

## Questions and Answers about the Fees at SAN FRANCISCO BOTANICAL GARDEN SOCIETY AT STRYBING ARBORETUM

*Why are there “nonresident” fees at Strybing Arboretum?*

The Society see this as a way to control who enters the garden and when. They regard the gardens as their private fiefdom and discussion of opening and closing times, access, use, and other important issues are not open for discussion: The Society decides! The local community is never engaged.

*What is the history of these fees?*

Two decades ago, the San Francisco Botanical Garden Society lobbied the Agnos administration and the Board of Supervisors for an entrance fee. Mayor Agnos made it clear that he would veto any fee, and that was that. Since that time, the Society has actively lobbied for a fee. In 2009, Davis and Associates was hired to lobby for a nonresident and resident fee. After a massive public outcry, these fees were dropped and a proposal for nonresident fees introduced. Both of these proposals were then dropped following public protest.

The Society has hired lobbyist Sam Lauter (for the sum of \$10,000/month). Since 2010, he has lobbied the Supervisors, bringing a trustee personally acquainted with the Supervisor in question in tow to his or her office. Although the rank-and-file have always been against the fees, Ginsburg made backroom deals with SEIU and 261 union bosses [Margo Reed, (415-848-3644) and Vince Courtney (415-810-4500)] to support the fees. Amazingly, SEIU did this against its own interests — as the low-wage ticket collectors who man the ticket booths set a precedent for the museums.

*How have the fees affected attendance?*

Many visitors turn back after seeing the \$7 charge; many locals have stopped coming altogether. Because the gates to the rear of the Hall of Flowers have been shut, visitors and workers at the exhibition halls are denied ready access. (Individuals associated with the San Francisco Botanical Garden Society are allowed to freely drive their vehicles through the gates and down to the current greenhouse).

*How has the Arboretum changed since the implementation of the fees?*

Hours have been cut. During March, the Arboretum opened at 10 and closed at 4! These hours are set without discussion. Two gates have been shut, a wall blocking another entrance to the Demonstration Gardens has been constructed and a garden within the the Demonstration Gardens has been destroyed and covered with gravel.

*What plans do the San Francisco Botanical Garden Society have for San Francisco Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum?*

First of all, as evidenced by new signage, they plan to eliminate the name of founder Helene Strybing. They are planning to create a new greenhouse at a cost of \$13 million. This will have a separate entrance and be sited near 19th Avenue. As it will be built on habitat of the endangered red-legged frog, the Sierra Club opposes this construction. They have asked the State to pay \$5 million of the cost. (Taxpayers forked over *millions* in 2010 to repave the “pathways”). The ultimate plan is to charge entrance fees for everyone. Given the prices at the neighboring museums (\$25 and \$29 respectfully), we can expect these to be in the \$15 range.

# Contact the Supervisors Now!

*The first hearing will be at a Budget and Finance Committee Meeting at City Hall on Wed., April 6th from 1 PM. If it is not killed in committee, it will go to the Board for a vote the following Tuesday. Wed. April 6th will be the only opportunity for public comment.*