

## Merging Economic Reality with Park Stewardship: Learning from the Presidio and Other Models (Session Overview)

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Note: this narrative is connected to a slide presentation available on the George Wright Society website (see Reynolds at [www.georgewright.org/gws2015\\_powerpoints](http://www.georgewright.org/gws2015_powerpoints)) which also includes slides for presentations by Amy Meyer, Cheryl Widell, Craig Middleton, and Katherine Arrow (Meyer 2016; Widell 2016; Middleton 2016; Arrow 2016).

### Introduction

THIS PAPER AND THE FOUR OTHERS THAT FOLLOW (Meyer 2016; Widell 2016; Middleton 2016; Arrow 2016) grew out of Rolf Diamant's sixth "Letter from Woodstock," published in *The George Wright Forum* in 2013. Rolf began the letter saying:

A few years ago, I suggested that US national parks were facing a paradoxical future. This was, I said, an era of unprecedented changes and challenges but also, in many ways, a golden age for the National Park Service...as it was an organization becoming more sophisticated, focused, and better trained than it has ever been in the past. I thought we should recognize that the park system was still growing in many positive directions. Park superintendents, overall, were becoming more emotionally intelligent and adept at dealing with complexity... Partners were increasingly more nimble and capable and pockets of useful experimentation and innovation were able to flourish. In my 6th *Letter from Woodstock* I take a closer look at one of those nodes of useful experimentation and innovation, the Presidio of San Francisco. (Diamant 2013, 225)

Rolf ended the article this way:

Given the magnitude and breadth of this remarkable 15-year transition from 'post to park,' I think it is time to give the Presidio greater recognition as a valuable part of our national park system. A great urban national park laboratory has been created...The Presidio is an opportunity to experiment with new approaches to partnership, community-building and civic stewardship. We should take advantage of all that can be learned. It is time to pay more attention. (Diamant 2013, 229)

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**Citation:** Weber, Samantha, ed. 2016. *Engagement, Education, and Expectations—The Future of Parks and Protected Areas: Proceedings of the 2015 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites*.

Hancock, Michigan: George Wright Society.

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Today, we are paying attention to one facet of what has made the presidio work, and what is a growing movement to make other parks and protected areas work in a future very different than the past in which they came to be. We are paying attention to the opportunity to steward natural and cultural resources with excellence, using innovative applications of public and private resources, to benefit place and synergy in park settings.

Our examples range from the very large to the very small. They concentrate primarily on using leasing authorities, but we recognize that other instruments to use building or spaces exist, and are a part of the useful mix. We also recognize that doing so is not always easy. Our goal is, at the very least, to get you to think positively about the idea, though we hope you will become excited about the potential.

### **An array of examples and potentials**

My purpose is to show you several examples of kinds of uses that are being achieved by the NPS and others. My hope is to inspire you regarding the possibilities, and encourage you to think positively and creatively when you go back to work. Preservation, interpretation, visitor enjoyment and smart-focused money generation are not incompatible.

Fort Hancock is a national historic landmark district at Sandy Hook, in Gateway National Recreation Area, New Jersey. The NPS is working to lease about 35 buildings in the district in order to preserve them, to enhance visitor enjoyment of the entire district, and to become a part of the local communities.

Following feedback from responses to a request for expressions of interest, the NPS created a “community map.” The purpose was to provide guidance in achieving a vibrant working community including residential, office, commercial, lodging and educational uses. There is a variety of building types at Fort Hancock, including officer residences and barracks buildings. The park is currently advertising to lease six buildings.

The Quincy Mine Headquarters building at Keewenaw National Historical Park, Calumet, Michigan, currently has three occupants, including the George Wright Society. Leases keep the building occupied and used, and rents cover utilities and light maintenance. Calumet is not in an affluent rental market. Yet, by making the building available one small step at a time, the park is not only preserving this national register building, it is providing employment, and making itself a working part of the community, in addition to being a nationally significant place to visit. The park is expecting additional money to further rehabilitate the building in 2016, and will then be able to lease more of it. There are additional historic buildings in the park, and step by step success here is expected to lead to further opportunity in the future.

The Cape Cod vacation rentals in Massachusetts consist of five beach houses, most with waterfront views. Four are located in Wellfleet, Cape Cod, the fifth is in Eastham. They are rented to the public, with stays as short as one night.

El Presidio de Santa Barbara State Historic Park, in Santa Barbara, California, was established by the California legislature. It is managed through an operating agreement between the California State Parks and the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation. The agreement gives the trust the authority for development, improvement, restoration, care, maintenance and control of the Presidio. The park superintendent is responsible for administration of the agreement. Income is used to carry out the purposes of the agreement, and none of it goes to the state general funds. The Presidio is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Crystal Cove Historic Cottages, at Crystal Cove State Beach, California, is a National Register property and a California state park. There are 46 historic cottages. It is operated through a concessions agreement by a private operator. The operator rehabilitates the buildings, then manages the rental of them to the public. The cottages were in terrible condition before rehabilitation. The

cafe and rehabilitated cottages are highly popular with the public. Each year, cottages are generally booked for the year starting on the first day they are open for reservations.

Fort Monroe, Virginia, is a military base that is no longer needed for military purposes. It is, in its entirety, a national historic landmark district. Most of the developed portion of the base is administered by the Fort Monroe Authority (FMA), created by the Commonwealth of Virginia. A part of the historic star fort and the undeveloped area on the north end of the base comprise Fort Monroe National Monument.

The FMA owns 176 homes, of which 156 are leased. It has 1.15 million square feet of commercial space, 236,000 of which are leased. When the Army transfer is complete, 57 more buildings (400,000 sq ft) will be added to the FMA's inventory. The historic officer homes at Fort Monroe are beautiful places. Unlike at the Presidio of San Francisco, the Commonwealth of Virginia did not establish an initial multi-year appropriation to rehabilitate utilities and prepare enough buildings for full potential leasing income to put the FMA on a sound financial footing. Though struggling, the FMA is successfully heading toward being a financially self-sufficient operation.

The Northeast Region of the NPS has an active regional business office which helps parks identify buildings that may be leased or used in other ways to preserve them and generate income to manage the park. Two such examples are the Tudor-like Vanderbilt Mansion Coach House (currently being used for park maintenance activities) which could be used as a restaurant, hotel or housing facility, and the Philander Chase Knox house at Valley Forge, which could be rented for housing some months of the year, or all or in part for events that do not conflict with existing park uses.

National parks and the NPS Northeast Regional Office are actively surveying buildings around the region that are currently underutilized. One example is the 3,000 square foot Weir Farm House, which is currently used for storage for Weir Farm House National Historic Site.

George Washington was first sworn in as president at what is now Federal Hall National Memorial, in New York City. The memorial's rotunda is now seeing extra duty as a special event space on evenings and weekends, when the site is closed to the public.

The intent of my paper, combined with papers by Amy Meyer, Cheryl Widell, Craig Middleton, and Katherine Arrow (this volume), has been to show you a broad array of examples and to have you begin to think about how they might apply to your own situation. As Rolf said, "It is time to pay more attention." No one is advocating giving up basic ideals of conservation, preservation and visitor enjoyment. We are, though, advocating broadening our perspective in how we make the next 100 years of national parks as successful in all three ideals (conservation, preservation and visitor experience) as it has been in the last 100.

## References

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