

Fort Hancock 21st Century Federal Committee¹ Annual Progress Report

It has been more than two years since the first meeting of the National Park Service, Fort Hancock 21st Century Federal Advisory Committee. Over that period the Committee has worked with Gateway staff to meet its charter to help guide "...the development of a reuse plan and on matters relating to future uses of the Fort Hancock Historic District of Gateway National Recreation Area." This community-wide process has produced an extraordinary opportunity for the public to lease buildings at Fort Hancock's historic post and launch development of a vibrant new community. It is noteworthy that these results have been accomplished in the face of significant disruption caused by Hurricane Sandy.

The Committee oversaw a comprehensive effort that produced a formal Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) designed to illuminate adaptive reuse opportunities that the public desired at the park. In developing this RFEI, NPS and the Committee have clarified and promulgated the premises' historic context, setting forth recommendations regarding the Sandy Hook peninsula's 1982 designation as the Fort Hancock & Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark (NHL). This work has resulted in recommendations and changes to current documents, websites, and signage that have helped NPS reshape understanding of Fort Hancock's historic standing.

The RFEI process was critical to informing the Committee and the park about adaptive reuse of its historic structures. More than 40 formal responses were received in response to this RFEI, as were numerous informal comments about how the Fort's resources could be used, preserved, and protected.

Results from the RFEI and extensive community outreach initiatives revealed high levels of interest in uses that would support educational and nonprofit organizations, short-stay lodging opportunities, and individual residences. These efforts also revealed the public's strong support for uses that would contribute to building an active and accessible community while simultaneously preserving the cultural, recreational, environmental, ecological, and economic vitality of all of Sandy Hook.

The successful community outreach effort and RFEI process led NPS toward approval and publication of a formal Request for Proposals (RFP – see <http://www.nps.gov/gate/parkmgmt/fort-rfp-2015.htm>) The RFP was initiated as a pilot effort offering leases for six buildings. Based on information received during the RFEI process, those six buildings include two designated for use by nonprofit

¹ See <http://www.forthancock21stcentury.org> for complete details on Committee activities, structure and work products

organizations, two for use as bed and breakfasts, and two for individual residences.

In addition, the Park has indicated that it is seeking internal NPS resources for rehabilitation of at least one structure. The Committee is strongly supportive of this internal effort as the need for and appearance generated by direct NPS investment is seen as foundational to successful partnering with private investors who are committed to rehabilitation and reuse of historic structures.

The Committee allocated significant time to learning about infrastructure and property management issues at Sandy Hook that would impact successful development of the new community. The Committee appreciates and supports the efforts, both underway and planned, that are intended to ensure the availability of robust electrical, water, sewer and telecommunications services that are essential not only to the Fort Hancock historic post, and its successful redevelopment, but also in support of all visitor experiences throughout the park.

The Committee also solicited information from experts about additional factors affecting the leasing process, including: financial incentives for preservation of historic structures; historic preservation construction standards; property valuation; insurance requirements; community governance; taxation; common area maintenance; and related matters. The Committee looks forward to creating opportunities for continuation of these conversations and assisting the park in offering appropriate background information to potential lessees.

Additional perspective about the challenges associated with the Committee's work, and its most probable avenues toward success, was gained through presentations and reports about other NPS sites that have undergone adaptive reuse efforts. Sites discussed included Fort Baker (Cavallo Point) at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area; The Presidio in San Francisco; NY Governors Island; Virginia's Fort Monroe; and Massachusetts Lowell National Historical Park.

Valuable context for this work was also provided by the Park's completion and publication of a General Management Plan for the Gateway National Recreation Area ("GATE"). This notable accomplishment highlights the synergy among all GATE units and outlines the critical role assigned to the Fort Hancock historic post and the Sandy Hook peninsula as regional and National models for adaptive reuse.

Efforts were also made to facilitate input from and cooperation with those organizations that already have a presence at Sandy Hook and thus form the nucleus of the new community envisioned by the Committee. These organizations include: New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Rutgers University; the Sandy Hook Foundation; the Sandy Hook Child Care Center; the Marine Academy of Science and Technology; Clean Ocean Action; the American Littoral Society; the Army

Ground Forces Association; and the New York 56 Nike Volunteers. The COMMITTEE recognizes and supports the need for prospective uses at Fort Hancock to compliment and otherwise enhance the existing operational facilities.

In consequence of its activities to date, the Committee has operated beyond the appointment terms of approximately half the original Committee members. Recognizing that the goals set forth by charter have been pursued, but as yet not met, the Committee has redoubled its efforts by seeking additional and replacement members. This process is nearing completion as the Committee proceeds into its third year of service.

Respectfully submitted:

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