

Initial Report & Stewardship Proposal

Lake Merced Task Force

June 1, 2001



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The Lake Merced Task Force (LMTF) evolved from a meeting convened in August 1999 at the Boathouse by many Lake Merced stakeholders. The LMTF was founded because of the growing public alarm over Lake Merced's rapid deterioration and to address its sustainability as one of San Francisco's most valuable natural and recreational areas. The delegates to the LMTF include representatives from environmental organizations, neighborhood associations, educational institution, local municipalities and elected officials. More than 30 member organizations are represented in the LMTF.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Task Force Vision: Lake Merced provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate a cooperative and mutually supporting relationship between the human community and its natural environment within an urban setting. It is the goal of the Lake Merced Task Force to develop a framework within which the Lake's many stakeholders can communicate and cooperate in a united effort to develop Lake Merced as a natural, aesthetic, recreational and educational resource.

Task Force Mission: The Task Force will build upon existing plans, policies, and programs, implementing short-term actions while creating a long-term, sustainable program for the stewardship of Lake Merced.

Task Force Goals: The Goals of the Lake Merced Task Force will be to:

1. Establish an organizational structure that provides for meaningful community participation in planning and program implementation for Lake Merced while recognizing the special responsibilities of the Commissioners of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and the Recreation and Park Department.
2. Develop a comprehensive Stewardship Program for Lake Merced that considers the Lake's many natural, recreational and educational Beneficial Uses.
3. During the time while a comprehensive program is under development, provide a vehicle for community involvement in evaluating policies and priorities that guide day-to-day operations at Lake Merced.
4. Assure that an implementation plan is prepared that identifies resources, time-lines and responsibilities in sufficient detail to assure successful implementation of the Stewardship Program.

Task Force Membership: The Lake Merced Task Force is comprised of representatives of the many groups that have a stakeholder interest in Lake Merced. These groups include, but are not limited to, the following:

Government agencies and legislative offices with jurisdiction over Lake Merced, educational institutions, recreational interest groups, neighborhood/homeowners groups, neighbors of Lake Merced, environmental groups, community groups with a Lake Merced focus, citywide organizations with related interests, funding sources, and concessionaires. A list of current Lake Merced Task Force members is attached.

Task Force Endorsements: The Lake Merced Task Force is supported in its efforts by several resolutions from appropriate regulatory offices (attached), which have brought staff and other resources of the City and County of San Francisco to bear on those Lake Merced's issues facing the Task Force. In addition, in-kind support from the Task Force's original conveners, San Francisco Beautiful, the Friends of Lake Merced and San Francisco State University (which has also provided significant financial backing), has assured that the work of the Taskforce would be carried through its two year commitment.

ROLES

Task Force Organizational Structure: It is important that the Task Force provide for participation by the Lake's many stakeholders while assuring coordination and balance of potentially conflicting interests. To achieve that goal, the following Task Force entities were formed in order to accomplish much of the work represented in the attached committee reports and recommendations.

Steering Committee: This committee is comprised of voting representatives from each of the four workgroups (resources, recreation, nature and water) and three "at-large" Task Force representatives as well ex-officio, non-voting representative of the various regulatory and political offices ultimately responsible for the Lake's stewardship (e.g., the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Commission, etc.). It is the proactive, coordinating role of the Steering Committee to stay informed about the Task Force's various activities, act as the conduit for exchange of information to and from the Task Force and assure that issues that affect more than one area are identified, studied and resolved.

A current roster of the LMTF Steering Committee is attached.

Workgroups: The workgroups concentrate on individual areas including Water, Nature and Recreation, which coincide with the focus areas of the Lake Merced Comprehensive Management Plan. A fourth workgroup, Resources, is responsible for identifying funding and related resource mechanisms to support the ongoing work of the Task Force including the implementation of approved action recommendations. It should be noted that each of the approximately forty Task Force organizational representatives has been required to participate (along with numerous other interested parties) in at least one of the workgroups.

Reports of the LMTF workgroups are attached.

Interim Task Force Infrastructure: Pending the Task Force's development into the ongoing mechanism for community input into the Lake's stewardship, including identification of a permanent support mechanism, San Francisco State University has provided office space, clerical support, meeting services, etc. as part of its firm commitment to the work of the Task Force during its first two year charge. San Francisco Beautiful provides additional clerical and technical support and the Friends of Lake Merced maintain the Task Force Website.

Task Force Activities: Over the past eighteen months, quarterly meetings of the Task Force-at-Large, monthly meetings of the Steering Committee and meetings of the various workgroups (too numerous to accurately depict) have resulted in a set of reports including action recommendations. Those reports, one each for Recreation, Nature and Water, along with an executive summary are attached.

Task Force – Immediate Next Steps: During the remaining six months of the original two year timeline for the Lake Merced Task Force, we will need to attend to the following:

- Present the LMTF Preliminary Report to San Francisco regulatory agencies
- Secure approval of the LMTF Report's various recommendations
- Secure approval of the LMTF as ongoing mechanism for community input
- Establish a permanent and self-supporting organizational LMTF structure
- Secure funding to support implementation of approved LMTF recommendations.

See the RESULTS section of this report for details regarding the *immediate next steps*.

RESULTS

The Reports: As aforementioned, the Workgroups of the Lake Merced Task Force have produced three separate reports with action recommendations. The full text of the Recreation, Nature and Water Workgroup Reports are attached. Recommendations from the Fund Development Group regarding potential funding will be forthcoming once it is known which action recommendations have been approved by the appropriate regulatory agencies for further research and development. The completed reports are summarized as follows:

Nature Committee: The Nature Committee identified three critical issues regarding Lake Merced's natural resources and developed recommendations in response.

Issue 1: There is insufficient information about certain aspects of the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems at Lake Merced. *Recommendations:* Conduct studies of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems; encourage on-going research on the ecology of the lake and surrounding environs.

Issue 2: Low public awareness about the lake ecosystem. *Recommendations:* Enhance public opportunities for education and involvement.

Issue 3: Habitat diversity around the lake is low due to proliferation of invasive plants and compatible human use. *Recommendation:* Maintain and enhance biodiversity in critical areas.

Recreation Committee: The Recreation Committee established five goals to develop a comprehensive recreational vision for Lake Merced that captured the many and varied recreational, educational, and environmental interests of current and potential users of Lake Merced while preserving and protecting the natural habitat and environment of the lake area.

Goal 1: Create and improve educational, recreational, and environmental opportunities for local and regional visitors. *Recommendations include:* Develop visitor facilities and services, which are compatible with educational and recreational uses and enhance the natural environment of the lake. Establish a healthy fishery and improve fishing opportunities.

Goal 2: Preserve, protect, and enhance Lake Merced's scenic and natural character. *Recommendations include:* Establish trail systems that preserve and protect the natural environment while maximizing educational and recreational experiences. Support efforts to establish and maintain natural areas and native vegetation around Lake Merced.

Goal 3: Provide adequate and safe vehicular and pedestrian access and circulation of all people to the educational and recreational features of Lake Merced. *Recommendations include:* Provide adequate and attractive parking areas at locations including Brotherhood Way, John Muir Way, Boathouse, and Sunset Circle. Encourage use of public transportation.

Goal 4: Ensure quality maintenance of the entire Lake Merced area and its future improvements. *Recommendations include:* Provide adequate number of well-trained staff to maintain Lake Merced and its amenities. Encourage park stewardship through volunteer efforts.

Goal 5: Provide educational and interpretive opportunities to the public that focus on the appropriate use of and sensitivity to the Lake Merced environment. *Recommendations include:* Provide appropriate signage to inform the public of park regulations. Increase awareness of environmental issues related to Lake Merced.

Water Committee: The Water Committee recommends the implementation of an integrated water resource program to protect Lake Merced and the Westside Basin Aquifer. The program shall govern surface water, storm water, groundwater, and recycled water use in the Westside Basin, while protecting Lake Merced water quality & quantity and enhancing its beneficial uses.

The goals of a specific, enforceable and expeditiously implemented integrated water resource program shall be:

Goal 1: Raising water levels in Lake Merced to 25 to 27 feet (as required by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Resolution No. 10.435 dated January 30, 1950) while taking into account impacts on the natural habitat, if any, that might result from raising the lake's level;

Goal 2: To restore the Westside Basin Aquifer to a level that will eliminate the imbalance between the amount of groundwater being removed and the amount of water being recharged to the aquifer; and

Goal 3: To implement water management practices that will restore, enhance and sustain the long-term beneficial uses of Lake Merced and the Westside Basin Aquifer.

Elements of an integrated water resource program should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1) implement the 1996 MOU between the SFPUC, Daly City, and the Olympic Club, San Francisco Golf & Country Club, and the Lake Merced Country Club;
- 2) implement a SFPUC conjunctive water use program with local area groundwater pumpers;
- 3) implement a program to recharge the Westside Basin Aquifer with recycled water via injection wells;
- 4) regularly assess the Westside Basin Aquifer through a series of monitoring wells; monitor;
- 5) evaluate the impacts of the over-the-lake sewer pipe and surface water run-off on Lake Merced's water quality.

Because of the mutual trust established within the Taskforce over the past eighteen months, its representatives have been able to work efficaciously in developing and *unanimously* agreeing to this wide ranging series of action recommendations, not the least of which is a plan to pursue avenues other than groundwater pumping for irrigation purposes. It is noteworthy that, even in this most contentious of issues, concord was reached on every recommendation and what disagreement remains solely refers to the deadlines for implementation.

The Resolution: In addition to the Workgroup reports, the Lake Merced Task Force has unanimously agreed to a resolution calling for adoption of the various Workgroup recommendations, exploration of funding options and development of a governance structure for the ongoing work of the Task Force.

The complete text of the January 25, 2001 LMTF Resolution (#01-001) is attached.

The complete text of the April 26, 2001 LMTF Resolution (#03-001), regarding water management and quality issues, is also attached.

REMAINING WORK *(in the original charge of the Task Force)*

In order to best address the mandates of the LMTF Resolution, the short term objectives and/or immediate charges of the Lake Merced Task Force are as follows:

1. Using the vehicle of this “Initial Report”, including the “Executive Summary” and attached support documents, as well as public appearances where advisable or warranted, seek approval of the various regulatory agencies responsible for the stewardship of Lake Merced to move forward with further research and development of the Task Force’s specific recommendations.
2. Seek approval of the various regulatory agencies responsible for the stewardship of Lake Merced to have the Lake Merced Task Force recognized as the bona fide mechanism for community input regarding issues related to the health and welfare of the Lake and its environs.
3. Within the Task Force itself, define and implement a permanent, self-supporting infrastructure and continuing scope of work, including continuing negotiations aimed at reaching agreement over the timelines for implementation of the various Water Group recommendations.
4. Participate, as appropriate, in the development, review and reaction to proposals and implementation plans associated with Task Force recommendations that have received regulatory approval for further action. For example, an ad hoc committee of interested LMTF members have begun planning discussions for the “visitor facilities and services” recommended by the Lake Merced Task Force.
5. Identify and secure public and private funding to support the implementation of approved recommendations. Following the January 25, 2001 LMTF adoption of the workgroups’ recommendations, the Fund Development Committee has expanded its efforts and a report of their activities will be added to the stewardship plan at a later date.