

From: Linda Cohen, Ocean Discoveries

The early session of the May 30th FACA meeting was obviously the most significant time in our discussions. I regret that I missed the morning session, but I had to attend a funeral service. After reading the May 30th minutes I would appreciate the opportunity to interject my opinion about the direction the park might go as of now.

I have extensively reviewed all of the expressions of interest submitted in response to the RFEI. In the case of Tim Reynolds of Ani Art School and Michael Fortenbaugh of the Manhattan Sailing Club, I had encouraged these owners to submit their initial proposals. As for possible residential use, Christopher Grover of Peak Construction is also one of the applicants known to me. These individuals appear to have the financial means to help push our project forward.

I feel it is imperative for us to proceed while we have garnered much interest in our project. Ideally, I agree with so many of our committee members who think that we should restore a few buildings to establish a prototype for future interest and development. These refurbished structures would serve as a start off point for the future. As an educator, when I initially joined the FACA committee I envisioned an educational building as a focal point, but I now think any reuse, properly executed, would create the kind of substantial interest we are looking for.

The following were my thoughts written when I first joined the committee:

THE CHILDREN'S DISCOVERY CENTER AT FORT HANCOCK
(for children of all ages)

In order to begin the project of infusing new life into Fort Hancock I think it is crucial to create a "draw" - a destination or focal point which will attract visitors throughout the year and give them a meaningful and worthwhile reason to visit Fort Hancock.

There are specific buildings which are already partially restored. By utilizing one of these, we could most readily begin our mission to reuse Fort Hancock.

Envision the Children's Discovery Center at Fort Hancock - a welcoming nature center and teaching facility. It would enhance the existing marine science facilities at Sandy Hook and inspire new educational and scientific groups to participate.

What I can see is a marine science museum and educational center featuring touch tanks filled with indigenous species just caught in the ocean and estuaries. There would be rooms of hands-on experiments and experiences in marine biology, geology, mathematics, technology, the arts . . . the involvements are unlimited. A family oriented research center would open up to the public the work being done by the partners on Sandy Hook - MAST, the Marine Labs, the Marine Science Consortium, Sea Grant, the Littoral Society, Clean Ocean Action and possibly other educational institutions which will want to have a presence in this vibrant renewed community.

It is said that one of the greatest problems of all our national parks is the failure to attract children. With a dynamic discovery center, Fort Hancock will be a magnet for families interested in seeing the fascinating diversity of marine life and the invaluable ecosystems of New Jersey. The Discovery Center would be an important destination throughout the year, not merely the summer months, and its creation would certainly attract other significant educational, artistic and recreational endeavors. Historic Fort Hancock has the potential to develop into an important cultural, research and educational center.

Linda Cohen, FACA Committee member