Kushner presented the Jack Morrison Lifetime Achievement Award to Mary



Anne Miller for her dedication, verve, clarity of vision, and deep community spirit. Kushner characterized Mary Anne as a Renaissance woman, and recounted her insistence that the renovation of Golden Gate Park's North Lake be completed using a durable clay bottom rather than concrete, and the way she initiated a campaign to have the new de Young museum faced with copper sidings, rather than the

original design of metal cages with field stones, as the latter would likely end up receptacles for cigarette butts and other debris.

An artist, writer, and environmentalist, Mary Anne holds Master Degrees in Art Education and Architecture. She joined the city's Planning Department in the late 1970s, but resigned when she decided that she could do more as a citizen activist. She has upheld the beauty and value of living in the western part of the city as a board member of the Sunset Parkside Environmental Action Committee (SPEAK), the Presidio Environmental Council, and the Alliance for Golden Gate Park. She joined SFT's Board in 1991, serving on planning and base closure committees,

and has edited SFT's newsletter for the last 15 years.

Sierra Club Bay Chapter chair Becky Evans presented one of the night's Unsung Hero awards to Karen Babbitt in honor of her record of community activism on behalf of good government, environmental protection, and neighborhood preservation in Noe Valley. Becky noted that Karen is known for demanding order when chairing meetings, and enjoying good beer. She is also widely recognized for her quiet competency, her strong belief in ethical government, and her ability to get things done.

Karen is an active member of Friends of Ethics, the Noe Valley Democratic Club, Sierra Club and numerous progressive political campaigns. She works in the urban planning and community development fields, and on Saturdays, enjoys selling produce at the Fillmore Farmers' Market.

Sue Vaughn, a local advocate who serves on the SFMTA's citizen's advisory committee and leads the Sierra Club San Francisco Group, presented the other Unsung Hero award to Andy Blue of the Plaza 16 Coalition, an aggregation of community, labor, environmental, and faith-based organizations -- as well as neighborhood residents and local businesses -- from the Mission District and across the city. The coalition formed in 2013 to challenge the Maximus "Monster in the Mission" proposed for the 16th and Mission BART Plaza, an extreme example of the reckless luxury and market rate development that has contributed significantly to the displacement crisis in the neighborhood.

Sue characterized Plaza 16 as a model for grassroots organizing, as it ensures that the whole community is involved in decision making in the interest of community survival. This includes people of color, immigrants, small businesses and faith-based members, and even the homeless population.

So far Plaza 16 has succeeded in warding off this monstrous project in the Mission, and are working on other, similar issues as well. Plaza16.org.

-- Denise D'Anne / Jeff Whittington

The Sharing Economy: Who Benefits?

Airbnb is behind the escalating argument at the Board of Supervisors as to whether a 60-day or 120-day limit on short-term rentals is adequate. Both arguments are a distraction; both sides are using divide and conquer tactics. The real issue comes down to supporting those able to use their housing for short-term rentals at the expense of those who use their housing to live and work in the city.

Is society responsible for helping renters to earn extra money? No. The solution is to do that which has been done for several decades: rent out spare rooms and not rely on support from an intermediary like Airbnb that rakes in billions of dollars worldwide.

The long-term effect is loss of rental stock and loss of well-paying jobs for hospitality workers. City revenue will suffer, along with workers and businesses catering to the tourist.

And at a time when we are plagued by a drought, long-term renters and homeowners have an awareness of the importance of saving water. San Franciscans also have a custom of recycling and composting. We cannot expect short-term visitors to abide by these environmental standards.

With a smaller working population living in the city, there will be fewer voters. Tourists don't vote!

-- Denise D'Anne

New Wall on the Waterfront

Two new proposed luxury towers at 75 Howard Street and 160 Folsom Street across from the Embarcadero threaten to shadow Rincon Park. The Tishman-Speyer Corporation is seeking a 100-foot increase to the existing height limits to build a 400-foot condo tower at 160 Folsom Street. Paramount Group is seeking a 92-foot height-limit increase to build a 292-foot condo tower at 75 Howard Street.

According to the Sierra Club these projects are taking advantage of a loophole in the Proposition K Sunshine Ordinance protection. Prop K does not require the Port of San Francisco to abide by its mandate, and these two projects come under the Port's purview. The Recreation and Parks department is the only agency that has jurisdiction under the Proposition K ordinance.

The Sierra Club informs its reader in its publication "Sierra Club Yodeler, June-July 2015" that neighborhood organizations and citizen groups concerned by the loophole have begun working together to protect the waterfront in an effort called "Save Rincon Park."

Please call or email Supervisor Jane Kim at (415) 554-7970 / Jane.Kim@sfgov.org, or write to her at 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, City Hall, Room 244, San Francisco, CA 94103-4689 . Urge Supervisor Kim to stand up for parks and our waterfront by rejecting these height-limit-increase proposals.

-- Denise D'Anne

Muni Musings

No Improvement in Service

In 2014 San Francisco voters passed a \$500 million bond measure to provide funding for Muni. One would be hard-pressed to see any improvement in Muni or in infrastructure; however, construction and utility improvement is going on at a record pace, obstructing Muni flow. Muni is eliminating bus stops, causing a hardship on the elderly and disabled. Nor are hospitals being spared the disruption; for instance the 33 Bus that stops at San Francisco General is slated for discontinuance.

Private Taxi Services Adding to Congestion

As with Airbnb in the housing sector, Uber, Sidecar and Lyft are dictating how we provide transportation services. These supposed new type of taxi service are causing more traffic congestion. In fact, Uber alone is planning on adding additional 120 vehicles on our streets, ostensibly to "improve" traffic flow.

Private Buses Disrupting Transit

If Assembly Bill 61 is enacted, it will give the green light for the behemoth private buses to use our Muni bus stops. These buses constantly interfere with public transit and threaten pedestrians, and no EIR has been done.

Who Wins?

Studies have shown that residential homeowners and business owners are reaping the rewards for being near bus stops. It is estimated that property values have increased by \$100,000 or more in the area of stops. In the meantime renters are either being evicted or have their rent increased due to the proximity of bus stops used by private bus companies.

Paying Fair Share?

As it is, private buses do not pay their fair share of costs. The costs include wear and tear on our roads and congestion that is impeding commerce as well as drivers headed for work.

The City charges minimal fees for private vehicle access to public bus stops, in the ludicrous range of \$1 to \$3.50. A study needs to be done to establish a more realistic fee per vehicle in light of infrastructure maintenance costs and disruption at Muni stops.

-- Glenn Rogers

Proposals for Presidio Parklands

The new Doyle Drive construction of tunnels atop which a new land bridge will connect the Presidio's Main Post to Crissy Field will create spectacular new open space. Proposals have been received, and the currently popular design calls for a building on the bluff amid the open space plantings and paths.

There should be no building anywhere on the bluff. Building on the bluff would be an unnecessary obstruction to the flow of the landscape connection that has been opened up by the tunnels. The whole purpose of the tunnels creating a new land bridge would be compromised by a building of any kind on this broad vegetated swath linking the upper and the lower Presidio, especially a glass building! A glass building would be especially damaging, causing reflections and creating a hazard for birds that would fly into the reflections in the glass.

This site should be thought of as a grand passage. The passage should be made up of various landscape experiences, with paths that link and direct the natural movement from one place to another of bipeds and quadrupeds (animals at night!). The only shelter should be trees and large shrubs that make up discontinuous groves that are as naturalistic in their placement as possible. Acceptable might be a well designed set of open trellises to shade a curvilinear set of low benches that would allow for a rest beside the path.



Honoree Babbitt

Native plants should be used everywhere; they will survive the limits on watering. The California seasons should be respected and the natural grasses should be allowed to go golden brown in the summer, to be restored (we hope) by rain in the winter. The grasses and wildflowers should be California natives seeded in the Fall with water used only to get them started, if the drought continues into the late Fall.

Lands End is a terrific example of how a naturalistic, native plant landscape can be achieved in just a few seasons. The western end of Golden Gate Park has large plots of native shrubs only and they are thriving today even in this drought.

The Commissary Building continues to be an embarrassment, "another shoe to drop" when the Parklands are completed. I agree with the idea of demolishing the building and making the reuse of the Commissary site a part of the Parklands planning effort. There could be a much smaller structure here with a series of green roofs tied in to the Parklands.

Why have the proposals not picked up the long awaited dream of expanding Crissy Marsh?. There were no binding promises, but this was definitely a strong possibility; it would be a logical tie-in to plan the Crissy expansion at this time instead of ignoring it so that we have a patchwork as the planning effort for this part of the Presidio.

-- Mary Anne Miller



Honoree Blue

Time for that Low Carbon Diet

On June 10, the SFT board voted to endorse the national efforts of Citizens' Climate Lobby, an organization of over 7,000 volunteers coast to coast who perpetually lobby Congress on behalf of a revenue-neutral carbon tax ("carbon fee and dividend"). This approach to reducing fossil CO2 has the advantage of allowing for large scale reductions in a short time, without placing an undue burden on the poor or dragging down the economy – indeed, a 2014 REMI study found that it would actually improve GDP by up to \$85 billion per year. Coupled with a border tax on carbon-using products, CF&D would also have the effect of persuading other countries to adopt a similar carbon fee of their own.

Coincidentally, June is the month of CCL's International Conference in DC. Several members of the San Francisco chapter, including SFT member Joni Eisen, spent June 20-23 lobbying our Congressional delegation and learning how to increase the effectiveness of their efforts.

While CCL is not a local organization, the issue it deals with is crucial to San Francisco, as climate change will have major impacts throughout the Bay Area, and mitigation is absolutely essential. The SF Board of Supervisors unanimously endorsed fee and dividend in September of 2014.

For more information go to citizensclimatelobby.org.

-- Jeff Whittington

Man for the Times

On March 30, former Board of Supervisors President Aaron Peskin announced that he would be seeking re-election to his old District 3 seat. A longtime environmental activist, Peskin led the renovation and expansion of a number of parks in his district, and in 2008 authored the Clean and Safe Parks bond, which set aside \$185 million to improve park facilities. He also fought expansion of the airport into the bay.



Aaron early on gained a reputation for supporting housing affordability and opposing overdevelopment. In 2005 he led a successful campaign against the conversion of hundreds of residential hotel rooms into a handful of luxury condos, and later sponsored legislation to curb Ellis Act abuses. Needless to say, this kind of leadership is sorely needed in the city at this moment.

He is also a leader in the fight for public transit. In 2007, when Republican billionaire Don Fisher was trying to undo transit-first measures with Proposition H, Peskin countered with Prop A, which has guaranteed MUNI \$30 million per year since 2008.

An indefatigable worker, Aaron authored and passed 205 ordinances when in office, making him the most prolific supervisor of his time.

Progressives frustrated with an increasingly regressive Board of Supervisors and a local Democratic Party dominated by real estate interests should get behind his campaign, which has the potential to re-establish a progressive majority on the Board.

-- Jeff Whittington