

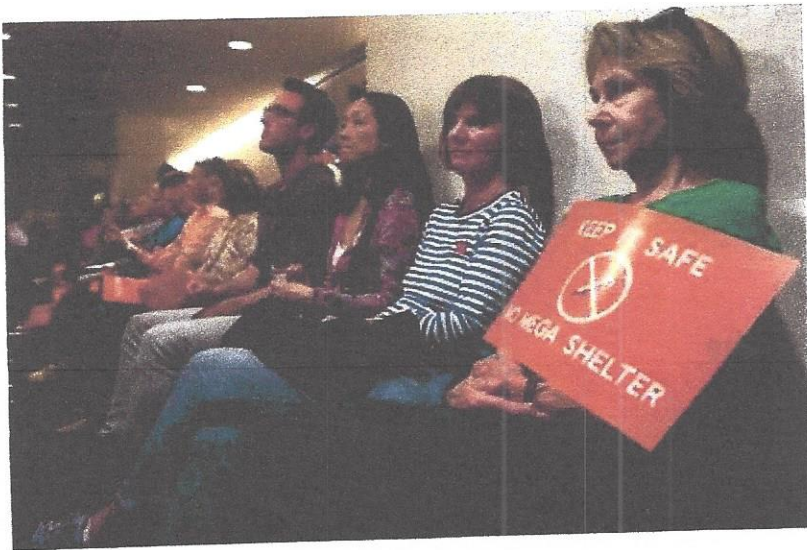


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waterfront homeless shelter violates public trust

By Dane Ince

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Concerned neighborhood residents attending a Port Commission meeting about a homeless Navigation Center to be built on the Embarcadero.

Neighborhood residents objected to a homeless shelter on San Francisco's Embarcadero because they expected elected leaders to abide by the law, regulations and a public process. That the Board of Supervisors approved the Navigation Center anyway last month is a blow to responsible civic government.

This was not an example of the supervisors' courageous determination to address the mental health, drug abuse and homelessness

issues facing us. It was a careless affront to land-use law, public input and the transparency that democracy and justice demand.

Neighborhood residents who opposed the center, including parents, senior citizens, business owners and nonprofits, were wrongly and unfairly labeled “NIMBYs,” the acronym for “not in my backyard.” In fact, while we recognize the seriousness of the homeless problem and the good faith of all those looking for solutions, we strongly oppose the placement of the Navigation Center on the Embarcadero because it is the gateway to the city — its front yard.

Residents have generously supported homeless services facilities in our neighborhood. We are proud to support the Delancey Street Foundation, for example, a leading residential self-help organization for the formerly homeless, drug-addicted and incarcerated.



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More than 10,000 people live within three

blocks of the proposed project. Many of us are concerned about the consequences of another shelter, including public alcohol and drug consumption, public urination and defecation, crime and police activity, and the possibility of more homeless encampments.

Through public-records requests, we received previously undisclosed documents that call into question the claims officials have been making about this unprecedented 200-bed mega-shelter. One city email shows that in March, while officials were telling the public that navigation centers are assets to their neighborhoods, city Homelessness and Supportive Housing Director Jeff Kositsky was “getting a great deal of complaints about tents” around the Division Circle Navigation Center in the Mission and admitted that the city “needs to do a better job of complying with our good neighbor policy in the area.”

The city has also disclosed hundreds of “critical incident reports” generated by existing Navigation Centers over the last six months. They reveal deaths, overdoses and regular calls for emergency services. Based on the rate of calls to existing facilities, we estimate that a Navigation Center on the scale of the one proposed for the Embarcadero could be expected to generate more than a call a day. How would that affect traffic and emergency services for current

residents?

The state granted San Francisco the Embarcadero property in trust starting in 1968 for particular uses. Neighborhood residents believe the city has not made the specific findings or secured the state approval required under the terms of the transfer to use the property for this purpose.

There is another equally important issue of trust at stake: the public's trust in the city government. This trust is based on the belief that the government and its representatives will follow the law, comply with regulations and be accountable to the same rules as citizens.

The mayor, the Port Commission and the Board of Supervisors have violated the public trust in both these senses, leaving the residents no option but to go to court.

Dane Ince is a member of the board of Safe Embarcadero for All, a group of residents, businesses and nonprofits opposed to a planned homeless Navigation Center on the Embarcadero.

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