

## **San Francisco International Airport**

### **Summary:**

The Civil Grand Jury learned of a practice at the San Francisco International Airport known as VIP Parking, whereby certain governmental employees and non-governmental persons are permitted to park at the Airport without charge. Since the practice was reported in the San Francisco Examiner in March of 1999 and received unfavorable comment in an editorial in that newspaper, the Civil Grand Jury deemed that it would be appropriate to learn more of the practice and determine whether the practice is an appropriate one at this time.

### Procedure:

The Civil Grand Jury met with John Martin, the Director of the Airport. Mr. Martin was extremely helpful and provided some documentation regarding the practice.

### The VIP Parking Policy:

The VIP Parking program at the Airport is a program whereby individuals selected by the Airport Director, and those nominated by the five Airport Commissioners, are permitted to park in the Valet Parking area on the fourth floor of the Airport garage, (although they are not entitled to valet service) for a period usually not to exceed 72 hours, and never to exceed 7 days. The privilege extends to their spouses, if they call the Airport in advance. While the passes are not deemed transferable, apparently until this year there was no attempt to check the identity of those presenting passes and the passes may have been used by persons other than those to whom they were issued. Now identification is required when checking in at Valet Parking. The charge for parking at the Airport is \$22.00 per day, while parking at the Valet Parking area is \$35.00 per day.

Mr. Martin advises that they average 2 to 4 spaces used per day. (Formerly a space was fenced off for VIP Parking, enclosing 20 parking spaces. This was eliminated when it was judged to be unnecessary). No written records are kept of those parking in the garage, or when they park and for how long, except records are kept of parking by certain elected officials so that they may avoid violating certain laws relating to limits on acceptance of gifts. There is no record from which the cost of the VIP Parking policy may be calculated.

There is no written documentation governing the VIP Parking program at the Airport. The policy has been neither approved nor disapproved by the Board of Supervisors (although all Supervisors have passes). The policy has existed for decades and has likely existed as long as the Airport has charged for parking. Similar programs exist at all major airports, not just at San Francisco International Airport.

Before 1992 there were 5000 passes outstanding. When Mr. Martin became Director of the Airport in 1996, there were approximately 365 passes outstanding. He has reduced the number of passes issued and today the Airport issues 182 passes. (See Appendix B).

Those entitled to passes include California's two United States Senators, members of the United States House of Representatives from the Bay Area, members of the California Legislature from the Bay Area, members of the Board of Supervisors of the

City and County of San Francisco, and certain employees of the City and County of San Francisco, such as the heads of City Departments and the five Airport Commissioners.

In addition, passes are given to select non-governmental people Mr. Martin advised the Grand Jury that the five Airport Commissioners each nominate five to fifteen people each. However from the list provided by Mr. Martin, it appears that Henry E. Berman, President of the Airport Commission has nominated twenty seven of the people on the list. Commissioner Strunsky appears to have nominated four passes for his family, including two in his own name. There are no standards governing who they may appoint. However, Commissioners are supposed to select people who are useful to the Airport and whose good will the Airport considers important. Included in this group are local union leaders, contractors, business people and others, apparently including the young son of one of the Commissioners. The list changes at the beginning of each year. (Appendix C is a list of those appointed by Airport Commissioners).

The list is prepared without consultation with the Mayor. Mr. Martin has never had a conversation with the Mayor regarding the VIP Parking policy. Mayor Willie Brown had a VIP Parking pass when he was in the California Assembly, but does not now have one.

## **FINDINGS**

The Airport has continued a policy over a period of many years, probably decades, which is similar to policies followed at other major airports across the country. Nevertheless, the Civil Grand Jury finds that this policy is not in the best interest of the taxpayers or residents of San Francisco. While the cost to the City is probably minimal, it is not wise to continue a policy which grants elitist style benefits to a few, who are chosen in a manner that suggests favoritism. While there may not be anything substantially wrong with the present policy, and while it does not rise to the level of a scandal or major impropriety, it does smack of the old boys network or improper favoritism.

The private individuals on the VIP Parking list are probably better able to afford parking rates than are most of those who use the Airport Garage. The governmental persons on the list, elected officials and others, are probably entitled to reimbursement of their parking if they use the garage for business purposes. If they do not, they should not get a free ride. The state and federal employees and elected officials should not be subsidized by San Franciscans.

The Civil Grand Jury believes that it is in the best interests of San Francisco to terminate this anachronism. It may be more a matter of appearance than real substance, but the time has come to change an outmoded policy.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The VIP Parking program should be terminated forthwith. There should be no exceptions for private persons or for government employees or elected officials.

## **RESPONSES REQUIRED**

Mayor

Board of Supervisors

Director of San Francisco International Airport

Airport Commission

## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A

May 26, 1999, Letter from Airport Director John L. Martin to Civil Grand Jury

APPENDIX B

1999 Garage VIP Parking Permits

Numerical Listing

APPENDIX C

List of Parking Permits Nominated by Airport Commissioners