

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 4, 2009

**FORT MASON CENTER PIER 2 IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

File No. 06-089-01

Project Manager: Carol Arnold/Moira McEnespy

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to modify a prior Conservancy authorization to the Fort Mason Foundation by redirecting funds from the Fort Mason Center interpretive program plan to plan preparation for improvements to Pier 2.

**LOCATION:** Fort Mason Center, Lower Fort Mason, southwestern shoreline of San Francisco Bay, east of the Golden Gate Bridge (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Urban Waterfront Restoration

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photographs](#)

Exhibit 3: [Coastal Conservancy Staff Recommendation for the Fort Mason Center Interpretive Program Plan \(File No. 06-089, November 9, 2006\)](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31300 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby modifies its authorization of November 9, 2006 to redirect funds in the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars for use by the Fort Mason Foundation for plans to restore Pier 2 at the Fort Mason Center, including the facility known as the Cowell Theater, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the Fort Mason Foundation shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (“Executive Officer”), a budget, schedule, and work program.
2. The Fort Mason Foundation shall identify the Coastal Conservancy as a sponsor of the improvements to Pier 2 at the Fort Mason Center in a manner approved by the Executive Officer of the Conservancy.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed amended project is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 7 (regarding urban waterfronts) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
2. The proposed amended project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
3. The Fort Mason Foundation is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

This project involves the preparation of plans for restoration of Pier 2, one of three piers that are part of the thirteen acre site known as the Fort Mason Center, located within Lower Fort Mason on the southwestern shore of San Francisco Bay (Exhibit 2).

On November 9, 2006, the Conservancy authorized the disbursement of up to \$25,000 to the Fort Mason Foundation (the Foundation) to prepare an interpretive program plan for the Fort Mason Center (Center) (Exhibit 3). Since that time, the Foundation has determined that other capital improvements at the Center are of higher priority, particularly the substantial repairs needed on the shed at Pier 2 where public safety is a major concern. The Foundation has therefore requested that the funds approved by the Conservancy in November, 2006 be redirected to costs associated with the preparation of plans for improvements to the buildings and facilities on Pier 2.

The Center is comprised of the piers and sheds originally built in 1912 to house U.S. Army supplies and to provide docking space for transport ships. In a highly successful conversion from military to civilian uses, the National Park Service took over administration of the site in the 1970's as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), now the most visited urban park in the country. Since 1976, the Center has become the home of nearly three-dozen creative and/or philanthropic nonprofit organizations. It houses the famous Green's vegetarian restaurant, as well as performance spaces, a large conference center, three museums, six theaters, and the City College of San Francisco's Art Campus. More than 15,000 events take place at the Center and more than 1.5 million people visit annually.

Like all of the facilities at the Center, Pier 2 has been designated a National Historic Landmark. The pier contains 30,000 feet of exhibit space and provides visitors with public access to and views of the San Francisco Bay shoreline. The pier shed houses the 440-seat Cowell Theater, the venue for many popular cultural programs including dance performances, theater, film festivals, seminars, conferences and community activities. Surveys have revealed that the shed is in need of a significant amount of exterior and interior work. While the substructures of the piers remain a federal responsibility, the rest of the work, such as that proposed here, is the responsibility of the Foundation.

A California Cultural and Historical Endowment grant in the amount of \$100,000 also originally intended to be used to develop the Fort Mason Center interpretive program plan has been redirected to the current project. Both that grant and the Conservancy's funds will be of great

assistance to the Foundation in its attempt to raise funds to construct necessary improvements to the facilities at Pier 2.

The Fort Mason Foundation is a nonprofit organization incorporated in 1976 to oversee the facilities and activities at the Fort Mason Center in partnership with the National Park Service. It functions as a manager of the Center, and recently signed a 60 year lease, the longest lease ever offered by the Park Service.

**Site Description:** Fort Mason is located in San Francisco on the southwestern shore of San Francisco Bay. It is comprised of two distinct sections known as Upper and Lower Fort Mason. A former U.S. military base, Fort Mason was converted to public use in 1972 and now operates as part of the popular GGNRA.

Upper Fort Mason is situated on a headland, the site of the original U.S. coastal military fortifications. Today it houses the administrative offices of the GGNRA, the headquarters of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, a nonprofit organization supporting the activities of the GGNRA, and a popular hostel. Lower Fort Mason is situated to the west closer to water level, and is the site of the former military port, with its piers and warehouses. Paved foot/bike paths run along the shore of the Bay connecting Upper Fort Mason to Lower Fort Mason.

Located on thirteen acres within Lower Fort Mason, for many years the area now known as the Fort Mason Center was used by Ohlone Indians for fishing and shellfish collecting. Early European visitors to San Francisco Bay noted its advantageous location for coastal defense, and used it accordingly. The site eventually became part of the Fort Mason U.S. military base.

Designated a National Historic Landmark, the Center is home to the piers and sheds of the former military port, now converted to cultural uses. It is a lively reflection of the dynamic Bay Area community, drawing visitors from every walk of life. Spectacular views surround the Center on all sides. The Golden Gate Bridge spans the Bay mouth to the west. To the north and east are the expanse of San Francisco Bay itself, and the coastal mountains of Marin and the northern East Bay. To the south are views of the City, including the wooded terrain of the Presidio.

Pier 2 and the other piers and sheds at the Center were constructed in 1912 as a U.S. Army facility. The pier played a key role in several wars including the Spanish American War, World War II and the Korean War, serving as the point of embarkation for military personnel being shipped to the Pacific. It houses a large shed originally used to store military equipment, which now provides approximately 30,000 feet of exhibit space. The 440-seat Cowell Theater is located within the shed and serves as a popular venue for a diverse array of cultural and community events, including dance performances, concerts, and theater productions. Recent engineering surveys have revealed deteriorating conditions on the pier and in the shed, including the Cowell Theater. These conditions need to be addressed immediately if the bayside cultural activities at the Center are to continue.

**Project History:** In 2006, the Foundation applied for a grant from the Conservancy to undertake a planning project to develop interpretive signs and displays informing visitors of the lively and interesting history of the area. The project was approved by the Conservancy on November 9, 2006. Since that time, facility surveys required under a recently renegotiated lease with the National Park Service, revealed deteriorating conditions at a number of facilities within the Center. The Foundation determined that the highest priority for any improvements at the Center is Pier 2 due to concerns about public safety, and plans for interpretive activities at the Center should await these more urgent repairs. It therefore requested that Conservancy funds for the interpretive program planning project be redirected to the development of plans for improvements to the deteriorated facilities of Pier 2, including the 440-seat Cowell Theater.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$ 25,000
California Cultural and Historic Endowment	100,000
Fort Mason Foundation Board	35,000
For Mason Foundation Funds	460,000
Loan – Union Bank of California	<u>480,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$1,100,000</b>

The expected source of funds for this project remains the 06/07 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Environmental License Plate Fund. The Environmental License Plate Fund account may be used for the purposes of coastal natural resource and enhancement projects, as well as other projects consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Vehicle Code Section 5067(c)(1)(B)). As discussed in detail below, the project is consistent with Chapter 7 (Sections 31300-31314) of Division 21, Public Resources Code.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The project is consistent with Chapter 7 (regarding urban waterfront projects) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, in the following respects:

In Section 31301, the Legislature found that urban waterfront areas are “the first part of an urban area to develop and, thus, the first to decay, [and] are in need of restoration in order to be the vital economic and cultural component of the community which they once were.” This section also states “the encouragement of tourism, public access to the coast, and planned private sector development is a benefit to the citizens of the state, as well as the local citizenry in affected urban waterfront areas”. This project will foster these goals by encouraging tourism, promoting public access to urban waterfronts, and providing the public with the opportunity to participate in important cultural events at a restored waterfront location.

Under Section 31307, the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations for the restoration or urban waterfront areas. The Cowell Theater and other facilities on Pier 2 are in need of restoration, the completion of which will ensure a quality urban waterfront experience for the many visitors to this area.

Under Section 31308, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any urban waterfront project after evaluating the total amount of funding available for urban waterfront projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible urban waterfront projects, the degree to which the project meets the objectives set forth in Section 31305, and the application of other factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. These factors were evaluated by staff as described below.

As required in section 31308, this project is consistent with Section 31305, in that it exhibits “innovation in sensitively integrating man-made features into the natural coastal environment.” This project will result in the restoration of facilities at Pier 2 which is a man made feature that has always been well integrated into the Bay shoreline environment as evidenced by the fact that it is designated a National Historic Landmark due to its important coastal military history. Additionally, the pier offers outstanding views of San Francisco Bay and is part of the City’s urban waterfront. The pier must be maintained in good condition in order to continue to serve these important Bay functions.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The project is consistent with **Goal 3, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, in that a plan to restore the facilities on Pier 2 of the Fort Mason Center will result in the promotion of public access to the urban waterfront of San Francisco. The Fort Mason Center, an important component of San Francisco’s urban waterfront, is visited by over 1,500,000 people, and is home to over 15,000 cultural events, each year. The project will also result in the restoration of a designated National Historic Landmark.

The project is also consistent with **Goal 11, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, which calls for the development of plans to provide recreational facilities, such as docks and piers, along San Francisco Bay. A plan to restore the Cowell Theater and related facilities on Pier 2 will result in an improved recreational experience for the many visitors who attend events and performances at this venue.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, in the following respects:

### **Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by Senator Mark Leno, San Francisco Supervisor Michaela Alioto-Pier, the National Park Service and others (Exhibit 4).
4. **Location:** The Fort Mason Center is a prominent feature on the western shoreline of San Francisco Bay just east of the Golden Gate Bridge.
5. **Need:** The Cowell Theater and other facilities on Pier 2 are in disrepair. A plan to restore these facilities is needed in order to continue their function as important venues for a diverse array of cultural performances and events and to provide public access to the Bay shoreline. The Foundation needs the Conservancy funds to help cover the costs of preparing the plans which are near completion.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** As part of the GGNRA, one of the most attractive and popular urban parks in the country, the Fort Mason Center and the many cultural events staged there draw not only local residents, but visitors from all over the world.

### **Additional Criteria**

7. **Urgency:** Facilities at Pier 2 are deteriorating and delays will only result in increased disrepair and unsafe conditions. It is therefore necessary that this project move ahead without delay.
8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Readiness:** The Fort Mason Foundation is fully engaged in this planning process and is ready to utilize Conservancy funds immediately.
10. **Cooperation:** The project is a cooperative effort of the Fort Mason Foundation, the National Park Service, advocates for cultural and historic preservation, and community members.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:**

This project is consistent with the San Francisco Bay Plan Recreation Policies Section IV.4.b (2) which states that "[h]istoric structures...listed on the national Register of Historic Places...should be preserved.... Public access to the exterior of these structures should be provided. Pubic access to the interiors of these structures should be provided where appropriate." Development of a plan to restore facilities at the Fort Mason Center, a National Historic Landmark, will encourage recreational use and increase public enjoyment of this important waterfront area, both along Pier 2 itself, and in the interior of the shed where the Cowell Theater is located. The historic character of the pier and shed will be preserved and the plan will be consistent with all requirements of the historic designation.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted or agreed to fund. Upon Conservancy approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.