

Chapter 3
DEVELOPMENT OF THE PORT OF SAN FRANCISCO:
THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PORT COMMISSION

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Introduction

The gold rush of 1849 brought worldwide attention to the port of San Francisco. The existence of the unique natural harbor of the San Francisco Bay, augmented by the facilities of the port, was an important factor in the early growth of the State of California and the development of the West (Port Commission of the City & County of San Francisco, 1984). With the growing economic importance of the Pacific coast and the increasing trade with the Far East prior to the First World War, a program of intensive development put the Port of San Francisco in a position as one of the leading shipping centers in the world (PCCCSF, 1984). However, following the Second World War, the port was surpassed in volume, variety and value of cargo by such harbor areas as the Port of Los Angeles and the Port of Oakland, which had available new and competitive shipping facilities to accommodate innovative trends in cargo handling (PCCCSF, 1984). To help maintain the port during this period of stagnation, the high levels of revenues needed were provided by the non-maritime use of port property such as those at Pier 39 and Fisherman's Wharf (PCCCSF, 1984).

The Port of San Francisco extends 7.5 miles along the western shore of the Bay from Aquatic Park in the north to the San Francisco container terminal in the south (see Figure 1). In 1968, the state transferred ownership of the port to the City and County of San Francisco (PCCCSF, 1984). As part of the transfer agreement, the Port Commission of the City and County of San Francisco (Port Commission) took over the administrative duties of the state-established San Francisco Port Authority (PCCCSF, 1984). These duties include the enforcement of the following three objectives guiding the usage of port property (Port of SF, 1979). Firstly, the Port Commission must maintain maritime activities, such as fisheries and ship repair, at the port. Secondly, it must provide a continuous system of public access, open space and water-oriented recreational activities along the port. Finally, the Port Commission may authorize commercial uses on portions of the port declared surplus to generate revenue for maritime functions and maintenance.

The Port of San Francisco encompasses commercially valuable property. At present, some of the piers along the port are "inactive": they are no longer used for their original maritime purposes or are serving interim functions. Close to both the city's financial district and major freeways, the port

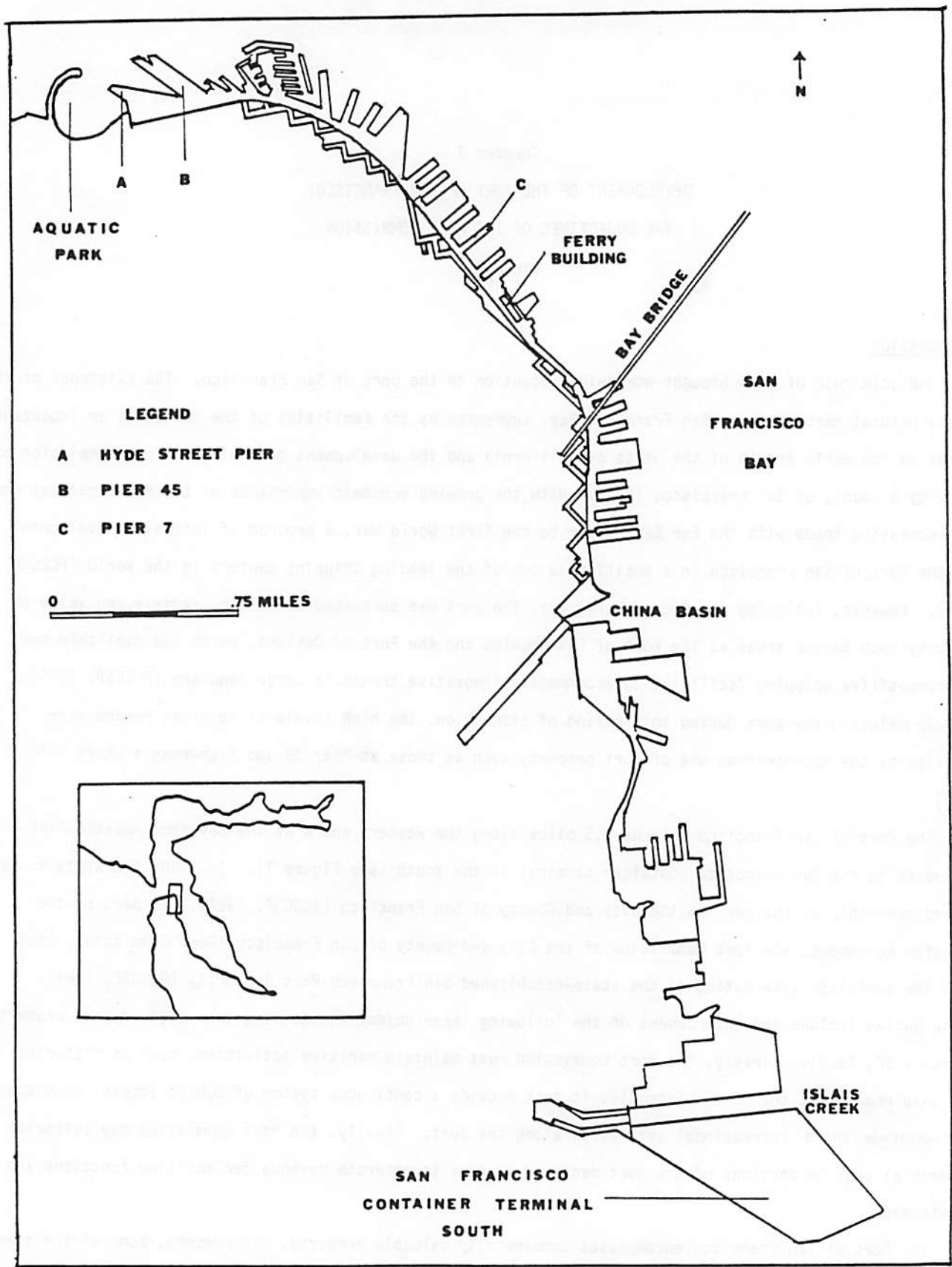


Figure 1: Port of San Francisco
 Source: Port Commission of the City & County of San Francisco, 1984

property also provides a spectacular view of the Bay. Thus, it offers a unique combination of convenience and aesthetic value. This combination attracts developers who would like to capitalize on the port property.

Although many development proposals for the port are offered by developers, the Port Commission can adopt only plans which enhance the port's function as a maritime center. This report seeks to show how the Port Commission fulfills its commitment to the objectives outlined above. If, in fact, the Port Commission's intentions are consistent with its stated objectives, the plans and proposals for the development of the port will clearly exemplify those objectives.

Past Studies

Most of the proposals and guidelines for the development plans evaluated in this paper were supplied by various official reports of the Port Commission. The general plans for the northernmost portion of the port were outlined in Port of San Francisco (1981). Port of San Francisco (1979) provided an overview of the types of plans in store for the area encompassed by Pier 7 and the China Basin--the Northeastern Waterfront. Port of San Francisco (1983) presents the proposed design and land use program for Pier 7. The historical background of the port and of the Port Commission was furnished by PCCCSF (1984) and Rossi (1985).

Methodology

Although the Port Commission is the principal agency managing development, there are other agencies which also help limit the kinds of development programs authorized for port property. Each has its own policies and each seeks to ensure the policies are followed. How these agencies interact to guide the planning and the development of the Port of San Francisco is discussed in the next section.

Three current development plans, each based on one of the objectives of the Port Commission (see Introduction) are then presented. Technical terms used in these objectives are defined and the stated goals of the proposals are examined. The conclusion will assess the plans' potential to implement the Port Commission's objectives successfully.

Port Planning Process

The overall planning process for port development involves several different agencies. Recommendations for land usage relating to maritime purposes are suggested by Port Commission-appointed committees (Port of SF, 1981). The Citizens Advisory Committee proposes land use programs appropriate for areas designated for commercial purposes (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). If these recommendations are consistent with the policies of the various agencies with jurisdiction over port lands and with the objectives of the Port Commission, they will be approved by the three main authorizing agencies: the Port Commission, the city Planning Department and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission. Based on these recommendations,

the city Planning Department designs the initial development plans (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). These plans must also conform to the city's Comprehensive Plan. The Port Commission may then choose to act on the Planning Department's initial plans or to recommend other land use plans. These plans must accommodate all of the agencies' land use policies in order to gain the final authorization from the three agencies. The Port Commission, the city Planning Department and BCDC must each give their approval to the plans in order for development to proceed. Each of the governing agencies have different responsibilities. In conjunction with their objectives, the Port Commission must also follow land use policies which address the provision of both maritime and non-maritime uses. The term maritime includes "maritime commerce, fisheries, water-dependent uses and recreation" (Rossi, 1985). The maritime uses have priority over all other purposes served by the port. Non-maritime uses encompass commercial, retail and office space (PCCCSF, 1984). These uses are permitted only when sections of port land are declared surplus to maritime uses by the Port Commission (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). Such lands, typically, are no longer serving their original maritime functions and have either been left vacant or devoted to temporary uses.

Aside from designing development plans, the city Planning Department also governs zoning, heights of buildings and building permits (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). The zoning of port property is controlled by the Planning Code of the city which designates all uses other than maritime as "conditional" for the area north of the Ferry Building (Port of SF, 1979). This conditional stipulation requires that those non-maritime uses that are permitted be removed, upon the authorization of the Port Commission, when port-related functions are in need of a location (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). Maximum building heights for the area included in Piers 45 through 9 is 40 feet, while new structures between Pier 9 and the Bay Bridge are limited to 84 feet (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). These constraints of the Planning Department aid the Port Commission in ensuring priority to maritime, port-related functions over non-maritime usage.

The Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) was formed in 1965 to protect the Bay from being filled and to provide public access and water-dependent uses on the edges of the Bay (Rossi, 1985). Water-dependent uses authorized by BCDC include maritime, commercial/recreation, marina and open space uses (Port of SF, 1979). BCDC also controls port land extending 100 feet upslope from the original San Francisco shoreline--the "seawall" (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). Therefore, any development plans concerning this land must also get approval from BCDC. BCDC allows the removal of the filled portion of port land for development, but requires that 50 percent of the removed area be devoted to public recreation, open space and public access to the Bay (Port of SF, 1979). The constraints of BCDC ensure that purely commercial development on the port is discouraged in favor of port-related or public-related activities.

Plans and Proposals

Maritime Uses: The Port Commission's objective of continuing as a major maritime center defines the primary purpose of the port. How the maritime uses of commerce, fisheries, water-dependent uses and recreation are implemented in the land use proposals depends on the details of individual areas (Rossi, 1985).

The proposal for a "breakwater" extending from the original Hyde Street Pier (see Figure 1, Site A) is based on this first objective (Port of SF, 1981). The breakwater is a physical barrier which acts to stop or impede the strong and potentially damaging oceanic wave-force known as the westerly surge. The impact of the westerly surge is greatest at the northern end of the port at the location of the Hyde Street Pier. The new pier/breakwater will provide berthing areas along its east side to accommodate and to protect fishing vessels, which would otherwise be moored elsewhere (Port of SF, 1981). With this addition of new facilities to moor fishing vessels, the port's functions are enhanced.

The planning for and construction of the breakwater falls under the responsibility of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Port of SF, 1981; Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). Although the projected date of completion is November 1986, only one fourth of the breakwater, at present (March 1986), stands completed (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). This pier/breakwater will contain not only off-loading and fish-handling facilities relocated from Pier 45, it will also create a new fishing basin between the Hyde Street Pier and Pier 45 (Port of SF, 1981). The west side will provide a safe place for mooring historic ships that will be open to the public (Port of SF, 1981). Funds for the construction of the breakwater come from Pier 45 revenues as well as other port funds and available federal and state grants (Port of SF, 1981).

Non-Maritime Uses: The other two objectives of the Port Commission examined here deal with non-maritime land use. These objectives may be implemented only on lands declared surplus to maritime uses by the Port Commission (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986).

The first of these two objectives is for the provision of public access, open space and water-oriented recreational uses on port property. The term "public access" refers to public walkways along the port's edge for recreational purposes such as jogging, walking, and viewing the Bay (Port of SF, 1979). "Open space" encompasses a variety of the aesthetic values of port property such as enhancement and restoration of the port's historical character and provision of views of the Bay (Port of SF, 1979). Included in the category of water-oriented recreational uses is the provision of recreational boating facilities and public fishing areas. This objective does not allow commercial development unrelated to public recreational purposes.

Pier 7 (see Figure 1, Site C) at present serves as a parking area (San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, 1983). However, due to its length and its situation relative to the tides and currents of the Bay, Pier 7 has been highly valued for recreational fishing (SFRPD, 1983). For these reasons, the Northeastern Waterfront Survey recommended that Pier 7 be reconstructed for open space and recreational purposes (SFRPD, 1983). This recommendation was later adopted in 1979 by BCDC in their Total Design Plan

(SFRPD, 1983). The Total Design Plan specifies that Pier 7 be rebuilt as a public fishing pier and provide public access and open space. The completed pier will allow people to walk along its length or to sit on benches to view the Bay.

The final objective examined here allows for a limited amount of commercial development, as a source of revenue for port operations. Examples of the Port Commission's commercial ventures are Pier 39's shopping mall and Fisherman's Wharf's shops and restaurants. The port operations referred to in the objective include the maintenance of ship repair facilities, cargo receiving areas, office buildings, and public access areas. The funding for these operating expenses are partially derived from the rents of docks, berths and storage of cargo (Rossi, 1985). The remaining amount of needed revenue must come from commercial uses on port property; city, state and federal agencies do not provide grants for port activities (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986).

With this objective as its main concern, the Citizens Advisory Committee recommended Pier 45 as the site for a hotel (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986; see Figure 1, Site B). Because of its location on Fisherman's Wharf, a known tourist spot, a hotel on Pier 45 would surely attract out-of-state people as well as Bay Area residents. It is also near some of San Francisco's other major attractions such as Ghirardelli Square and Chinatown. Because of these assets, a hotel on Pier 45 would have the potential of generating much revenue for the port. In March 1986, a competitive bidding process begins with the selection of promising developers and later, submittance of proposals by these developers (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986).

Conclusion

Although the plans and proposals seem to be made with the port's best interests in mind, they may not necessarily fulfill their intended purposes. The Hyde Street Pier/breakwater will certainly create berthing areas for fishing vessels that would normally be moored in Sausalito (Rossi, pers. comm., 1986). As an added asset, some revenue will be supplied by the pier/breakwater. The Hyde Street Pier/breakwater clearly promises to fulfill the objective to maintain maritime operations at the port.

Pier 7 is proposed to serve as a public fishing pier. In addition it will also provide the space for activities such as jogging, walking and viewing the Bay. Since other port operations will pay for Pier 7's maintenance, the question of whether the public fishing pier is the best option available will be shown by the extent of its use.

Lastly, Pier 45 has uncertain prospects. Because of its location of Fisherman's Wharf, the hotel that will be constructed on Pier 45 must compete with the other hotels in the vicinity. Although the hotel on Pier 45 will have the added attraction of providing a Bay view, this asset may not guarantee that a large amount of revenue will be derived. Options that could ensure a sizeable sum of revenue are few. Extensive surveys are needed to discover the best use for Pier 45.

These latest development projects do indeed exemplify the Port Commission's commitment to maintaining the port as a maritime center: their most successful projects come from the maritime uses of the port. However the Port Commission still faces the difficult challenge of designing profitable new land use projects such as Pier 39. Recommendations from advisory committees are insufficient to guarantee successful and profitable commercial ventures. Since the difficulty of such a task lies in knowing the wants and the needs of the people who will be coming to the port, extensive surveys and studies of such people are required before planning begins.

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