



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Fort Mason Bldg. 201
San Francisco, California 94123

September 23, 2013

Members of the Board of Directors
Presidio Trust
Building 103, Presidio of San Francisco
San Francisco, California 94129

Dear Trust Board Members:

I have been pleased and honored to participate as an observer and advisor in the deliberations of the Presidio Trust regarding the Mid-Crissy Field area and the future of the Commissary site. We commend the Presidio Trust for the openness of the public process employed in seeking a future the use of the Commissary. We believe it represents the kind of public transparency that our shared constituents have a right to expect, and which will lead to the best outcome.

I am aware of the significance of the decision you face. At the juncture of the Main Post and Crissy Field, the Commissary site and its future use is a critical and powerful opportunity to seamlessly advance the park-building goal of the Trust: to physically and programmatically connect the Main Post to Crissy Field. This once in a lifetime opportunity, made possible by the Presidio Parkway, will perhaps be the most significance park transformation in the 21st century life of the Presidio. The right use of the Commissary site will advance this park-building goal tremendously. The wrong use will interrupt this progress and create a physical, visual and programmatic barrier to this realization. The decision will also have profound implications for NPS-managed areas of Crissy Field, one of the premier sites of the entire Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

As a federal partner with the Presidio Trust in maintaining the national park values of the Presidio, we are proud to contribute our advice and perspective in the interest of assisting you in reaching the best possible decision for this critically important site on the Presidio.

At this time, we offer no recommendation on which of the three finalist proposals the Board should select. Instead, we offer suggestions on factors to consider that relate to place and program relevance, visitor experience, architecture and design, traffic and congestion, and partnership. In each of these areas, we offer a critical question for the Board to consider in weighing the proposals.

Place and Program Relevance

Since it was transformed in 2001, Crissy Field has become one of the most beloved visitor destinations in the San Francisco Bay Area, and as the PTMP notes, the front yard of the Presidio. It serves a variety of recreation uses, but as importantly, it has become a place where people come to absorb a sense of naturalness in an urban area, and contemplate – consciously or subliminally – the juxtaposition of the built and natural environment. People are clearly inspired by a visit to

Crissy Field, and we have heard a consistent chorus of stories from visitors about how a Crissy visit has imbued them with a desire to connect even more deeply with the national park in which it sits.

Currently, the Crissy Field experience is largely east-west, with stunning views to the north. With no direct connection between Crissy Field and the Main Post, most Crissy Field visitors are concentrated on the beach, in the corridor of the Crissy Promenade, and on Mason Street. With the completion of Presidio Parkway and the visual and physical connection with the Main Post, it is likely that visitors will discover the possibilities and opportunities to the south.

If the Commissary building remains in some form, we believe the future use must be clearly contextual to Crissy Field. It should not be a use that could occur anywhere else. It is our hope that the future use serves the desire of visitors to learn more about the natural/cultural nexus, and as suggested in the PTMP, offer programs “celebrating the area’s diverse historical, cultural and natural resources.” We also hope that the future use of the Commissary serves one of the primary goals we have had for Crissy Field since its transformation – that it be a welcoming place for a diversity of visitors.

Critical questions: Is the proposal uniquely responsive to the context of Crissy Field as part of a National Park in an urban area, or could the uses described in the proposal occur elsewhere?

Visitor Experience

The Presidio Trust and National Park Service share the privilege of assuring that a visit to the Presidio features opportunities to become immersed in the history of the post and its role in shaping this nation, as well as the natural environment in which Presidio history took place.

The Trust has put a great deal of thoughtful consideration of the visitor experience of the Main Post into planning for two major visitor features: the Heritage Center at the top and the Visitor Center at the bottom, which is currently being planned jointly with the National Park Service. The Anza Esplanade is viewed as a linking device, and enhanced visitor use of some of the Montgomery Street barracks buildings will reinforce the connection. The new Presidio Visitor Center in Building 210 bookends the Main Post experience, as the Main Post is currently configured.

On Crissy Field itself, the Promenade, Crissy Field Center, and the business establishments of Mason Street are the main components of the current visitor experience. The promenade is arguably the most beloved destination for recreationists of all kinds. Crissy Field Center is a renowned environmental center that constitutes the park’s focal point for outreach to youth from diverse communities. Programs of the Crissy Field Center are not confined to Crissy Field proper; they take place throughout the Presidio.

While the Main Post and Crissy Field are two of the prime venues for Presidio stories, because Doyle Drive separates them, there is currently little connection of the visitor experience of these two sites. With the extraordinary opportunity afforded by Presidio Parkway, this can change, but only if there is a conscious linkage of the experience of a Presidio visitor from the top of the Main Post to the Bay shoreline.

Trails leading from the Presidio Parkway tunnel top to Crissy Field can, at last, allow a continuum of visitor experience in which programs at the Heritage Center, Visitor Center, Crissy Field Center, and future program in the Commissary interact and reinforce one another. This will allow visitors to learn about and understand the historic resources of the post, the roles played by the Presidio

from the time of the Ohlone to the present day, and the natural environment on which the post was sited. All of this will be available for visitors to experience in a roughly 1/8 square mile rectangle that runs from Moraga Street to San Francisco Bay.

We believe the best proposal will be one that features programs that interact with the other facilities on the Main Post and Crissy Field in illuminating the Presidio's themes and national park values, and helps bring them to the public.

Critical question: Which proposal best contributes to a continuum of visitor experience- physically, visually, and programmatically- by linking with and complementing the programs of the Heritage Center, Visitor Center, and Crissy Field Center?

Architecture and Design

The NPS believes that any building proposal that does not conform to all elements of the excellent Mid-Crissy Design Guidelines should be rejected. These guidelines – including those that relate to height, orientation and building massing - are intended to ensure that structures on Crissy Field are compatible with the historic scene, do not interrupt views, and are scaled properly for the site. Along with conformance to the Mid-Crissy Design Guidelines, we believe that the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation and Treatment of Historic Properties must also be strictly adhered to. In addition, NPS prefers a design that is 'light on the land' – built to the highest standards of sustainability, yet fully compatible with the historic and scenic setting. The site calls for a distinctive building, but we believe that a building that is an overly strong architectural statement, or overly imposing, is not appropriate on Crissy Field.

Critical question: Does the proposed building conform with the Trust's Mid-Crissy Design Guidelines and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, is it appropriately scaled and oriented for the site and its surroundings, and is it compatible with the historic setting?

Traffic and Congestion

We have a concern that a future use in the Commissary building may exacerbate the existing traffic and general congestion that already threatens the natural feel of most of the rest of Crissy Field. There may be a tipping point beyond which the values of peace and tranquility that most seek at Crissy Field could be lost. Creating a major new visitor destination on Crissy Field should not be a goal, in and of itself. The best proposal will address how the traffic and parking impacts will be effectively dealt with, and how the use envisioned will not detract from the natural feel of the overall site.

Critical Question: How well does the proposal address the issues of traffic, parking, and general congestion at Crissy Field?

Partnership

The Presidio is the quintessential partnership venue. While there are stand-alone tenants in the West Crissy area, we believe that a future use that intends to operate independently of the National Park Service and Presidio Trust is not appropriate for the prime Commissary location. Unless a proposal for use of the Commissary is predicated on the notion of partnership with the National

Park Service and Presidio Trust, we believe it will not successfully fit within the holistic approach to management that the Presidio Trust and NPS have been striving toward for over a decade.

Critical question: Does the proposal demonstrate openness to full partnership with the Presidio Trust and National Park Service in the programming of the facility?

An Alternative Vision

An alternative future vision altogether for the Commissary building is for the intrusive and non-historic structure to be removed, and to create a seamless park land connection from the Main Post to Crissy Field. As the NPS 1994 General Plan Amendment for this site recommended, we would embrace this concept, including the expansion of the Crissy Field marsh on the site. We believe that this future would be preferable to a use that is incompatible due to scale, size or purpose – or does little to be directly relevant to the mission of the Presidio as a national park and national historic landmark.

Wait and See

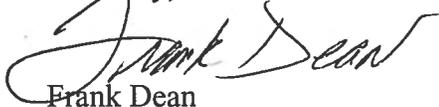
If, for whatever reason, the Trust cannot determine a clear choice from among the three finalist proposals, we could endorse a decision to delay action on the Commissary site until after the tunnel top is completed and Main Post-Crissy Field visitor use patterns are more clearly defined. Additionally, by delaying action the Trust could re-evaluate the Presidio Plan recommendation for a cultural institution on this site – and whether it is the best and most feasible option for this premier location. Since future use of the Commissary is not tied to the achievement of financial self-sufficiency at the Presidio, there does not appear to be a compelling urgency to proceed with a new use, other than to hasten the elimination of a building that many consider an eyesore.

Future NPS Action

After we have completed a thorough review of all three proposals we will likely provide an endorsement of the one that we feel best supports the national park values reflected in the spectacular site on which the Commissary building sits.

We hope you find these comments useful in the important deliberation you are facing on the future of the Commissary site.

Sincerely,



Frank Dean
General Superintendent