



# PRESIDIO

WEST LETTERMAN /  
THORNBURGH

FINAL

## Design Guidelines

*Updated February 9, 2024*



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*Image source: Presidio Trust, 2023.  
(Front & Inside Front Covers)*



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# Introduction

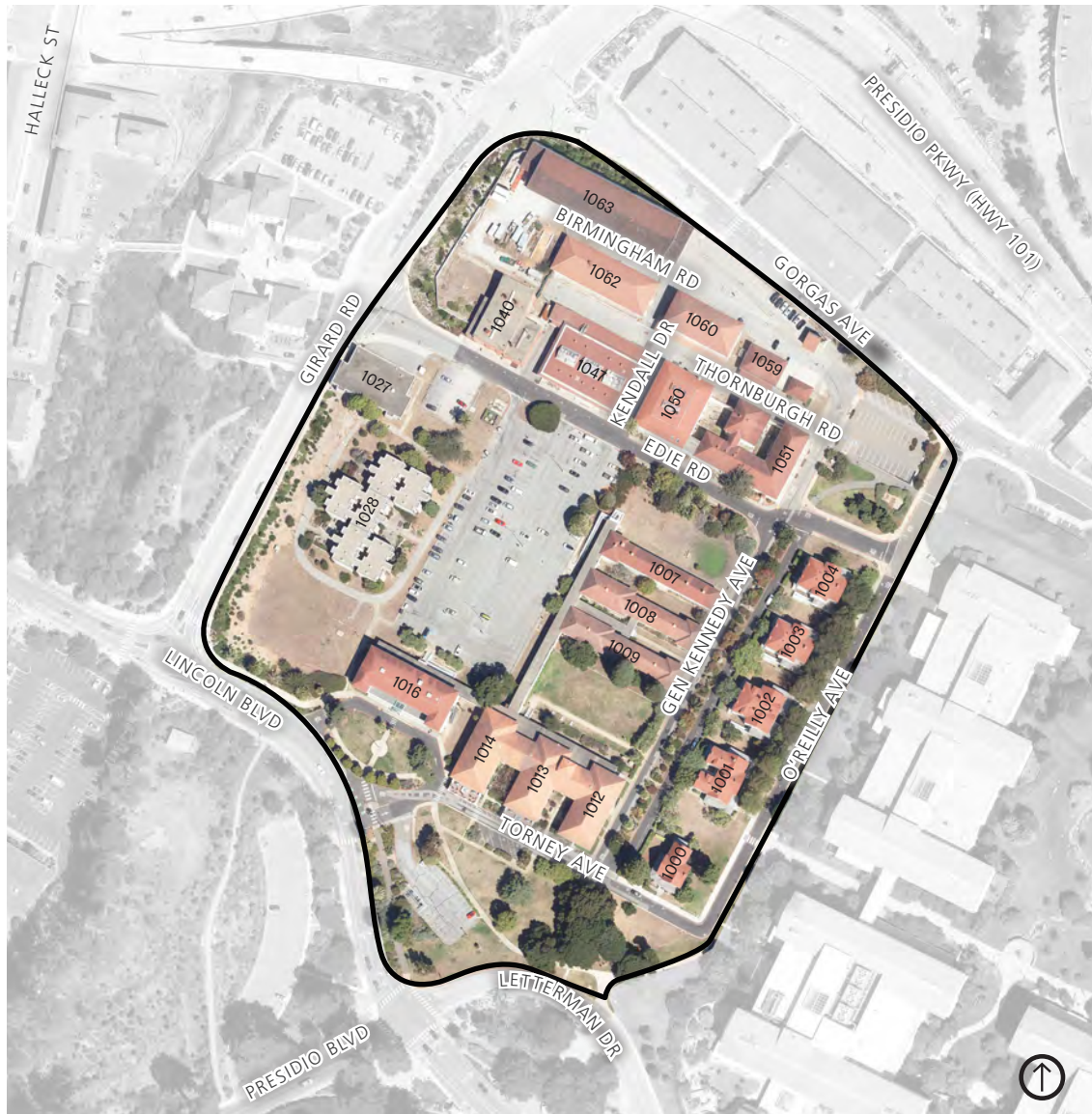


## Introduction

The Presidio Trust developed the 2007 *Letterman District Design Guidelines* to provide a planning and design framework for the entire range of actions that was to take place in the 37-acre western portion of the Letterman Planning District, known as West Letterman. Because many of the projects addressed in the 2007 document have been executed, this document provides an update to the 2007 version, as well as the 2000 *Planning and Design Guidelines for New Development and Uses on 23 Acres Within the Letterman Complex*. This updated document provides guidelines for remaining projects by incorporating today's conditions within the Letterman Planning District. The design guidance from the the previous documents remain unchanged by this update.


Since the time the previous two documents were developed in 2000 and 2007, the Presidio Trust Management Plan (PTMP) was completed, the Letterman Digital Arts Center was constructed and is now occupied, and Doyle Drive has been replaced with the Presidio Parkway. The remaining projects anticipated by the PTMP include:

- Rehabilitation of the remaining vacant historic structures concentrated around Thornburgh Road,
- New building construction within West Letterman,
- Improvements in circulation, and
- Landscape treatments.



**FIGURE 1**

West Letterman/Thornburgh subdistrict. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.

 Subdistrict Area

The West Letterman/Thornburgh Design Guidelines (hereinafter, “Guidelines”) address the remaining projects in the Letterman Planning District per the PTMP, which include new construction in West Letterman; building rehabilitation in Thornburgh; designed landscape improvements; and circulation improvements within the 18-acre West Letterman/Thornburgh subdistrict shown in Figure 1.

The Guidelines describe the district and provide guidance on the treatment of open space, architectural character, views, access and circulation and other physical characteristics. The Guidelines were established to conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Therefore, consistency with the Guidelines will facilitate future decisions and activities.

The PTMP contains design guidelines that are specific to West Letterman and Thornburgh. These guidelines are prerequisites for future development and include the following:

- Re-establish the historic courtyard and connect it with other open spaces and formal landscapes.
- Use new construction to articulate the character and density of the historic district.
- Enhance pedestrian connections.
- Consider removal of non-historic dormitories (Building 1028) and non-historic garage/storage building (Building 1027) and replacement with more compatible housing west of the historic hospital complex.

- Maintain and enhance the pedestrian scale and mixed-use campus setting.
- Re-establish the active character of the historic hospital district by rehabilitating the Thornburgh Road/Gorgas Avenue buildings and restoring key open spaces.
- Enhance connections to adjacent planning districts.

#### Specific guidelines for buildings and structures:

- Retain and reinforce the fine-grained historic building patterns of the district. New construction should consist of multiple building volumes at a similar scale to the surrounding district rather than one or two monolithic buildings.
- Orient new buildings parallel to the street in keeping with the rhythm and character of historic buildings. Any new building forms should be simple and functional in the tradition of military architecture found at Letterman and throughout the Presidio.
- Ensure that any new buildings or building additions respect the historic building setting, scale, and design principles (e.g., rectangular building arrangements enclosing outdoor courtyards, slender hallways or breezeways between buildings). Scale, height, massing, color, and materials of new construction should be compatible with historic building clusters. Maximum height should be between 30 feet to 45 feet, depending on the location within the site.
- Ensure that infill buildings in the western historic portion of the site respect the edge of the historic former Letterman Hospital courtyard.

As with all Presidio guidelines developed for individual districts or building groups, they are

to be used in conjunction with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Treatment of Cultural Landscapes (NPS 1996) and the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Buildings at the Presidio of San Francisco (NPS 1995).

The Guidelines should not be viewed as rigid rules. They represent the Presidio Trust's intentions for future development and rehabilitation projects and serve to guide projects as they move through the planning and design process. They also form the criteria against which the Presidio Trust conducts its own design review process. The Trust's intent is to ensure that design and construction for projects proposed in this area conform as closely as practicable to the Guidelines.



**FIGURE 2**

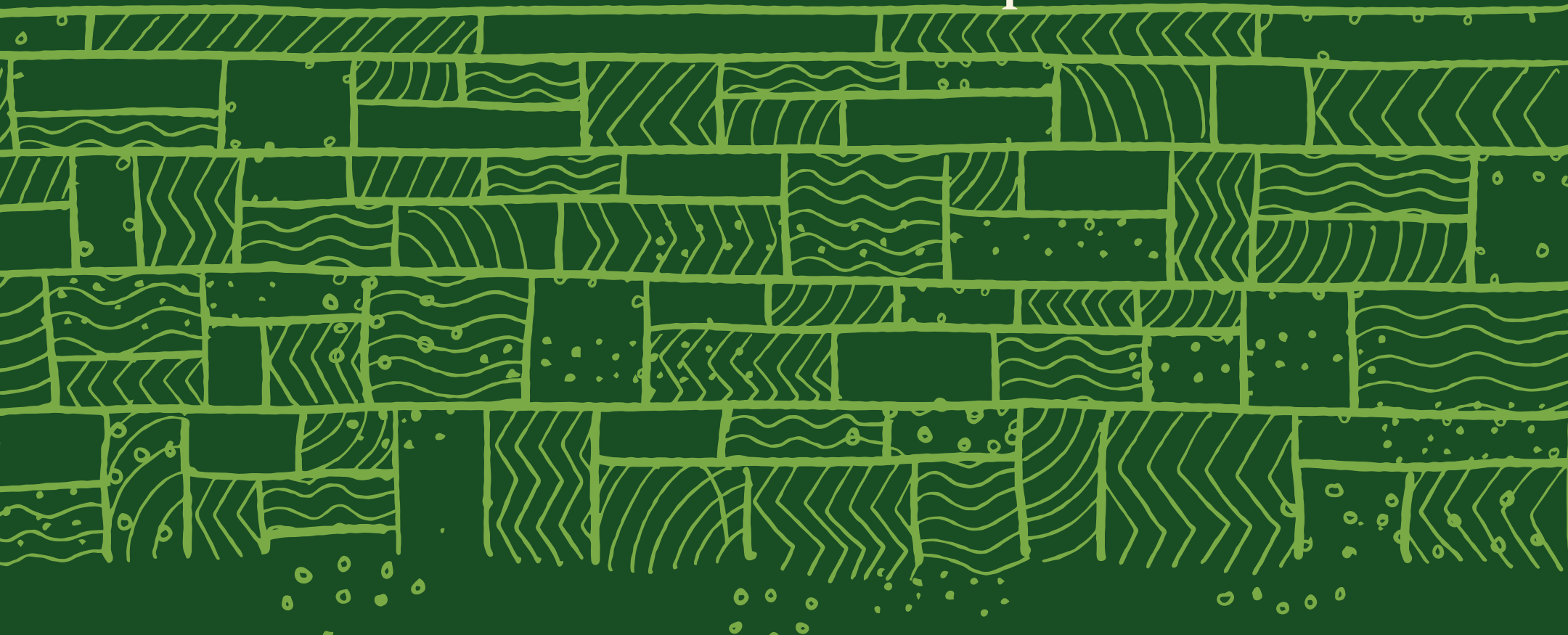
Nurses and medical staff posing outside one of the finger wards, circa 1900. *Courtesy of GGNRA, Park Archives. GOGA-1766.*



**FIGURE 3**

Oblique aerial photo, taken June 15, 2023, of the West Letterman/Thornburgh subdistrict. *Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.*

# Brief History of Letterman General Hospital



## Brief History of Letterman General Hospital

### NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK STATUS

A National Historical Landmark is a property of national historical significance as designated by the Secretary of the Interior. The Presidio of San Francisco was identified as such in 1962, with an update designation in 1993 and subsequent analysis of Cold War-era properties. It is recognized nationally as a Spanish colonial and then Mexican military settlement (1776–1846) and a major U.S. Army post from 1847 through the Cold War.

The 1993 update defines the Presidio's "period of significance" as spanning the years 1776 to 1945, and 1951. The draft Cold War update extended the period of significance to 1958. Buildings and features are considered historic (and thus contributing to the National Historic Landmark status) if they were constructed during the period of significance and still retain their integrity. Of the Presidio's 870 buildings, approximately 470 are historic and classified as "contributing features" to the National Historic Landmark district. As shown

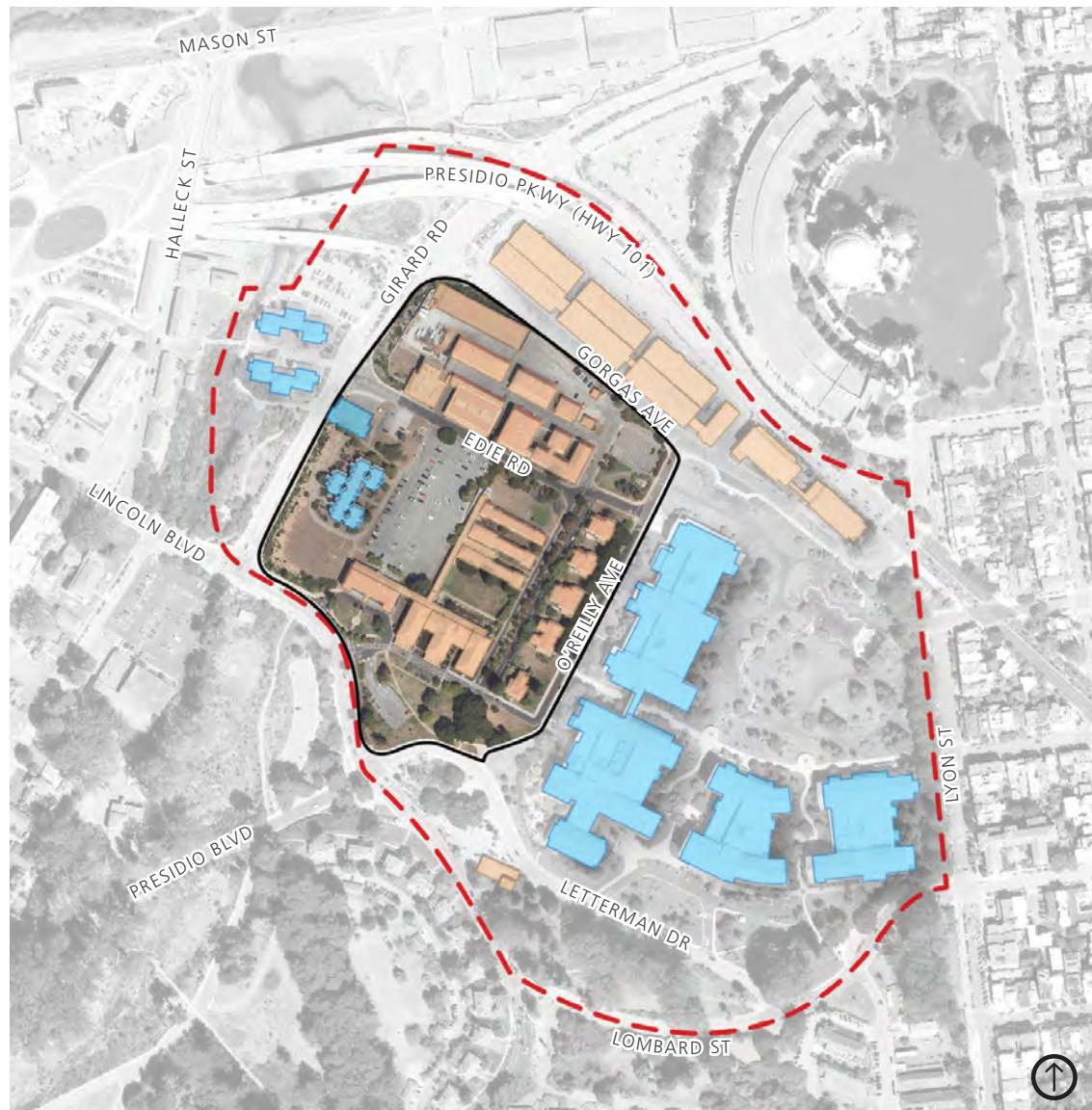
in Figure 5, the West Letterman/Thornburgh subdistrict contains 26 buildings and all but two qualify as historic.

A historic district, such as the Presidio, consists of more than just individual historic buildings. It also includes the "cultural landscape." The cultural landscape is defined by land use patterns, and includes clusters of buildings, circulation networks, open spaces, vistas, and small-scale distinguishing features. Cultural landscapes include not only plant material, grading, and other typical landscaping elements used to shape the natural landscape, but also include the way that the physical environment is transformed on a larger scale by site organization, building form, and circulation. In the Letterman District, elements of the cultural landscape include traces left by the layout of the historic hospital complex, as well as that of the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition. Remnants of the site's past include buildings from the historic hospital complex, street layouts, open spaces, and a distinct approach to landscape design. Each of these elements evoke the site's history and contribute to Letterman's unique character. New construction and building rehabilitation within a historic district must respect the integrity of the district and recognize the character-defining features of both the architecture and cultural landscape.



**FIGURE 4**

Thornburgh Road, looking west toward the Golden Gate, 1915. *Courtesy of OpenSFHistory / wnp15.1195.jpg - See more at: <http://opensfhistory.org/Display/wnp15.1195.jpg#sthash.TKRr1V8u.dpuf>*



# **HISTORIC BUILDING STATUS LETTERMAN PLANNING DISTRICT**

- Historic Buildings
- Non-historic Buildings
- Planning District Boundary
- Subdistrict Area

**FIGURE 5**

Historic and non-historic buildings within the Letterman Planning District. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.

## LETTERMAN HOSPITAL

The U.S. Army constructed a general hospital on the present 60-acre site starting in 1898, to provide long-term and specialized care to soldiers returning from deployment for the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars. Over time it also provided care to military families and veterans across the Bay Area, as well as functioning as a training hub for doctors, nurses, and medical technicians.

Named in 1911 for Major Jonathan Letterman, medical director of the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War, the complex has seen continued construction and changes through to the present day. Serving as a medical care facility for almost 100 years, its history is intertwined with the military history of the U.S.

Within the Army's system of general hospitals, Letterman gained renown for the state of its medical arts and was, for a time, among the

largest hospitals in the country. Letterman boasts early innovations in orthopedic and physical therapy, created the first Army psychiatric wards and was one of the first Army hospitals to employ nurses from the Army Nurse Corps (and thereby became one of the first places where women served in the armed forces). In 1906, the Letterman Hospital offered relief to the City of San Francisco during the earthquake and subsequent fires. Earthquake victims were welcomed into the Army's hospital as the city's hospitals went up in flames, expanding with temporary facilities to handle the displaced and sick. It reached its peak of activity during World War II, when it received 73,000 patients in 1945 alone.

The buildings along Edie, Thornburgh, and Gorgas have ties to this distinctive history, as well as to the more mundane side of hospital life such as growing food, doing the laundry, storing hospital supplies, and the generation of heat.

Familiarity with the site's history will make the buildings easier to understand and will explain why certain buildings or features carry the importance that they do. A full history of Letterman General Hospital may be found in several publications other than these guidelines (see the bibliography).



**FIGURE 6**

Aerial view of Letterman Hospital, taken in the early 1920's, shows the dense building pattern of the interconnected hospital. During the sixties, demolition of the western half of the hospital destroyed this pattern and the landscape around it. *Courtesy of the Robert W. Bowen Family.*

## RECENT HISTORY OF DEMOLITION, PRESERVATION AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

In the late sixties, after construction of the Letterman Army Medical Center (LAMC) General Hospital to the east of the historic hospital core, the Army developed a plan to demolish the old hospital in its entirety. After tearing down about a quarter of the historic complex and constructing a new concrete nurses' dormitory and an associated building (Buildings 1027 and 1028, both built in 1976), the Army changed course and stopped its demolition plans. Although they kept the remaining historic buildings, they became the “back of house” area for the hospital while the

core activities shifted to the LAMC structure.

When the National Park Service (NPS) took over the Presidio from the Army in 1994, the historic Letterman Hospital was in a state of serious disrepair. Long vacant and without heat, the core buildings of the hospital, including the administration building and the remaining wards were highly dilapidated.

The NPS, while still evolving its General Management Plan for the Presidio, began the process of rehabilitating Letterman through its Historic Leasing Program. In partnership with a developer (Equity Community Builders) and a tenant (the Tides Foundation), the

three parties brought the buildings back to life through careful attention to the highest preservation standards (required by the Tax Reform Act of 1986). In addition, the Tides Foundation formed the Thoreau Center for Sustainability (now known as Tides Connect) to tenant the building, which brought with it a commitment to environmental sustainability. The outcome was the first major project at the Presidio and proved that civilian uses for these former military buildings could be found. As a result of the high commitment to quality that the project sponsors, architects and tenants brought to the project, the project was awarded the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Honor Award in 1998.



**FIGURE 7**

Tides Connect occupies what remains of the hospital's administrative building and wards, as well as, the officers' housing on O'Reilly Street. *Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.*



**FIGURE 8**

Letterman Digital Arts Center occupies the site formerly occupied by the Letterman Army Medical Center and Institute of Research. Completed in 2004, it contains about 850,000 square feet of office space and a 7-acre park at its core. *Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.*



When the Presidio Trust took over operations of the Presidio from the NPS in 1998, its first big project was also at Letterman. Realizing the 1964 LAMC General Hospital and the 1971 Letterman Army Institute of Research (LAIR) facilities were out of date for medical use and seismically unsound, the 23-acre site on which they stood was offered as a ground lease through the Request for Proposals process. Lucasfilm Limited was selected to develop the site for a Digital Arts campus, demolishing the two concrete facilities and building four new office buildings. Once again, the agency, project sponsors and designers set high standards for this project, resulting in an innovative structure that earned a LEED Silver rating for its outstanding “green” performance. Its underground parking garage makes possible a large green space as part of the Digital Arts Complex, providing a richly landscaped, publicly accessible park at its heart.



#### FIGURE 9

Aerial view of the Letterman General Hospital, ca. 1994.  
Source: Presidio Trust, *HIST 100 LGH* Callmann, 1994.

#### FIGURE 10

Aerial view of Letterman Digital Arts Center in 2012.  
Courtesy of Carl Wilmington, June, 6, 2012.

The next major project impacting the West Letterman area was Caltrans and Federal Highways Administration (FHWA)'s replacement of the seismically and functionally obsolete Doyle Drive with the Presidio Parkway. This long-planned project reconfigured the northern and western edges of West Letterman by removing non-historic building 1158, introducing new parking and landscape areas, widening and extending Girard Avenue, and creating a new freeway access point at Girard Avenue and Gorgas Avenue. The freeway portions of the project were complete by 2015 and the landscaping was installed by 2021.

In 2019 the Trust completed the rehabilitation of the Gorgas Avenue Warehouses (Buildings 1160-1163, 1167, 1169, 1170) at the northern edge of the district, leaving the nine buildings on either side of Thornburgh Road as the last remaining historic, unrehabilitated, unoccupied buildings in West Letterman.

## HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Construction of the initial Letterman General Hospital complex concluded in 1899. The original hospital was designed as a 300-bed pavilion style facility with the buildings, including wards, administrative buildings, kitchen and mess halls arranged symmetrically around a centrally planted quadrangle. By 1904, additional construction included an operating pavilion in the center of the quadrangle, the powerhouse, a laundry facility, two officers' residences, and additional barracks wards.

Letterman was part of a grand tradition in hospital design whereby the physical design of the facility reflected current thinking in medical treatment and functions. The pavilion plan allowed for separate hospital wards for separate disease types. The wards, operating rooms, and other hospital functions were

linked by one-story corridors (originally open, later glazed) which allowed easy movement of patients and maximized light and air circulation throughout the hospital, providing all the spaces with views out to beautifully landscaped grounds (Figure 11).

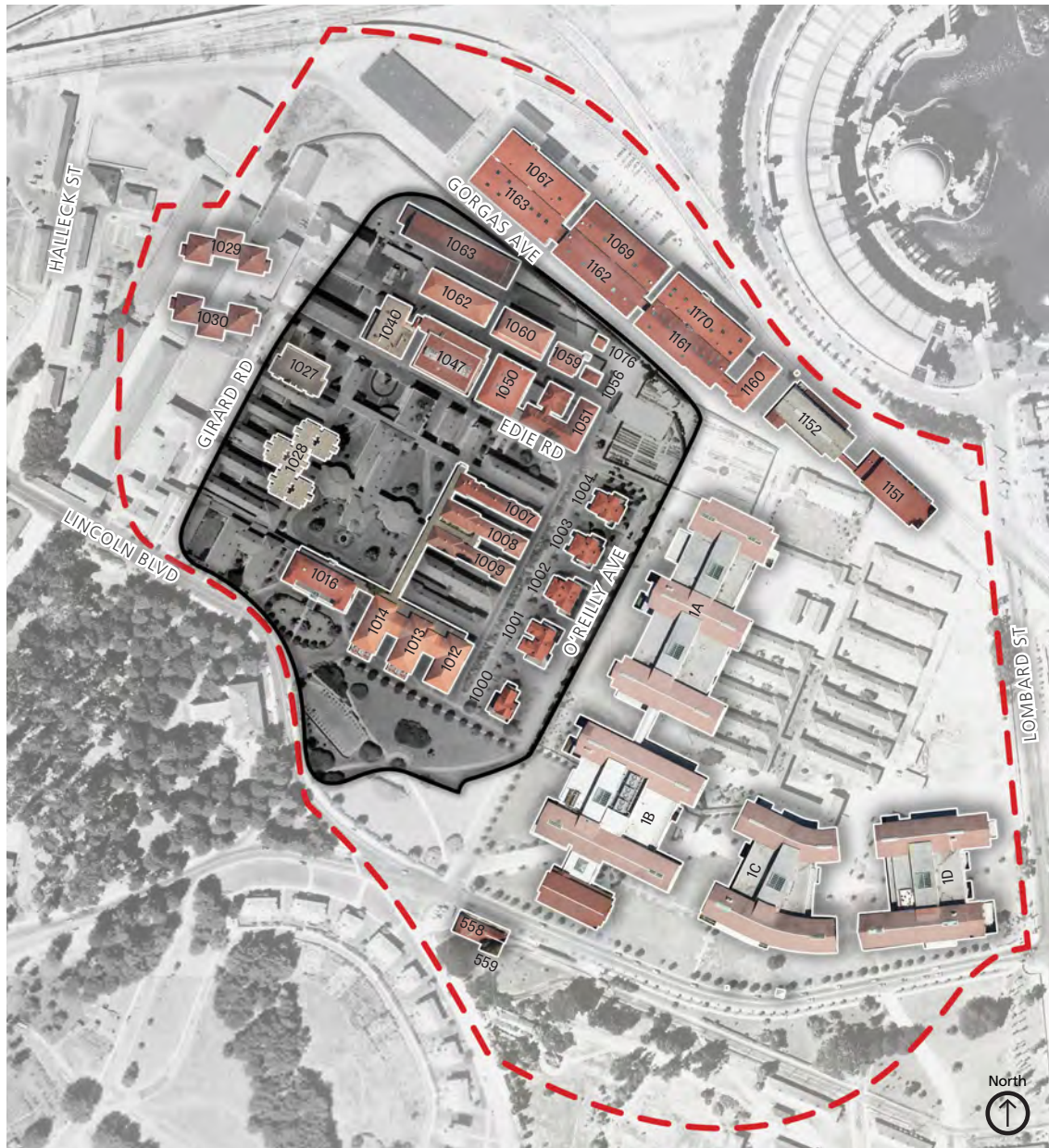
Currently, only a portion of the hospital's core is standing (Tides Connect is located in its remaining buildings). The structures on Edie and Thornburgh were built starting in 1904 through 1948 to house supporting functions of the hospital. The warehouses on Gorgas Avenue were constructed in 1919 as a General Supply Depot for Fort Mason (Figure 12).

The hospital formed a tightly woven complex of buildings laid out in a rigid symmetrical pattern. Functional zoning grouped residential, administrative, medical and support areas together in tight sub areas each with their own visual character. Its landscape included a variety of feature types and components at scales.



**FIGURE 11**

Panoramic view, ca. 1920, taken from Lincoln Boulevard, south of Letterman, shows the ornamental landscape which enhanced the hospital's main façade. *Courtesy of the Family of LTC George Gillis.*



## CULTURAL REMNANTS OF WEST LETTERMAN/ THORNBURGH SUBDISTRICT

- Existing Building
- Planning District Boundary
- Subdistrict Area

### FIGURE 12

Remnants of the cultural landscape are indicated here, including footprints of previous buildings and landscape features which no longer exist. Within the West Letterman/Thornburgh subdistrict, existing buildings (colored) are superimposed over black-and-white aerial photos of the Letterman District from 1938. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 13**

Glazed galleries link the former ward buildings. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 14**

The narrowness of Thornburgh Road frames the western view. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 15**

Gorgas Avenue warehouses create a utilitarian streetscape. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 16**

O'Reilly Avenue retains its residential character. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.

Together, the grouping of buildings and associated landscapes create Letterman's distinct urban and landscape character, visible in the following extant features:

- Building complexes were created by linking smaller buildings together. Breezeways and enclosed galleries provided the linking devices. A system of courtyards and planted landscapes were defined by building edges. Today, the spaces between the former ward buildings and the central parking lot of Tides Connect are evidence of this.
- Thornburgh Road is a narrow space with an urban character. Its uniform street walls create a clearly defined exterior space, with a functional/industrial feeling.
- Gorgas Avenue is a wide, utilitarian street. Most of its buildings are warehouses with loading docks. Its width and the architectural character of the buildings which define its edges create an "industrial thoroughfare" which is consistent for most of its length.
- The west side of O'Reilly Avenue maintains the original residential character with its full landscape and stately residences. The Letterman Digital Arts buildings on the east side of O'Reilly do not diminish the strongly defined historic character of this street.
- The Presidio wall at Lyon Street and its associated windrow has remained mostly unchanged since the Second World War era and continues to define the edge of the Presidio with a leafy green wall.
- Both Gorgas and Thornburgh have open-ended views to the east and west. Thornburgh's view of the Golden Gate Bridge is beautifully framed by its narrow street walls.



**FIGURE 17**

Building 1019, the former Officers' Ward, shows one of variety of minimal ornamentation found on specialized residences, a modified Chinese Chippendale balustrade. *Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, ca. 1934.*



**FIGURE 19**

Building 1016, the former hospital administration building, uses single and paired windows to create a carefully controlled façade. *Courtesy of the Robert W. Bowen Family, ca. 1910.*



**FIGURE 18**

Building 1047, the former Laundry Building, has broad roof overhangs, which is a common feature of Letterman Buildings. The decorative brackets are unique to this building. *Courtesy of the Department of Interior, 1981.*



**FIGURE 20**

Building 1044, the former operating pavilion has the commonly occurring low hipped roof and large windows common throughout the hospital complex. *Courtesy of the Robert W. Bowen Family, ca. 1904-1911.*



**FIGURE 21**

Formal gardens in front of Nurses Quarters and Dormitory. *Courtesy of Western Neighborhoods Project, ca. 1927.*



**FIGURE 22**

The interior courtyards of the hospital were very formal due in part to the medical philosophy that fresh air and sunlight had healing properties. *Courtesy of GGNRA, Park Archive, 1952.*

## CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

The Letterman Hospital was administratively separate from the rest of the Presidio and had its own architectural character and plan organization.

The following is a summary of the architectural characteristics of Letterman's historic buildings that are identified as character-defining features:

- Most of the buildings are very plain, with little applied decoration. They are simple, straightforward buildings.
- Throughout the Letterman Complex, building form is determined by function. Considerable variety is evident in building shape and size because of the broad mix of functions housed in the buildings.
- There is a broad range of building types in the Letterman Complex, ranging from residential, administrative, and medical to service buildings and warehouses. However, similar building types are grouped together by use, creating distinct clusters within the district.
- Architectural detail and materials are used to differentiate the ceremonial public buildings from the service and functional buildings. Architectural detail and decorative features are used sparingly.
- Buildings are typically very long and thin with tall floor-to-floor heights, resulting in distinctive proportions.
- A basement story is often clearly visible. Because of the slope of the site, the basement story is often fully above ground, at least on one side of the building.
- Fenestration is characterized by tall, thin windows, which are used singly, in repetitive "punched openings" (as is seen in a hospital ward building) or grouped together to create large expanses of glazing (as is seen on galleries, the gymnasium or laundry).
- Building elevations are highly regular in organization. The placement of window and door openings is carefully laid out according to symmetry and geometric regularity.
- Buildings have overhanging eaves. Frequently, the eave line of a building contains decorative architectural elements.
- Consistent use of white paint and red roofs tie the district together visually.
- The designed landscape provides a rich cultural context and a sense of place, and historically consisted mainly of small formal open spaces with ornamental plantings and formally planted streets.

Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. RG 18.  
Series: "Airscares" of American and Foreign Areas, 1917-1964. 18-AA-25-51.









An abstract graphic on the left side of the page, featuring several vertical, wavy bands of different patterns. From left to right, the patterns include: a dense field of small horizontal dashes, a series of parallel diagonal lines, a field of small circles, a series of parallel wavy lines, and a series of parallel zigzag lines. The entire graphic is rendered in a light green color against a dark green background.

# Guidelines

## Guidelines

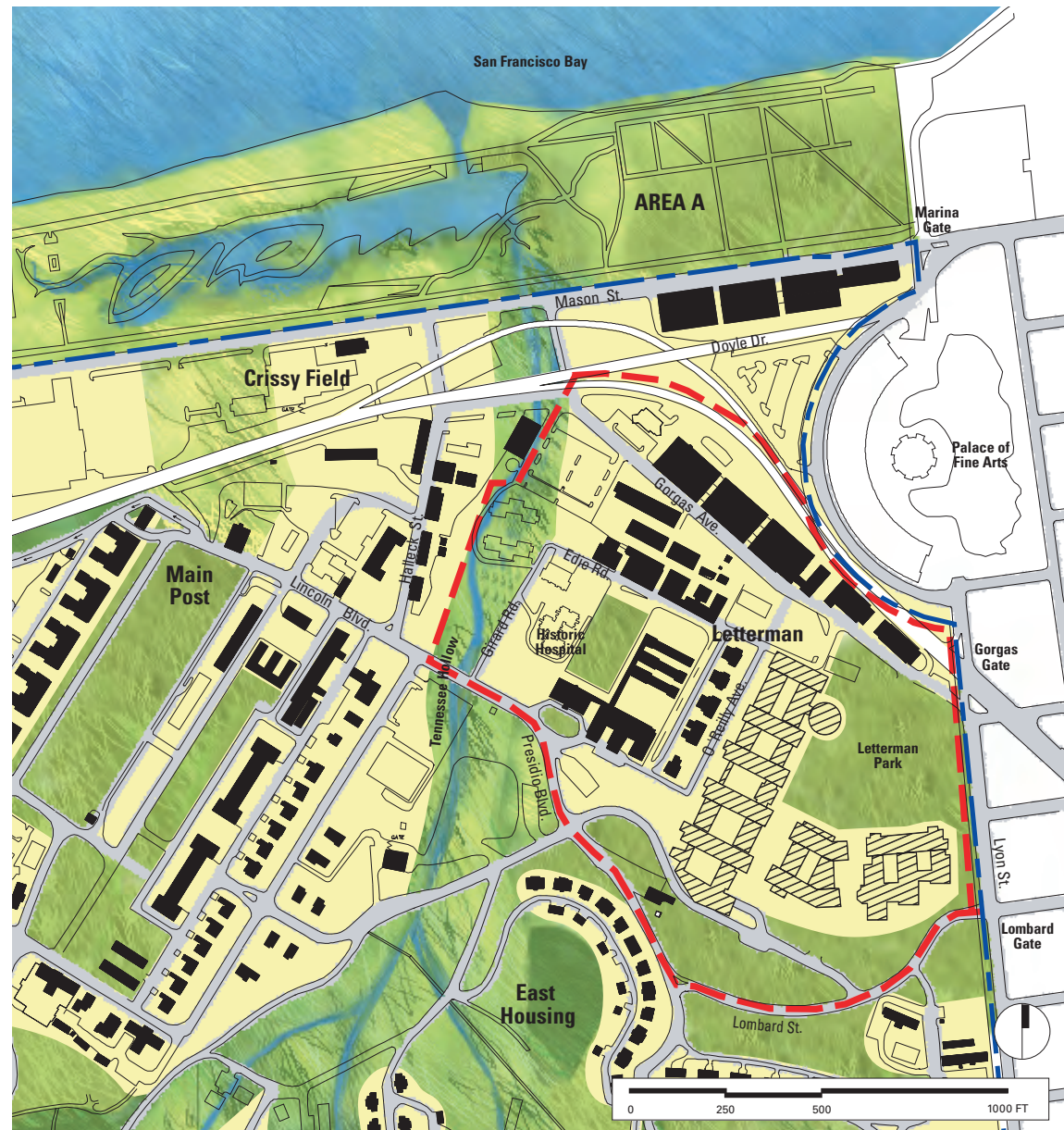
Planning guidelines for the Letterman Planning District are included within Chapter Three of the PTMP. Figure 23 represents an excerpt from the PTMP, which illustrates a framework for managing future development of the Letterman District. They establish general concepts for how the district should be rehabilitated, setting parameters for spatial organization and land patterns, standards for buildings and structures, open space and vegetation, and circulation and access. They also include a reference to the *Planning and Design Guidelines for New Development and Uses on 23 Acres Within the Letterman Complex* as a guide for new construction on the Letterman Digital Arts Center (LDAC), as well as, undertakings for the Letterman district as a whole.

-  Generalized Areas of Development
-  Historic Building
-  Non-Historic Building
-  Digital Arts Complex (Concept Design)
-  Planning District Boundary
-  Area B Boundary

Planning District Area	60 acres
Existing Total Building Area	1,360,000 square feet
Maximum Permitted Building Area	up to 1,490,000 square feet
Maximum Demolition	30,000 square feet
Maximum New Construction	160,000 square feet
Land Use Preferences	office, residential, and service retail

**FIGURE 23**

Page 80 from the PTMP illustrates a framework for managing future development of the Letterman district.  
Source: Presidio Trust, PTMP. 2002.



The guidelines included in this document reiterate and elaborate on the PTMP concepts. Chapter Three of the PTMP outlines the following framework for future development within the Letterman District, which remains applicable for this exercise (the final three guidelines marked with an \* have been completed):

- Re-establish the historic courtyard and connect it with other open spaces and formal landscapes.
- Use new construction to articulate the character and density of the historic district.
- Consider removal of the non-historic dormitories (Building 1028) and replacement with more compatible housing west of the historic hospital complex.
- Maintain and enhance the pedestrian scale and mixed-use campus setting.
- \* Retain historic Lombard Gate as the primary, formal entrance to the park.
- \* Create a new entrance from Doyle Drive into the park as part of the Doyle Drive reconstruction.
- \* Protect and restore Tennessee Hollow.



**FIGURE 24**

Illustration indicating forms that would be appropriate for infill construction, based on the framework found in Chapter Three of the PTMP. Source: Presidio Trust, PTMP. 2002.

## REHABILITATION OF BUILDINGS ALONG THORNBURGH ROAD AND EDIE ROAD

The Thornburgh buildings were constructed between 1900 and 1945 to serve the Letterman Hospital. They are utilitarian structures, and all are contributors to the Presidio's National Historic Landmark District.

In general, the buildings retain a high degree of their original appearance, but all buildings have experienced changes over time. Building 1040 has seen the most drastic exterior changes due to the removal of its original roof and brick smokestack, and the addition constructed on its north side. The exterior of

Building 1062 has been significantly altered because almost all its original windows were removed and openings closed in. Building 1047 has lost its original decorative parapet. Buildings 1050 and 1051 have also had significant modifications made to their windows, with all original windows replaced by contemporary aluminum awning windows.

Building interiors have experienced considerably more modification over the years resulting from frequent change of use, so that each building contains varying degrees of historic fabric. The Trust has assembled significance diagrams for each building that delineate contributing and

non-contributing elements of the interiors. Building 1062 has the most extreme interior modifications resulting from its conversion from a storehouse into a theater. These modifications were not made during the period of significance and can be considered for complete removal.<sup>1</sup> Building 1040 is filled with mechanical equipment related to its former use as a heating plant. A large percentage of this equipment dates from the 1960's, outside the historic period for the building and could be removed. Other

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<sup>1</sup> Trust will require a project condition that the existing interior of Building 1062 will be photo documented prior to its rehabilitation.



**FIGURE 25**

Historic view of Building 1062 shows its original window configuration. *Photo courtesy of GGNRA, Park Archives, GOGA 39814-664.*



**FIGURE 26**

Historic view of Building 1050 shows its original windows and the second-floor solarium facing Kendall Drive, which was filled in with small windows in the late 1940's. *Photo courtesy of GGNRA, Park Archives, ca. 1935.*

buildings, like 1050 and 1051 have fairly intact interiors, with some new partitions in the open ward portions of 1051 that could be either be removed or retained.

Proper treatment of the historic buildings is as important as finding new uses and programs to inhabit them. Making wise choices about

how to treat the historic structures must take into account the following:

## GUIDELINES

- Rehabilitate the historic buildings in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Buildings at the Presidio of San Francisco.
- Consider taking advantage of the federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program by performing a certified rehabilitation.
- Make every effort to adapt the historic structures to compatible new uses that require minimal alteration to character-defining materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships between buildings and their settings.
- Preserve the original feeling of these buildings by accepting their spare, utilitarian character.
- Use documentation provided by the Trust to guide retention of interior historic elements that are character-defining.
- Consider removal of those non-historic elements which detract from the historic character of the interior space.
- Consider using California's State Historical Building Code (Section 18950 to 18961 of Division 13, Part 2.7 of Health and Safety Code) which includes provisions for latitude with respect to the mandates of regular codes in the interest of protecting and retaining historic materials, methods of construction, and character-defining features.



**FIGURE 27**

Photo of officers of Letterman General Hospital in front of administration building 1016, taken in 1918. *Photo courtesy of GGNRA, Park Archives, Letterman Army Hospital Papers, GOGA 1570. August 30, 1918.*

## INFILL CONSTRUCTION

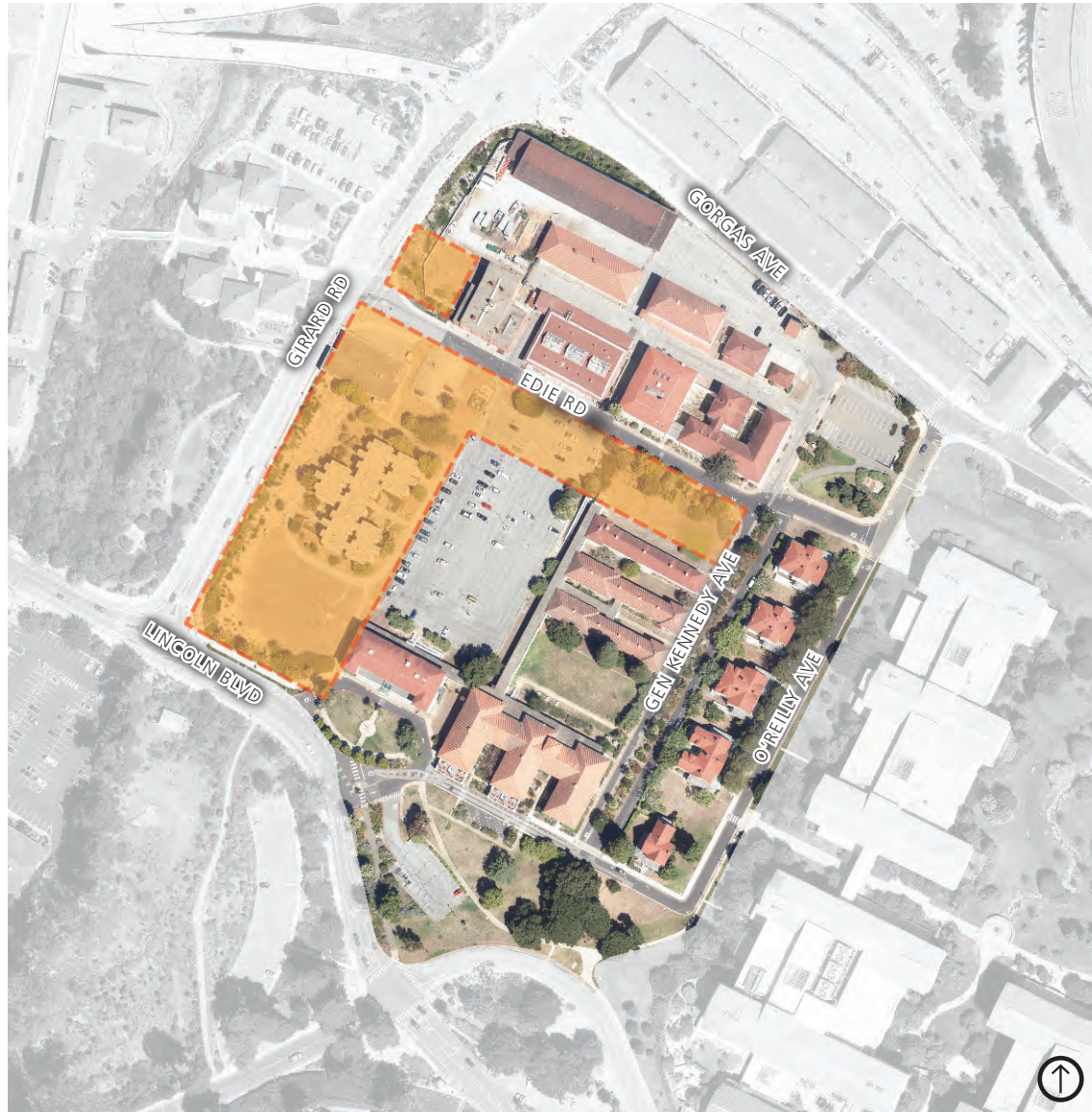
The existing West Letterman area is missing much of the building fabric that originally comprised the Letterman hospital. Starting in the 1960's, the Army demolished all the historic hospital structures west of the Administration Building (1016) and all the buildings that stood in its central courtyard north of 1016. The replacement buildings, the Nurses' Dormitories (1028, 1029 and

1030) and related Building 1027, do not relate to the historic structures that remain or to the former building pattern, and by most assessments, detract from the original building group. Removing the non-historic dormitory and support building (1027 and 1028) would allow the former scheme with its symmetrical arrangement of buildings around a landscaped courtyard to be re-established (see Figure 28 for locations of potential infill development). The PTMP states that a maximum of 160,000

square feet of new (infill) construction is permitted in the Letterman District, provided that at least 30,000 square feet of non-historic buildings are removed. If new construction is to be a successful addition to the West Letterman area, it must be sensitive to the adjacent historic buildings and complement their scale and appearance. The following are guidelines for new or replacement construction.

### GUIDELINES

- Respect the historic spatial relationships, open spaces, and orientation of the existing historic buildings.
- Maintain a landscaped setback of 15-20' from the east curb of Girard Road to maintain comfortable pedestrian access (including a sidewalk and plantings), while re-establishing the densely-built character of the historic site.
- Use the layout of buildings formerly on this parcel as a source of inspiration for replacement construction so that it relates to the historic context.
- New construction should complement the existing architectural style, color and material palette of the historic Letterman area.
- The new construction should be of its time and differentiated from the historic buildings, but it must also be compatible with the massing, size, and scale of the surrounding historic buildings.
- Literal copying of historic details or features is not recommended. Contemporary design based on simple massing and elegant proportions will result in a more complementary design strategy than attempting to recreate historic styles.
- The bulk of the new buildings should not be so large as to visually overwhelm the existing buildings, many of which are delicate frame structures.
- Height and location of the infill construction should comply with Figure 29 and Figure 30.
- Respect the similarities that exist among buildings in the distinct clusters that make up the Letterman District.



## ALLOWABLE AREAS FOR INFILL CONSTRUCTION

 Allowable Area

### FIGURE 28

Potential locations for infill construction. *Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.*



**MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE HEIGHTS FOR  
NEW CONSTRUCTION**

- 45'
- 30'

**FIGURE 29**

Diagram shows permitted areas and heights for infill construction. Building height is measured per Section 260 of the San Francisco Planning Code. Source: *Presidio Trust, 2023.*



**FIGURE 30**

Oblique aerial diagram shows permitted areas and heights for infill construction. Building height is measured per Section 260 of the San Francisco Planning Code. Source: *Presidio Trust, 2023*.

**MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE HEIGHTS FOR  
NEW CONSTRUCTION**

- ▬▬▬ 45'
- ▬▬▬ 30'

## SITE AND STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

The historic Letterman Hospital was characterized by three distinct landscape zones. The southern part of the district (south of Edie Road) was carefully landscaped with decorative plantings and trees. The central courtyard behind Building 1016 (now the parking lot) was a lush, gardenesque landscape with curving paths, benches, palm trees and manicured lawns as depicted in Figure 31. The northern part of the Letterman site west of General Kennedy Avenue had an industrial or functional character without trees or greenery. Most of the surfaces were paved, with a rail line running on Gorgas Avenue to serve the warehouses.

Some of this pattern of landscape treatment remains today and should be perpetuated in any new landscaping proposals.

### GUIDELINES

- The decorative, gardenesque landscape of the southern part of Letterman should be preserved or rehabilitated. If new planting is introduced, it should be compatible with existing or historic plant palettes.
- The institutional quality of Gorgas and Thornburgh should be maintained to reflect the functional character of this area. New features and streetscape features should employ an industrial or functionalist aesthetic.
- Select street lighting and street furnishings only from the Presidio Landscape Standards. Avoid light pollution and light trespass in designing exterior lighting.



**FIGURE 31**

Rendering used in the PTMP to illustrate how new landscape design could invoke the missing character of the historic landscape. Source: Presidio Trust, PTMP. 2002.

## LETTERMAN COURTYARD

While the final vision for the Letterman Courtyard is described above and depicted in Figure 31, an incremental transition may be appropriate. A transitional improvement would be to add trees to break up the current expanse of pavement. Any transitional treatments should contribute to the final vision for the restored courtyard.

### GUIDELINES

- Consider an incremental approach to moderating the hardscape character of the central parking lot, while retaining necessary parking. Introduce trees and planting to the parking area in a pattern consistent with the historic formal landscape.
- Plant the edges of the central parking lot with ornamentals and trees to soften the hardscape character, consistent with the historic landscaping of the central courtyard area.
- Locate trash storage and collection areas away from public open spaces, road corridors or important landscape features as much as possible. Their size and location should be reviewed with the Presidio waste and salvage coordinator.

**FIGURE 32**

Existing conditions at the parking lot off of Edie Road. This area had once been the site of the Letterman General Hospital courtyard. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 33**

Moderating hardscape character using trees and planters at the Taylor St parking area in the Main Post. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 34**

Moderating hardscape character using ornamentals and trees, softening edges of parking at Presidio Landmark. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



## THORNBURGH ROAD

Thornburgh Road has the potential to become an inviting pedestrian zone due to its compact size and urban character. In order to achieve this potential, the following must be addressed:

### GUIDELINES

- Use paving, curbs and other site features to create a “woonerf” or local slow street, where cars move at slow enough speeds to allow pedestrians and bicyclists to safely share the street. Minimize on-street parking, prioritizing accessible spaces.
- Close Kendall Drive to automobiles but maintain it as a pedestrian corridor.
- Consider developing the loading docks of Thornburgh as part of the streetscape design and use them to create seating or gathering spaces.
- Acknowledge the industrial character of this streetscape by selecting materials that convey this feeling and by limiting the introduction of plant materials.
- Maintain the view corridors to the east and west.



**FIGURE 35**

Artist rendering showing potential character of Thornburgh Road. Source: Presidio Trust, *Final Planning and Design Guidelines for New Development and Uses on 23 Acres Within the Letterman Complex*, 2000.

## EDIE ROAD

During the historic period, both sides of Edie Road were lined with buildings, but today, only the buildings on the north side remain, resulting in an asymmetrical treetscape. To restore the historic character of Edie Road, the following improvements are recommended:

### GUIDELINES

- Design Edie Road as a transition between the two historic landscape zones, with minimal planting on the north (historically industrial) side and street trees or other vegetation in a planted strip along the south (historically hospital) side.
- To provide pedestrian access to Thornburgh Road, develop an ample sidewalk on the north side of Edie that includes lighting, street furniture and plantings. Provide pedestrian crossings at Kendall Street and other key locations to conveniently connect to the landscaped parking area.
- Provide passenger loading zones for convenient access by taxi or rideshare.
- Locate on-street accessible parking to serve multiple tenants in accordance with accessibility standards and guidelines
- Modify the geometry at the intersection of Edie and Girard to reduce pedestrian crossing distances



**FIGURE 36**

Existing conditions along Edie Road. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 37**

Conditions at the intersection of Edie Road and Girard Road. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.

## GORGAS AVENUE

The width of Gorgas Avenue reflects the rail lines and automobile traffic that formerly served this busy warehouse district. On the north side, the historic relationship between the loading docks and the street has been maintained through the rehabilitation of the warehouses and adjunct sidewalk.

### GUIDELINES

- On the south side, streetscape improvements should incorporate a sidewalk, ideally in coordination with any stormwater improvements.



**FIGURE 38**

View westward of existing conditions along Gorgas Avenue. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 39**

Coordinated pedestrian and stormwater improvements along the northern side of Gorgas. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.

## CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Currently, the West Letterman site is difficult to navigate because of a confusing roadway network and gaps in the sidewalk network, though the Presidio Parkway and other Trust projects have made some improvements. As shown in Figure 43, many sidewalks are discontinuous and do not directly connect to other nearby parts of the Presidio. This is a result of mid-twentieth century changes to the original street and sidewalk system and does not represent a historic pattern. Pedestrian network improvements and a clearly defined hierarchy of vehicular and bike circulation routes will make the area easier to access and navigate with or without a car. The following immediate changes are recommended to

### GUIDELINES

- The Presidio Parkway project extended Girard Road north to connect with Gorgas and Marina Boulevard; consider extending Thornburgh west so that it intersects Girard, as it did historically.
- Encourage transit use and develop strong Transportation Demand Management strategies to decrease dependence on the automobile.
- Close gaps in the pedestrian network and widen sidewalks along Edie Road
- to provide inviting and user-friendly connections both within the site and to adjacent areas. Provide convenient pedestrian connections to nearby bus stops and bike share stations.
- Reduce the size of or eliminate the central parking lot south of Edie Road by adding planted areas or new construction that screen its view from the surrounding buildings.



**FIGURE 40**

Existing conditions along the south side of Edie Street showing discontinuous sidewalks along the central parking lot. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



**FIGURE 41**

Sidewalk improvements along the north side of Gorgas enhance the pedestrian experience. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



## VEHICULAR CIRCULATION

Presidio Parkway & Ramps

Vehicular Network

- Primary
- Secondary (Existing)
- Secondary (Proposed)

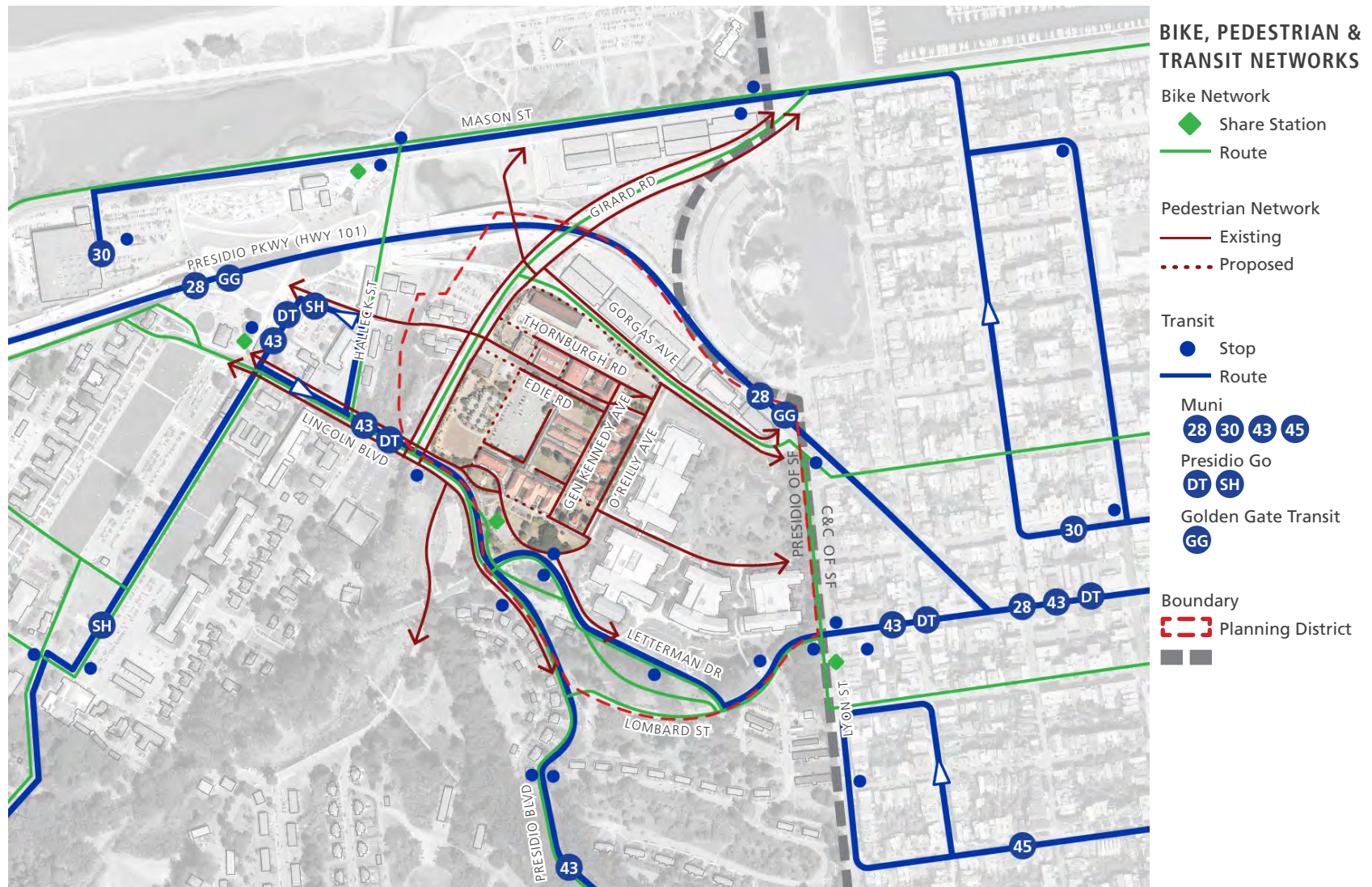
Boundary

- Planning District
- Jurisdictional

**FIGURE 42**

Vehicular circulation. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.





**FIGURE 43**  
Existing and proposed bike and pedestrian network. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.



## GREEN BUILDING PRACTICES

Environmental sustainability in design recognizes that every design choice affects the natural and cultural resources of the local, regional, and global environment. Green

building practices should be included in all proposals and should begin at the inception of the project's planning phase, and extend through the life of the building and site. Follow the concepts outlined below, to the extent feasible.

### GUIDELINES

- Achieve a minimum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold rating in new construction and Silver rating in building rehabilitation projects.
- Minimize energy expended during construction. Recognize that reuse of existing buildings is itself a sustainable practice.
- Use environmentally responsible building materials.
- Conserve water by reducing consumption and by using low water-consumption plumbing fixtures.
- Design energy efficient building systems. Take advantage of solar orientation to reduce heating and cooling loads.
- Reduce or eliminate waste by reducing consumption, reusing materials, and recycling. Recycle building waste produced during selective demolition.
- Make the park easier to access and navigate without a car by improving the pedestrian and bike network and improving access to transit.
- Provide a healthy environment by reducing or eliminating the use of toxins and pollutants and by properly managing their disposal.
- Incorporate green stormwater practices into design of landscape features. Select a plant palette that respects its historic feeling.



**FIGURE 44**

In 2021, Building 105 was awarded the LEED Gold building certification. Built in the late 1890's, the former barracks was recently rehabilitated as a historic boutique hotel. Source: Presidio Trust, 2023.

## Bibliography & Credits

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**FIGURE 5** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 6** Robert W. Bowen Family

**FIGURE 7** Presidio Trust

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**FIGURE 9** Presidio Trust, LGH Callmann

**FIGURE 10** Carl Wilmington

**FIGURE 11** The Family of LTC George Gillis

**FIGURE 12** Presidio Trust

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**FIGURE 14** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 16** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 17** National Library of Medicine

**FIGURE 18** Department of Interior

**FIGURE 19** Robert W. Bowen Family

**FIGURE 20** Robert W. Bowen Family

**FIGURE 21** Western Neighborhoods Project

**FIGURE 22** GGNRA, Park Archives

**GUIDELINES COVER PAGE** National Archives and Records Administration

**FIGURE 23** Presidio Trust, PTMP

**FIGURE 24** Presidio Trust, PTMP

**FIGURE 25** GGNRA, Park Archives

**FIGURE 26** GGNRA, Park Archives

**FIGURE 27** GGNRA, Park Archives, Letterman Hospital Papers

**FIGURE 28** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 29** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 30** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 31** Presidio Trust, PTMP

**FIGURE 32** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 33** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 34** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 35** Presidio Trust, Final Planning and Design Guidelines for New Development and Uses on 23 Acres Within the Letterman Complex, 2000

**FIGURE 36** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 37** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 38** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 39** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 40** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 41** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 42** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 43** Presidio Trust

**FIGURE 44** Presidio Trust


## Abbreviations

**GGNRA** Golden Gate National Recreational Area

**PTMP** Presidio Trust Management Plan

**C&C of SF** City and County of San Francisco





For questions or requests, please contact  
the Presidio Trust Planning & Compliance  
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