



**PARK POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

Select the types below to fit the issue

<input type="checkbox"/>	Citywide or Significant and Controversial	<input type="checkbox"/>	Long-term Policy and Planning
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Urgent Citywide or Significant and Controversial	<input type="checkbox"/>	Individual Park Issue
<input type="checkbox"/>	Divisive Issue within SFPA	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other

**Title:** *San Francisco Botanical Gardens Nursery: Center for Sustainable Gardening*

**Date:** *March 12, 2012*

**Recommendation:**

SFPA should formally support the construction of the *Nursery: Center for Sustainable Gardening* at the San Francisco Botanical Gardens and commit to working with the Recreation and Park Department, San Francisco Botanical Garden Society and neighborhood leaders to ensure the San Francisco Botanical Gardens remains well maintained and accessible to the public.

SFPA should provide a letter of support for the project and publish this document.

**Contact:** Meredith Thomas, Director of Policy and Stewardship, meredith@sfparksalliance.org

**Policy Area:** Capital Project; Formal support of project

**Key Deadlines:**

Approval to accept project as a “gift in place”:

Recreation and Park Commission Consent Calendar

March 15<sup>th</sup>

Board of Supervisors

March TBD.

**Description/Analysis**

**Issue:**

Background

The San Francisco Botanical Gardens (Botanical Garden) is 55 acres of landscaped

gardens and open spaces featuring a diverse plant collections and community education program. Located in Golden Gate Park (GGP), the Botanical Garden is owned by SF Recreation and Parks Department (RPD), and operated under a Memorandum of Agreement since 1955 by non-profit organization, San Francisco Botanical Society (SFBGS).

In 1995, SFBGS funded a Master Site Plan for the Botanical Garden in conjunction with the City's long-term planning for GGP. The Master Site Plan called for the construction of a new nursery facility, *Nursery: Center for Sustainable Gardening*, replacing the existing aging and deteriorating nursery. The existing nursery is over 45 years old and located in the coldest part of the garden. The proposed facility is reflected in the approved Master Site Plan and incorporated into the City's 1998 GGP Master Plan, a framework and guidelines document highlighting historic characteristics of the park, future capital projects and management policies. Once the nursery capital project is complete the facility will become a "gift in place" from SFBGS to the City of San Francisco through the Recreation and Parks Department valued at \$14.2 million.

### Proposed Nursery Design Plan

Since its original concept design, plans for the nursery have been refined and include:

- The Headhouse which will house work space for SFBGS staff, volunteers and RPD staff assigned to the Botanical Garden, a living roof, public restrooms and storage areas for educators.

- The Nursery will also contain greenhouse and shadehouse at the rear of the Headhouse and the outdoor Learning Court.

- The Learning Court will be accessible and visible to visitors and provide space for year-round formal and informal education. The project is targeted for LEED Platinum certification. The highest level of green-design recognition.

- A paved roundabout objected to in some public comment was removed after working with the Fire Department to ensure emergency vehicles would still have access.

- The original concept design called for 6-8 parking spaces, those have been removed and only one ADA space remains in the plans.

### Project Funding and Impacts

In November 2011, the Nursery project received a Final Mitigated Negative Declaration (FMND) for the project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) showing that there has been no substantial evidence that the project could result in significant adverse environmental impacts. The total project cost is \$14.2 million dollars. SFBGS will raise the total funding for the capital project. Thus far, \$7 million dollars has been raised by SFBGS.

### Project Next Steps

The next phase of the project requires the City to formally accept the Nursery: Center for Sustainable Gardening, as a 'gift in place' from SFBGS. If the Recreation and Park Commission approves the project, it will then move to the Board of Supervisors.

## Opposition to the Project

Current opposition to the construction of the Nursery includes the Sierra Club, Golden Gate Park Preservation Alliance and the San Francisco Peace and Freedom Party and seems largely tied to the initiation of a non-resident fee for entry enacted by RPD and the Board of Supervisors after planning for the nursery project was more than fifteen years along, as well as potential impacts on habitat and species in the park.

Concerns regarding the Nursery project include:

The addition of a new building containing office space in GGP that will accommodate SFBGS and RPD staff and the 500 SFBGS volunteers; and paving of 300 feet of new roads to accommodate large delivery trucks and emergency vehicles; the opposed believe this may add future pressure to increase parking and add on to the square footage of the building.

The removal of native and non-native trees to accommodate the project; the opposed believe there should not be removal of trees to support the construction of a building. Mitigation includes the replacement of native trees 3:1 and non-native trees 1:1.

There is concern about disturbance of the California Red-Legged Tree Frog sighted in John Muir pond during construction. SFBGS indicates that mitigation will occur during construction.

The opposed believe allowing SFBGS to raise money for construction and operation of the Nursery will further entrench SFBGS into the Botanical Garden. The groups believe the existing \$7 Non-resident fees for entrance to the Botanical Gardens deter visitors and that the site should remain at no cost for admission thus remaining accessible to all for casual exploration of the garden and education.

## **Policy Considerations:**

The main issue surrounding the support of the nursery facility is the impact of the use of private funding for improving publicly owned lands.

The City of San Francisco has a long history of accepting gifts from non-profit organizations on public lands. The de Young museum constructed in GGP in 1894 is located on RPD land and operated by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (FAMSF). In 1989, the de Young Museum suffered a significant amount of damage during the Loma Prieta earthquake. The FAMSF Board of Trustees initiated a process to build a new facility. This partnership is a model of a non-profit organization privately financing a capital project and gifting the completed project to the City. The renovation of the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers by the San Francisco Parks Trust is another example..

The key questions for SFPA to consider are:

Does the replacement and reconfiguration of the nursery enhance or deteriorate that portion of Golden Gate Park and is it in keeping with approved plans?

Is the proposed capital project directly associated with the non-residential fee to enter the Botanical garden?

**Rationale for Recommendation:**

The proposed project will provide improvements to the current deteriorating nursery facility and improve overall visitor experience and educational opportunities at the Botanical Gardens. The current collaboration between the City and its non-profit partner SFBGS should be supported.

This project was well under way before the proposed non-resident fee at the Botanical Garden was proposed, implemented and upheld. Fundraising for the capital improvement is not commingled with operating revenue generated by the entrance fees.

The overall policy question about charging fees to enter public parks is a separate matter deserving of consideration.

**Financial Considerations**

There are no cost implications for SFPA. Additionally there will be no public dollars slated for the development of this project. Private funding is being pursued by the SFBGS.

Respectfully Submitted by:

---

SFPA Director of Policy & Stewardship

Recommendation Approved:

---

SFPA Policy Council Chair