

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
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*from Meeting Minutes*

**SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS**

**10. Approve Proceeding with Phase One of Environmental Studies and Preliminary Design Work Related to Development of a Physical Suicide Deterrent System on the Golden Gate Bridge**

**a. Staff Presentation**

Celia Kupersmith stated that staff would present the recommendation to the Board for approval to proceed with Phase One of the environmental studies and preliminary design work related to development of a Physical Suicide Deterrent System on the Golden Gate Bridge and that public comment would follow the presentation. She noted that the District has appropriated funds to complete the first phase of the project, which will focus on wind stability testing and analysis. She stated that the knowledge to be gained from wind studies will remain useful regardless of the length of time it may take to acquire all the funding for a suicide deterrent project. Ms. Kupersmith also stated that staff will ensure that the wind studies result in a specific and useful product that maintains the safety of the Bridge structure and that will achieve a more focused environmental evaluation. She further noted that it will take approximately four months for the procurement process and six months for the completion of Phase One work. A copy of the proposed the Resolution, *Approve Proceeding with Phase One of Environmental Studies and Preliminary Design Work Related to Development of a Physical Suicide Deterrent System on the Golden Gate Bridge*, is attached.

In addition, Denis Mulligan stated that an important issue to consider is that long span structures are subject to dynamic and potentially dramatic responses to wind. He also stated that the District will engage experts who have experience with similar structures to provide a detailed analysis for generic designs that will withstand wind at certain speeds, both with and without the inclusion of the moveable median barrier. The design evaluation will include three general concepts: 1) extension to existing railings; 2) new replacement railings; and, 3) nets. Mr. Mulligan stated that staff will review all designs and develop a final report that will provide recommendations with respect to generic forms that are satisfactory from a wind perspective. Mr. Mulligan added that it is prudent to complete the wind analysis as an early course of action to ensure which design concepts will and will not work.

**b. Public Comment**

The following members of the public expressed their support to construct a physical suicide deterrent system on the Golden Gate Bridge, including their support to expedite the studies for such a system:

1. Dr. Mel Blaustein, Medical Director of Psychiatry at St. Francis Memorial Hospital and Chairman of the Psychiatric Foundation of Northern California (Foundation). At the meeting, Dr. Blaustein presented the District with a check in the amount of \$18,500 from the Foundation as a result of its fundraising efforts;

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2. Robert M. Guernsey, Citizens for a Safe Golden Gate Bridge;
3. John Kevin Hines, Psychiatric Foundation of Northern California (Golden Gate Bridge suicide survivor);
4. Mary Teeter Zabloutny, mother of suicide victim Jonathan Zabloutny;
5. Sarah Cherney, partner of suicide victim. At the meeting, Ms. Cherney stated that filmmaker Eric Steel will be releasing his film that depicts suicides from the Golden Gate Bridge;
6. Esther Marks, a San Francisco resident;
7. Anne Fleming, a San Francisco resident;
8. Mike Oxford, father of a suicide victim; and,
9. Eve Meyer, Executive Director of San Francisco Suicide Prevention, Inc.

The following individual described a research project currently underway by a group of civil engineering students at the University of California, Berkeley, regarding a life cycle cost analysis of a physical suicide deterrent system on the Golden Gate Bridge:

1. James Lew, University of California, Berkeley student

The following individual expressed his concerns regarding the expenditure of funds to install a suicide deterrent on the Golden Gate Bridge, citing his belief that this project is responsive to political pressure for certain groups and that many others in the healthcare industry would rather the funds be used for medicine and science to treat patients:

1. Dr. Clark Hinderleider, a Mill Valley resident.

c. **Discussion by the Board**

Discussion ensued, including the following salient points:

- Director Stroeh inquired as to whether staff will be looking at design concepts related to the suicide deterrent with respect to the work for the Seismic Retrofit project. In response, Mr. Mulligan stated that wind tunnel testing will be performed on a proposed aerodynamic modifications to the handrail on the west sidewalk and to the upper chord of the stiffening truss as part of Phase III of the Golden Gate Bridge Seismic Retrofit project, and that staff will evaluate the design concepts related to the suicide deterrent both with and without the retrofit modifications.
- Director Reilly inquired as to whether wind testing was performed in association with the installation of the Golden Gate Bridge Public Safety Railing. In response, Mr. Mulligan stated that wind analysis was performed because there was a concern that the railing may affect the structure. It was determined that the change to the structure effected by the Public Safety Railing was minimal and did not cause a negative impact.

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- Director Eddie suggested that the resolution be changed to reflect the new dollar amount and further suggested that a contract contingency fund be established for this project. In response, Ms. Kupersmith stated that the proposed Resolution will be revised to acknowledge the additional receipt of funds; however, the added money would not increase the scope of the first project nor should it increase the price of the work.
- Director Ammiano expressed his appreciation for the public's comments on this very sensitive issue and for their grass roots efforts to collect donations. He further stated that he is confident that the remaining funds will be raised to satisfy the 20% match.
- Director Murray made the following comments:
  - She expressed her support for proceeding with Phase One of the design work for the suicide deterrent and requested that staff begin the preparation of the next phase in order to be ready when the funding becomes available.
  - She expressed her concerns regarding the upcoming release of the film by Eric Steel, which depicts footage of people jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge, and requested that security patrols be increased as an interim measure for suicide prevention. In response, Ms. Kupersmith stated that the District will work with the California Highway Patrol to develop a plan and report back to the Board.
- Director Martini expressed his concerns regarding the treatment of people that suffer from mental illness and the role of the District in terms of the responsibility to those individuals, as well as to those individuals who use the Bridge appropriately. He reiterated that the District has ongoing budgetary constraints and stated that the District's focus should be on projects that provide a safe structure for the thousands of people who utilize the Bridge each day.
- Director Boro noted that the majority of comments he has received from his constituents thus far have not been in favor of a suicide deterrent on the Golden Gate Bridge. He stated that, in his opinion, while it is important to look at the feasibility of the suicide deterrent, the moveable median barrier has the priority, as it focuses on increasing the safety of Bridge users who are using the bridge responsibly and as it was intended to be used. In order to provide some perspective, he suggested that the public be made aware of the number of suicides in the nine greater Bay Area counties in the past four years compared with the number of suicides from the Golden Gate Bridge. He also stated that suicide is a big issue, and that the Bridge is not the sole cause of it.

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- Director Dufty stated that this issue has always been personally meaningful to him since he was acquainted with a person who committed suicide from the Golden Gate Bridge. He stated that he serves as a Board member of the San Francisco Community Mental Health Services, and that he welcomes any comments regarding this matter. He noted that Proposition 63, the State of California Mental Health Services Expansion and Funding tax, was passed in the November 2005 election, in which voters made an investment in the mental health system. Director Dufty also stated that it should be a priority for the District to install a suicide deterrent system which would balance the needs and interests of all the users of the Bridge.
- Director Stroeh stated that the issue was also personally meaningful to him because of a family member who committed suicide. He also stated that the project is scientifically interesting and that, in his opinion, the Seismic Retrofit project may benefit from the suicide deterrent project; however, the matter is not on the priority list for the District. He suggested that the District consider installing a retractable barrier or net that would be used only during mid-day and nighttime hours and that the sidewalks be closed during primary commute periods of the day.
- Director Reilly stated that she supports the proposed Resolution and that, in her opinion, erecting a suicide deterrent on the Bridge should be a high priority. She further stated that the District has a responsibility for the safety of every user of the Bridge.
- Director Shahum stated that she supports the proposed Resolution and recommends that the District not consider prohibiting current access on the sidewalks of the Bridge.
- Celia Kupersmith suggested that, in order to reflect the additional monies received from Dr. Mel Blaustein, Medical Director of Psychiatry at St. Francis Memorial Hospital and Chairman of the Psychiatric Foundation of Northern California, the proposed Resolution will be changed to include these new amounts. She stated that this change captures all the funding and keeps a better public record of the funding that has been made available, but does not change the scope of the project. The maker of the motion and the seconder of the motion agreed to this suggested change to the proposed Resolution under discussion.
- President Middlebrook stated that although she commends the fundraising efforts thus far, she is concerned that more money has not been raised in an entire year and that she would not support the proposed Resolution.

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**d. Action by the Board**

**Directors PAHRE/AMMIANO**

**Resolution No. 2006-020** approves proceeding with Phase One of environmental studies and preliminary design work related to the development of a Physical Suicide Deterrent System on the Golden Gate Bridge.

**Adopted**

**AYES (14):** Directors Ammiano, Cochran, Dufty, Eddie, Hernández, Kerns, Murray, Newhouse Segal, Pahre, Reilly, Shahum and Stroeh; Second Vice President Boro; First Vice President Moylan  
**NOES (2):** Director Martini; President Middlebrook  
**ABSENT (3):** Directors Brown, McGoldrick and Sandoval

**ADJOURNMENT**

11. All business having been concluded, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m., in the memory of Jan Iverson.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet S. Tarantino  
Secretary of the District

JST:PLW:plw

Attachment: (Resolution No. 2006-020, Approve Proceeding with Phase One of Environmental Studies and Preliminary Design Work Related to Development of a Physical Suicide Deterrent System on the Golden Gate Bridge)