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Subject: Increased User Fees at Jerry Garcia Amphitheater
To: recpark.commission@sfgov.org, Phil.Ginsburg@sfgov.org, Alfredo.Pedroza@sfgov.org, "Mike Farrah" <mike.farrah@sfgov.org>
Cc: "John Avalos" <John.Avalos@sfgov.org>, council@sfnpc.org
Date: Thursday, July 30, 2009, 8:40 AM

Good morning. I am writing on behalf of the Excelsior District Improvement Association (EDIA) concerning the imposition of increased fees at the Jerry Garcia Amphitheater in John McLaren park. At our June meeting, EDIA passed a resolution supporting a full fee waiver for all events sponsored by non-profit community based organizations that charge no admission fee and are open to the public, which are presented at the amphitheater. This resolution was passed when it came to our attention that the Recreation and Park Department was imposing a substantial increase in the charges required to be paid for the use of the amphitheater by an Excelsior businessman who wished to sponsor a free music event at that venue. As a result of that increase, the sponsor elected not to present the event.

The members of EDIA are not unaware of the severe budgetary crisis the City is currently experiencing. However, we are also acutely aware of the almost wholesale relinquishment by the City of any commitment to foster an active public life in our District. We have no community center, senior center, one of our (two) park clubhouses has been virtually abandoned for months and alternate public spaces where they exist are committed to specific purposes and uses and are generally unavailable or available at best for a fee which makes them prohibitively expensive for most community activities. This, in a district that has a higher percentage of children than almost any other in the city and many low income residents.

Jerry Garcia amphitheater could potentially play an important and much needed role as a venue for music, theater and other cultural events in our neighborhood and other nearby ones as well and somewhat alleviate our lack of other resources. However, it would appear that by mechanically raising fees for use of the facility, the City will not generate any substantial income but will likely succeed in largely eliminating the already modest utilization of the amphitheater as a meaningful public resource. Where is the policy analysis, what is the cost saving vs. public detriment that the increase in fees will cause? Where is, at least, the attempt to find a more palatable solution for a neighborhood which by most accounts is already woefully under served but for which our much vaunted civic imagination seems absent and unconcerned? The amphitheater has been built and renovated in the not too distant past. Having expended substantial capital for these improvements, it appears to us a somewhat false and misguided economy to increase fees to a level where few can afford to utilize this resource and it sits as a forlorn relic of unrealized dreams. We therefore urge you to reconsider the fee policy at the amphitheater and support those policies which will foster maximum use of that facility for the public good, including a no or greatly reduced fee policy for demonstrable public uses.

EDIA

by Robert Katz
Member, Board of Directors