



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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**DATE:** November 22, 2010  
**TO:** Historic Preservation Commission  
**FROM:** Timothy Frye, Acting Preservation Coordinator, (415) 575-6822  
**RE:** Stow Lake Boathouse Article 10 Nomination Request

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The Planning Department (Department) received the attached revised Stow Lake Boathouse Landmark Nomination form from Susanne Dumont on November 22, 2010. While the Department has not completed its review of the document, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has requested review of the nomination form at its regularly scheduled December 15, 2010 hearing. Please note that the Stow Lake Boathouse is currently proposed as a contributor to the Golden Gate Park Article 10 Nomination that the HPC will consider at its January 19, 2011 hearing.

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**Nomination for Landmark Status**

**Stow Lake Boathouse, 50 Stow Lake Drive, Golden Gate Park**

~  
Constructed between **1946 - 1949**

Architect: **Warren C. Perry**

Submitted by Suzanne R. Dumont, November 2010



Tim Frye,  
Acting Preservation Coordinator  
Planning Department  
Historic Resource Evaluation  
1650 Mission Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103-2479

11/21/10

**Re: Nomination for Landmark Status ~ The Stow Lake Boathouse, 50 Stow Lake Drive, Golden Gate Park**

Date of Construction: between **1946 -1949**

Architect: **Warren C. Perry**

Builders: **Wellnitz & De Narde**

Building Cost in 1946: **\$34,249**

Architectural Style: **Alpine-style chalet**

Owner: **The City of San Francisco, managed by Recreation & Park Department**

Land Parcel Number: **1700001**

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Dear Mr. Frye,

This letter serves as a follow up to my nomination made on 11/2/10, of the Stow Lake Boathouse for designation as a San Francisco landmark. This nomination is for both the exterior and the interior of the boathouse. (**Attachment 1** to be provided by Mr. Frye who has stated he has access to an updated version of the U.S. Department of the Interior National Register of Historic Places for the National Park System that was supplied with the first version of this nomination).

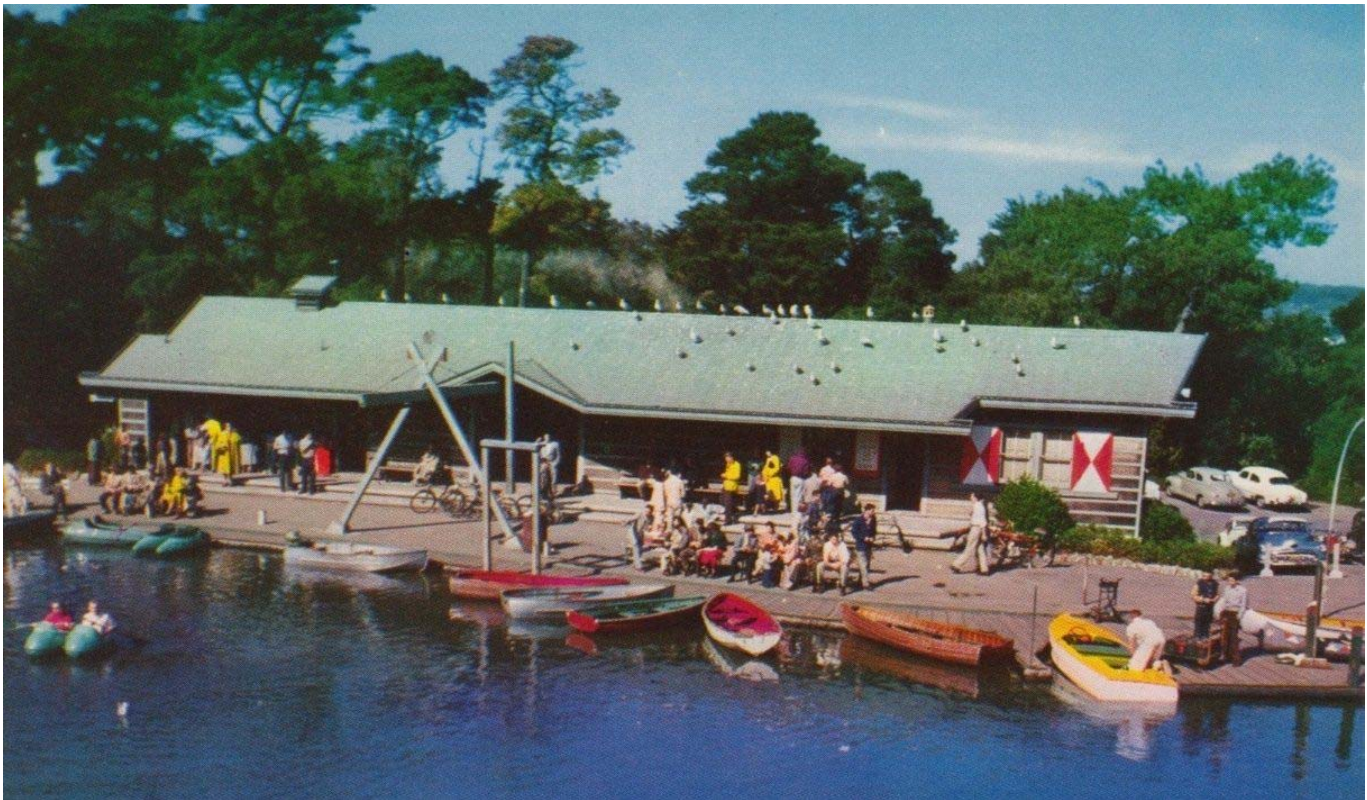
**Brief description of the Architect and Structure**

Ecole Des Beaux Arts trained architect, Warren C. Perry, built the boathouse in 1946 - 1949. Perry also studied at the School of Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley where he became a faculty member later succeeding John Galen Howard as Chairman of School of Architecture in 1927. In 1929 Perry was appointed Dean of the School of Architecture, a position he held until 1950.

There are multiple existing examples of Perry's residential and commercial work in San Francisco, the Bay Area and throughout California. He designed the George C.

Edwards Track Stadium (now named Goldman Field) with architect George Kelham. A full listing of projects by Perry warrant compilation by Planning Preservation staff.

The Stow Lake Boathouse fits with a fanciful theme of buildings sprinkled throughout Golden Gate Park, including but not limited to: the Angler's Lodge, the Equestrian Center/Police Stables, the Model Yacht Club, etc. "Built into an embankment, the exterior is clad with horizontally oriented wood siding in two alternating finishes. Decorative features include cut wood fretwork gables and sliding window shutters." (Christopher Pollock in "San Francisco's Golden Gate Park" 2001 West Winds Press). A cheerful historic paint scheme has been carefully maintained by the Tilden / McLellan Family.



1950s era postcard of the Stow Lake Boathouse.

Note the boat hoist is a central, integral & defining feature.

After a fire destroyed the original boathouse in the 1930s, Calvin V. Tilden began a boat rental business on the site in a small shack on June 20, 1943. In 1946-1949 the current boathouse was rebuilt on the site. It is important to note that the historic use of this site has always been **for boating**. The snack bar was added in the 1950's as a convenience to boaters and has always been ancillary to boating activities. No evidence of any restaurant, café or souvenir shop is found in the records for the boathouse. The boathouse site has provided boating recreation since at least 1894, then called the "Strawberry Lake Boathouse", as described in a story published in the "The Morning Call" from 1983, (**See Attachment 2**).

The Stow Lake Boathouse has been leased to the same San Francisco family for over 67 years. For this reason the boathouse has not be subjected to changes that would otherwise have marred the exterior and interior of the structure (**See Attachment 3**). Interior changes have been minimal.

The architecture of the boathouse is significant as part of the “City Beautiful” movement and, as part of John’s McLaren’s vision to create a “Central Park of the West.” In 1998 the Golden Gate Park Master Plan listed the Stow Lake Boathouse as having “contributing” historic status (**See Attachment 4**). In addition it meets many of the criteria in the Urban Design Element (**See Attachment 5**).

The Stow Lake Boathouse is the only fully operating small boat building and repair shop in San Francisco. It is a remnant of once vibrant blue collar workspaces that existed throughout San Francisco during World War II. Possibly the boathouse was the first commercial “green” operation in San Francisco, with many electric boat motors that were charged at night inside the boathouse.



*Current view of The Stow Lake Boathouse from parking lot.*

## **Description of the interior (see Attachment 6 : pages 13 -15)**

The top floor includes snack bar, snack bar kitchen, boat repair shop/boat storage, office, ticket booth & night watchman's quarters: small bedroom, bath & kitchen

### Distinguishing features

#### Snack bar:

- Original wood display shelves
- Original millwork on the snack bar window awning
- Several original signs from 1940's
- Original counter
- Original wooden boat rental organizer

#### Snack bar kitchen:

Few distinguishing features due to a fire in the 1970's

#### Boat repair/storage area:

- Original wood walls, floors and ceiling. A section of floor boards were originally designed to be removed for access to the basement.
- Still functioning electric boat hoist is a defining feature
- Original, still used, large work bench includes with original built-in vise.
- Electrical charging stations for electric boat motors
- Original stairway to the basement
- Original wood windows

#### Office:

- Original floor plan
- Original door with boating motif
- Original linoleum floor
- Original wood windows

#### Ticket booth :

- Original bay window forms the ticket booth
- Original red and white striped wall paper
- Original wall phone
- Original signage
- Original wall mounted wooden boat identification organizer

#### Night watchman's Bedroom:

- Original open closet shelving and clothes rod
- Original small wall safe
- Original large, floor mounted safe
- Original linoleum floor

Night watchman's Bathroom:  
Original light over sink  
Original medicine cabinet over sink  
Original "random block" tile floor  
Original wall tile  
Original tub/shower  
Original sink

Night watchman's kitchen:  
Original wood cabinets  
Original linoleum countertops  
Original linoleum floor and wall covering

**Basement level at parking lot:**

Space includes: an unventilated storage area and the original men's and women's public restrooms (currently not in service)

Thank you for consideration of this nomination. Time is of the essence as you have been told by the HPC. I am available to assist in any way I can.

Sincerely,

Suzanne R. Dumont  
841 Rockdale Drive  
San Francisco, Ca 94127  
415.999.5823  
zangsf1@gmail.com

Cc: Charles Chase, President, Historic Preservation Commission

Attachments:

Attachment 1 (Attachment 1 to be provided by Mr. Frye who has stated he has access to an updated version of the U.S. Department of the Interior National Register of Historic Places for the National Park System that was supplied with the first version of this nomination).

Attachment 2 Photocopy: "For the Boats: A Picturesque Pavilion in the Park" from The Morning Call, Saturday, October 14, 1893

Attachment 3 Tenant history

Attachment 4 “Buildings and Structures Inventory” listing from the Golden Gate Park Master Plan, 1998.

Attachment 5 Urban Design Element Criteria

Attachment 6 (Pages 13-15) Interior photos taken 11/20/10.

Miscellaneous attachments:

A. Email to T. Tam regarding change of use at Stow Lake Boathouse – 2/1/10

B. “Historic Stow Lake Boathouse Quietly Threatened” by Suzanne R. Dumont and Sandy Weil, published in Beyond Chron, December 17, 2009

C. “Report of the Secretary, Office of The Park Commissioners” excerpts detailing the 1910 rent for the boathouse

D. Flyer for the February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010 announcing the Save Stow Lake Boathouse Party

E. “Historic Boathouse renovation may leave 65-year leaseholder up Stow Lake without a paddle” by Iris Rowlee from Marina Times, March 2010

F. COMET (Condition Management Estimation Technology) Reports: SF Recreation & Parks, 2007.

G. Photograph: “Two Stow Lake Boathouse Regulars” taken by S. Dumont

H. Photographic Postcard view of the original 1893 boathouse.

I. “The Community Wants to Preserve and Protect the Boathouse for BOATING”  
By Suzanne R. Dumont



## **Attachment 1**

**(Attachment 1 to be provided by Mr. Frye who has stated he has access to an updated version of the U.S. Department of the Interior National Register of Historic Places for the National Park System that was supplied with the first version of this nomination).**

**Attachment 1**

**FOR THE BOATS.**

**A Picturesque Pavilion in the Park.**

**WILL BE BUILT NEXT WEEK.**

The Park Commissioners Select a Rustic Design for the Strawberry Lake Boathouse.

A very pretty and appropriate design for a boathouse on Strawberry Hill Lake has been chosen by the Park Commissioners, and next Monday the work of constructing the building will begin. Of the different designs submitted this last one has the merit of being in harmony with the surroundings—the green forest, the jagged red rocks, the placid lake and a hill rising abruptly close by. There were sketches of

classic houses fit for harboring some imperial flotilla, pleasing enough to look at with their Ionic columns and dignified facades, but lacking the essential quality of rural simplicity.

But the commissioners, seeking to avoid a multiplicity of superstructures in Golden Gate Park, which would destroy its chief charm, frowned upon pretentious structures. They wanted an appropriate building that would be rustic, picturesque and without marked contrast to nature. The chosen design contained these qualities and it will soon be carried into execution.

The site selected is at the northwest bend, near the rocky island and a short distance beyond the Roman bridge. Next Monday a force of men will begin work on the foundations and meanwhile lumber will be cut and sawed specially for the boathouse in a Mendocino forest.

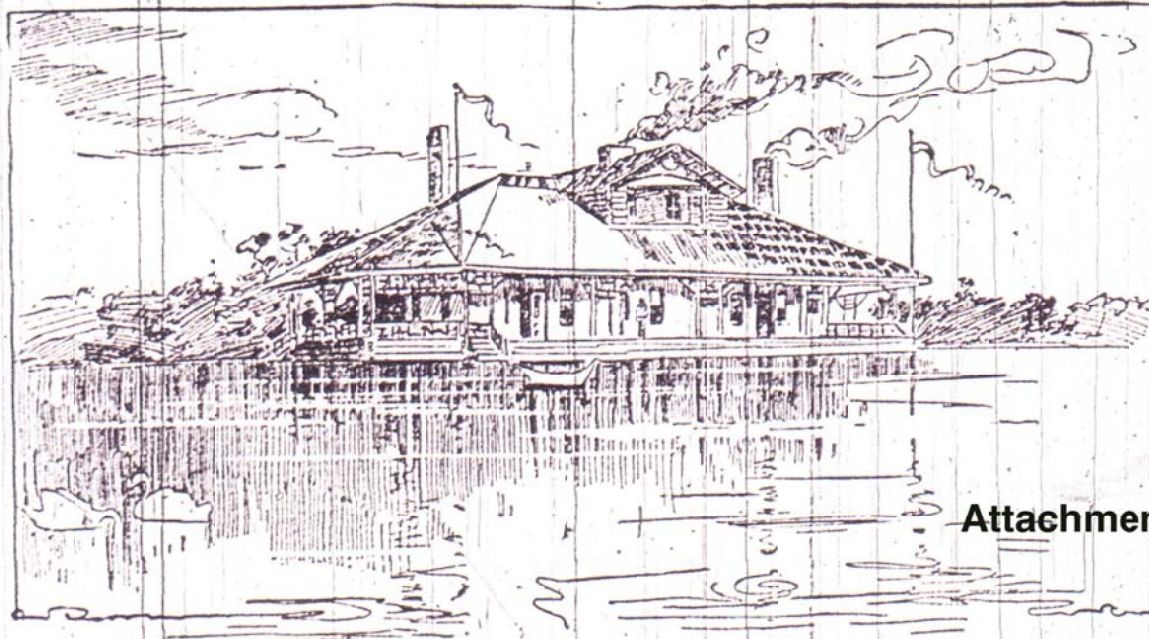
The house will cover an area of 120 by 70 feet. It will have a surrounding platform approached by easy steps, and the architect, acting under instructions of the commissioners, has designed everything about its exterior in rustic wood-work. There will be two stories and a basement. The top floor will contain four rooms for the attendant and watchman, while the basement will have men's toilet-rooms and be used as a storeroom and workshop. A veranda twenty feet

reaching out to a support of rough pillars. The main waiting-room will be thirty-two feet wide with an entrance from the driveway at the easterly end.

A small ticket-office will stand in part of the veranda, and at the opposite side will be a dressing and toilet room for ladies. The main room will be eighty feet long and thirty-two feet wide. At each end great open fireplaces in which immense logs are to burn in cold weather will give this apartment a quaint effect, and the walls will be paneled with redwood in natural finish.

The total height will be fifty feet, and there will be an open space of sixteen feet from the eaves. Height or imposing proportions have been avoided, but the low sweeping roof, with its tall chimneys, projecting verandas and primitive split shakes instead of shingles, will appear to good effect. The exterior will be built of redwood slats with the bark removed. Supports for roof and the lattice work are to be of young redwood trees without bark, but covered with a preservative varnish.

The boathouse will be about 1000 feet from the new terminus of cars running north of Golden Gate Park, which can be reached for a nickel fare. In a very short time boats will be built and it is expected that before the fair opens a flotilla of forty tiny craft will sail the lake's surface.



PLAN OF THE BOATHOUSE AT GOLDEN GATE PARK.

PAUL SWANK, ARCHT.

Attachment 2



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## **Attachment 3**

### **Tenant History**

Concession/lease holders for the last 67 years are all members of the same San Francisco family:

**1943 - 1971 Calvin V. Tilden**

**1971 - 1991 Calvin B. Tilden**

**1991 - present Bruce McLellan, Calvin V. Tilden's  
grandson & Calvin B. Tilden's nephew**

**Attachment 3**

**Attachment 4**  
Buildings and Structures Inventory  
Golden Gate Park Master Plan, 1998

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**Attachment 4**

## **Attachment 5**

### **Urban Design Element Criteria**

In keeping with the Urban Design Element, the Stow Lake Boathouse is a stellar example of the relationship between people and their environment. A positive attribute, the boathouse is a destination for tourists from all corners of the world, and provides a respite for city dwellers looking to escape the stresses of everyday life.

Numerous reasons exist as to the importance of the boathouse in individual lives... from the San Franciscans who experience their first boat ride there, to the high school student who gets his/her first job there, to the many couples who become engaged while rowing around the lake, to the seniors who come to enjoy the character of the boathouse which invites them to sit and stay as long as they like without spending one dime. There are many other aspects to the rich culture that defines the boathouse that should be honored, protected and respected.

Some of the reasons that the boathouse fits the Urban Design Element criteria are:

- ~ That it gives to the city and its neighborhood an image, a sense of purpose and a means of orientation. (Objective 1)
- ~ The boathouse, along with the other structures in Golden Gate Park, forms a whole that has a special effect and impact. (Policy 1.3)
- ~ The boathouse provides a profound sense of nature, consistency with the past and freedom from overcrowding. (Objective 2)
- ~ The boathouse is a notable historic destination in its own right with architectural and aesthetic value. (Policy 2.4)
- ~ The boathouse must be carefully restored in a way to enhance rather than weaken the original character of such buildings. (Policy 2.5)
- ~ The boathouse deserves recognition and protection as an outstanding and unique area that contributes to an extraordinary degree to San Francisco's visual form and character. (Policy 2.7)



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H.264 video compressor  
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## Attachment 6

Tina B. Tam,  
Preservation Coordinator  
San Francisco Planning Department  
1650 Mission St. SF 94103  
email: [Tina.Tam@sfgov.org](mailto:Tina.Tam@sfgov.org)

Dear Ms. Tam,  
I am writing you at the suggestion of the Office of Historic Preservation regarding the Stow Lake Boathouse located at 50 Stow Lake Drive in Golden Gate Park.

You may be aware that the Recreation & Parks Department has put out 3 RFPs and is currently in the process of putting out a RFQ to change the boathouse concessions. Rec & Parks has made it clear they are seeking to install a large indoor restaurant on the entire top floor of the boathouse and relegate boating operations to the lower parking lot level.

Our group is protesting the proposal of an indoor restaurant for many reasons. We have gathered over 800 signatures in a very short time because the proposal by Rec & Parks is not driven by public demand or need. In fact public input has been quite clear in asking that the boathouse be restored and not turned into a restaurant with boat storage in the basement... especially since the boating facility that dates back to the the 1890's would be at risk for many reasons if the primary usage of the building is allowed to change.

Please add me to your list of persons to notify whenever there is a meeting in regards to the future of the Stow Lake Boathouse using my email address above, or my mailing address:  
841 Rockdale Drive, SF, CA 94127

Thank you very much,

Suzanne R. Dumont  
Save Stow Lake Boathouse Coalition  
[www.savestowlake.org](http://www.savestowlake.org)

**ATTACHMENT A.**

## **Historic Stow Lake Boathouse Quietly Threatened**

by Suzanne R. Dumont & Sandy Weil, 2009-12-17  
published online at BeyondChron

The City and County of San Francisco quietly put out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Stow Lake Boathouse last spring for a new leaseholder to open an indoor / outdoor café / restaurant at the Boathouse. The three responses received were tabled as none met the primary requirements. On December 7th, 2009 a Request for Quotation (RFQ) was issued that requests a conceptual plan for capital improvements and operation of the concessions. This item is on the agenda on Thursday, December 17th at 2pm at City Hall, Rm. 416, when the Recreation and Parks Commission meets. The week before Christmas is no time to decide the fate of such an important part of Golden Gate Park. Has an environmental impact report been done to evaluate the impact on wildlife and human users, increase of traffic, etc?

Park users concerned that the historical usage of the boathouse and character of the Boathouse be preserved, as the City searches for ways to increase its revenues, the Save Stow Lake Boathouse Coalition was formed. The Coalition is collecting signatures on petitions both online and at Stow Lake.

The joy of taking a boat ride around Stow Lake is an experience many of us have enjoyed since childhood, with generations of families taking their children and visitors for a ride under the bridges and around Strawberry Hill and then indulging in snacks at the snack bar, like pink popcorn. The storybook character of the Boathouse attracts all ages and all ethnic groups to it, every day the weather permits, seniors who come for walks and chats while enjoying a cup of coffee or ice cream, regulars who row around the lake, school groups who come for the birds and to enjoy an affordable snack at the snack bar...all part of the special community at the lake who come for a respite from our over commercialized world and to enjoy the wildlife and flora of Stow Lake.

The historic preservation and repurposing of the Beach Chalet with restaurants and a museum, is a magnificent example of how the City can maintain its heritage and increase revenues. The Beach Chalet was abandoned, falling into decay and attracted crime. The Stow Lake Boathouse is not abandoned, it does not attract crime and the only decay of the facility is caused directly or indirectly by City mismanagement.

## Attachment B.

Since the City put the current leaseholder on a month-to-month lease, he has been unable to afford the costs of repainting, maintenance or upgrades, including adding electrified boats. The current lease has been held in the same family since the early 1940's. The current tenant has painted the Boathouse several times, maintaining the historical colors, at great cost to themselves.

Now, the Boathouse needs paint and capital improvements including structural engineering and foundation work as water is seeping in from Stow Lake. The City says it has no funds for these repairs. The Save the Stow Lake Boathouse Coalition proposes that the City work with the current lease holder to be sure all needed repairs are done, first and foremost by extending the current lease at least 10 years to make necessary repairs possible so that the character and architectural exterior of the boathouse remain the same and to keep running the "old fashioned" snack bar & boat rentals.

The current tenant has never had a boating accident and has many long-standing, excellent relationships with customers. The current tenant has employees that have worked there for over ten years and those jobs should not be endangered. The current tenant has added healthy food options to the snack bar menu and is interested in adding additional items to increase revenue and wants to repair and improve the facility once a longer term lease is in place and the City should provide support to this dedicated tenant to make these necessary repairs.

Do we need another restaurant in Golden Gate Park when there are already 3 food concessions immediately adjacent: 1 in the de Young, and 2 in the Academy of Sciences. With the multitude of 9th Avenue restaurants nearby... does this really make sense... and where else can you row a boat in the middle of the City and enjoy pink popcorn? Let's preserve it for all generations to come.

To sign the Save Stow Lake Boathouse petition go to:  
<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/2/save-the-stow-lake-boathouse-coalition>

For further information contact [SaveStowLake@aol.com](mailto:SaveStowLake@aol.com)

## **Attachment B.**

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decompressor  
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## **Attachment C.**

## Attachment D.

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**Attachment E.**



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**Attachment F.**

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## TWO STOW LAKE BOATHOUSE REGULARS

**Attachment G.**



Photographic postcard view of the original boathouse lost to fire in the 1930's.

### **The Community Wants to Preserve and Protect the Boathouse for BOATING**

*By Suzanne R.. Dumont, Founder Save the Stow Lake Boathouse Coalition*

The current tenant, Bruce McLellan, Stow Lake LLC, maintains a vibrant boating recreation amenity and pays approximately \$200,000 a year in rent and revenue to Recreation & Park. He has never been late with his rent. He has a perfect boating safety record because of his extensive knowledge of boating recreation, experience in renting boats to non-sailors and training of his staff. He has hired hundreds of high school students and for many of them, this is their first job. He is an ardent supporter of school groups, disadvantaged children groups and others who come to the boathouse for wildlife education, boating and to enjoy the lake area.

The Recreation & Park Commission sets all boat rental fees. Mr. McLellan has purposefully kept his snack bar pricing low with ALL items under \$3.50, keeping in mind his no-income, low-income and middle class families, seniors and others. He has added many healthy food options, all under \$3.50. This affordability attracts many, who would not otherwise be able to enjoy an ice cream or hot dog in the park. For example, a hot dog at the deYoung Museum Café costs \$8.50 and this pricing clearly deters low income people/families.

Mr. McLellan and his staff are beloved by seniors who frequent the boathouse benches. Seniors tell me that the boathouse staff treat them as friends, offering them a safe place to enjoy the park with no pressure to buy a thing. I am aware of at least one occasion when a 90 year old regular boathouse visitor died, that Jeff Fones, the boathouse manager, quietly attended the funeral on his own time.

On occasion the boathouse staff offer first aid and assistance to children or adults in need. A free bag of ice is quickly offered to anyone who bumps their head or knees. Clean clothing is offered a child who may have fallen into the lake.

The Stow Lake Boathouse and Bike Rental Concession (in the basement) consistently receive 4.5 star ratings on the independent Yelp website.

For tourists the staff act as guides, helping to orient them, answer their questions and offering the kind of hospitality and service that makes San Francisco proud.

## Attachment I.

On the occasional Sunday afternoon, the boathouse welcomes Charlie Miller, a senior who lives in a downtown SRO and a music enthusiast. He brings his record player and spins old tunes to everyone's delight.



*Charlie Miller & his record player at the boathouse*

### **6 Years of Lease Problems = Deterioration of the Boathouse**

Currently the boathouse is managed by Recreation & Park in conjunction with the Recreation & Park Commission, who have mismanaged the property leading to deterioration of the structure, not to mention stressing the boathouse community of workers and users.

Recreation & Park has kept the existing tenant on a month-to-month lease since 2006, threatening 30-day eviction. Recreation & Park failed to repair the roof per the lease agreement, forcing the tenant to do so at his own cost. The tenant is not able to make other capital improvements needed to protect the structure from the elements given his precarious status. Now Recreation & Park uses the condition of the boathouse to portray the tenant as errant party in performing repairs.

Recreation & Park has failed to resolve lease issues in spite of numerous wasteful rounds of RFP/RFQs over a period of 6 years, with Mr. McLellan applying each time



## **Attachment I.**

for renewal of his lease and meeting all the criteria set forth. The public has no right of appeal on Recreation & Park decisions and there is no oversight for the Recreation & Park Commission who are all mayoral appointees. Someone needs to stop the incompetency.

Now, in spite of a loud, persistent protest by the community and boathouse users, Recreation & Park continues to push for a drastic change of use for the historic and well-loved boathouse. There is no public demand or support for the plan Recreation & Park proposes: an upscale, Wi-Fi café with a large souvenir shop in place of the historic boat repair shop and boat storage. Save the Stow Lake Boathouse Coalition <http://www.savestowlake.org/> has collected over 2,700 petitions signatures and letters of support from the San Francisco Chapter of the Sierra Club, Telegraph Hill Dwellers Neighborhood Association and other groups in support of a historic restoration of the property with the current boathouse tenant in place with no café/restaurant/bar or souvenir shop added.

Recreation & Park staff put forth a 5<sup>th</sup> bid request in February 2010 for the boathouse concession lease. In August 2010 Recreation & Park announced it had chosen a New Mexico based chain, Ortega Enterprises LLC, aka Cloudless Skies, to take over the lease. The Ortega plan reduces recreational use of the lake by purchasing fewer rental boats and prioritizing café and souvenir sales, commodities easily found in many spots throughout the city. Golden Gate Park has at least 7 other eating establishments, 3 of which are less than 2 minutes walk from Stow Lake. In addition there are multiple cafes/restaurants on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue close to Stow Lake. There is no need and no demand for a café at the boathouse.

The Recreation & Park Ortega Enterprises LLC plan would convert the entire top floor of the boathouse (approximately 2,500 sq. feet) into a café/souvenir shop with boat storage and repair relegated to the parking lot level. Recreation & Park proposes to remove the historic boat hoist, the boat repair shop and night watchman's quarters/offices. This gutting of the boathouse turns it into a café with boats stored in the basement. In addition many people are concerned about the plan to haul the boats up and down on the pedestrian ramps, again concerns that Recreation & Park ignores.

The impact of increased traffic, noise, and lighting on the wildlife and flora of the park has been ignored. Great Blue Herons nests on the island directly across from the boathouse, one of a few colonies in the Bay Area. Save the Stow Lake Boathouse Coalition in conjunction with the Sierra Club, has asked Recreation & Park for an Environmental Impact Report, again to deaf ears.

## **Attachment I.**