



Municipal Pier crumbling, but no money to rebuild SF treasure

By Carl Nolte | June 4, 2016 | Updated: June 4, 2016 3:33pm



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Photo: The Chronicle

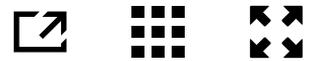


IMAGE 1 OF 4

John Macias of Concord fishes in the crumbling Municipal Pier. “I hope we don’t fall in,” he jokes.

San Francisco’s Municipal Pier, one of the scenic treasures of the city, is crumbling away. Everybody knows it. The pier that curves out into the bay from at the end of Van Ness Avenue and protects Aquatic Park has been falling apart for years.

And everybody knows the solution, too: Replace the old pier with a new one. There’s only one problem: money. There isn’t any.

“That’s what has everybody stumped,” said Kevin Hendricks, superintendent of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, which owns the pier.

The pier is a federal responsibility, and Hendricks is the responsible officer.

A 'budget buster'

The price tag to replace the pier was \$68 million seven years ago, the last time the Park Service got an estimate on the project. Sixty-eight million may not sound like so much these high-rolling days, but it is more money than the entire National Park Service construction budget for the whole country in normal years. As a sort of one-year-only birthday present for the Park Service's centennial, Congress nearly doubled the service's 2016 construction budget, to \$116.3 million.

But still, Hendricks calls fixing the Municipal Pier a "budget buster." Moving the project forward, he said, "remains elusive."





Photo: The Chronicle



John Macias of Concord casts out in one of the crumbling Municipal Pier's few areas open for fishing.

Hendricks offered an inspection tour of the Municipal Pier the other windy afternoon. It came with a small history lesson about how the pier was built as the first element of a new city park — an Aquatic Park — on the northern edge of San Francisco.

The city paid \$250,000 — more than twice the original estimate — to construct the pier between 1929 and 1933. It curves out from the foot of Van Ness Avenue like a long crescent more than 1,400 feet long. It has two purposes: to serve as a breakwater to protect little Black Point Cove and its sandy beach, and to be a public pier where people can stroll, fish or just enjoy life.

The San Francisco Municipal Recreation Pier was the first element of what became Aquatic Park. Later a bathhouse — “A Palace for the Public,” it was called — was built as a

Depression-era federal project. Still later, the bathhouse was turned into a maritime museum. A fleet of historic ships was berthed on the edge of the cove, and the whole thing became a maritime national park. Hendricks says 4million people — more than visit Yosemite — stroll through the park every year.

‘Nothing like it’

The Muni Pier, built of concrete and supported by 634 pilings, shelters it all. The pier also offers one of the best views in a city famous for its good looks. From the end of the pier, strollers can see the bay and its islands, the Golden Gate Bridge on the horizon and the city rising on its hills in the background. “There’s nothing like it,” Hendricks said.

“An incredible view,” said Sam Richardson, who was visiting from London and saw it for the first time last week.

“It’s really pretty,” said Mandy Cannon, a tourist from Utah, “but the pier is a mess.”



Photo: Michael Noble Jr., The Chronicle



John Macias of Concord takes in the view from the Municipal Pier.

That's true. The concrete is peeling away, exposing the rusting steel underneath. The whole west side of the pier is fenced off because it's unsafe. The pier was built to hold a load of 200 pounds per square inch, but now three-quarters of that strength has been lost, which means it can't hold big crowds. So it's closed on Fleet Week and the Fourth of July.

"It's not quite a ruin yet," Hendricks said. But it's close.

"Every day it gets worse," said Carol Walker, a volunteer for City Guides who leads tours of the pier. "They can't let it slip away, they just can't. It needs to be fixed."

Walker has started a petition on Change.org, asking for emergency funds to replace the pier. She hopes to put pressure for action on House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, and other officeholders.

"I'm very persistent," she said. "I won't go away."

For his part, Hendricks wants to engage what he calls "park partners" — the city of San Francisco, the state, private donors. He's been working on the problem, but has nothing concrete yet. He calls it "an intriguing challenge."

Pier could be closed

However, if nothing happens and the pier continues to deteriorate, Hendricks said, the Park Service may have to close it to the public.

That would be bad news for the people who use it.

Oliver Hamilton, who grew up in San

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Francisco, went away to college and was back in town last week. He spent a lot of time on the pier when he was younger, “you know, fishing for crabs and just hanging with friends,” he said.



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“There’s a pretty beautiful view,” he said. “It’s a very San Francisco place to go.”

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