

<http://www.nps.gov/gate/learn/news/rfp-openhouse.htm>From: **William Wilby**
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Date: Mon, Jan 21, 2013 at 11:26 PM

Subject: Member Input to Ft. Hancock Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) Meeting

To: Linda Canzanelli <linda_canzanelli@nps.gov>

Cc: "Dennis_Reidenbach@nps.gov" <Dennis_Reidenbach@nps.gov>

Dear Linda,

My sincere apologies for not being able to attend this first meeting of the Ft. Hancock Advisory Committee. Since I cannot be there, I wanted to give you a short summary of my ideas and questions after having read the initial material you sent around.

There are many suggestions, themes, and ideas captured in the memorandum summarizing committee member interviews. Coupled with the fact that there are 20 committee members, the single biggest risk to this committee is that it meets over many months and years, spends a great deal of time arguing issues around Ft. Hancock, and gets the NPS no closer to a solution for Sandy Hook/Ft. Hancock than it is today. All the while buildings continue to decay, tenants leave, and park revenues continue to decline. Therefore, I believe the critical agenda item for the committee in its early stages is focus -- What are the two or three things that the committee can accomplish (that has not already been effectively done by someone else, or that cannot be delegated) to get the "Gridlock" over Ft. Hancock broken and the process moving in a positive direction.

Here are my ideas:

1) *A process for public "buy-in" is the single most important thing that the committee can accomplish.* The plan developed by Sandy Hook Partners (SHP) accomplished virtually every item listed under "Successful Outcomes" in your memorandum, and yet failed in part because of a concerted political campaign by a small group of moneyed and connected interests. Moreover, as I understand it, SHP was the 5th attempt over a 20+ year period to redevelop and solve the Ft. Hancock problem. *Merely repeating this exercise is a recipe for failure.* There are essentially two options for Sandy Hook: 1) redevelop Ft. Hancock into a mixed-use public private facility using existing structures, or 2) do nothing and allow the buildings to decay over a multi decade period. (There is perhaps a third option which is to bulldoze the existing structures to take the site back to nature more rapidly, but I am assuming this is off the table because of Ft. Hancock's designation as a national historic site). I don't think anyone wants to turn Ft. Hancock into a shopping mall. The choice between option 1 and 2 needs to be made at the outset by the public *in a democratic process*, and not by moneyed special interest groups, or small committees such as ourselves. We should consider a public referendum to put these issues to rest, and then the committee can get on with the process of facilitating whichever objective is chosen in a much less contentious atmosphere.

2) *National Park Service attitude toward Sandy Hook should be clarified.* Without 100% commitment by the NPS, this FAC is a waste of everyone's time. Getting Sandy Hook

out of Gateway, and having it report directly to the NPS would be a tangible step in demonstrating the NPS' commitment to Sandy Hook/Ft. Hancock, and would simplify implementation of any committee recommendations.

3) *The committee should build on what has already been done.* The committee should not attempt to come up with a development plan for Sandy Hook. It is beyond the expertise and organizational competence of this committee to do so. *There are several reasons why the time may be right to accomplish option 1 above, building on the work already done by SHP:*

a) Opposition to SHP was defeated in every court case all the way through the NJ Supreme Court, so there are no more legal obstacles to accomplishing what was originally envisioned by them.

b) Hurricane Sandy has created a favorable political environment for rehabilitation of the entire coastline. Ft. Hancock may be able to capitalize on this momentum if we move quickly.

c) The one individual most responsible for opposition to redevelopment plans at Sandy Hook is no longer a factor.

d) An important reason for the inability of SHP to obtain financing, after having survived all of its legal challenges, was the financial crisis of 2008 which caused funding for all projects to dry up. As banks are starting to lend again, the financing environment for developers, especially for projects like this one, should be much improved.

4) *If there is to be a public/private partnership, there should be a master developer to ensure consistency of the outcomes and process.*

5) *Tax credits are an important part of any Return-on-Investment (ROI) calculation by a private investor.* As in the case of NPS commitment to Sandy Hook and the FAC, availability of tax credits should be established at the outset before bringing in any private investors, or even initiating a discussion on a private partnership.

6) *Given the large numbers of universities in the NY metropolitan area, one or more universities would be ideal tenants for Ft. Hancock.*

In summary, the easiest path to accomplishing all of the goals, ideals and themes laid out for this committee may be to rejuvenate the plans of SHP, with different players, and with revitalized efforts to obtain public "buy-in", such as a democratic choice by the people of Monmouth County in a referendum on the two options outlined above. Once that choice has been made, the NPS should be a supportive and an active participant in all of these processes.

I request that my input be read at the critical issues secession on Thursday morning, and copies of this email be given to committee members. Thanks in advance for your efforts,

Bill

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