

Hastings plan for parking has Collaborative fuming

Nothing like a good fight to rally the community's forces, and it looks like the fledgling Tenderloin Futures Collaborative has one: Hastings College of the Law plans to build an 873-car, 80-foot-tall, 303,600-square-foot parking garage. The Hastings-owned site on the corner of Golden Gate and Larkin has surface parking for 200 cars.

Dec. 12, more than 30 people gathered for the second meeting of the Collaborative, heir apparent of the Lower Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force. Every seat was filled in the nicely appointed community room at Network Ministries, 333 Ellis.

Hastings' presentation and audience questions about the need for such a huge structure in its back yard took up most of the hour and a half. The tone was outwardly civil; the undercurrent ranged from cautious to suspicious to defiant. The Ministries' Glenda Hope, crisply efficient, chaired the meeting.

Hastings CFO David N. Seward said the garage is needed because tight parking in the area will worsen when the Seventh and Mission federal building goes up, the Asian Art Museum opens, and City Planning revitalizes the Market and Octavia neighborhood.

"We're a small, stand-alone college," said Seward, "even though we're affiliated with U.C." He said Hastings would use the income from parking and ground-floor retail to offset the school's other "much-needed" project — adding 80 new student apartments to its 252-unit student residence at 100 McAllister and seismically upgrading the building. Students, staff, Civic Center government employees and the public would use the garage, Seward said.

Randy Shaw, a Hastings alumnus and Tenderloin Housing Clinic director, launched the opening volley: Why does Hastings need more parking spaces? Its enrollment is down, less than when he was a student, Shaw said. Why can't students take BART, like other people? "I see no basis for your increased-need statement," Shaw

told Seward.

It was, Seward reiterated, a "question of need. We're losing spaces."

Brad Paul, former staff of the Task Force, reminded Seward that the transportation goal is to have fewer cars coming into the inner city, not more. And he asked whether Hastings had considered a garage with fewer spaces but some housing.

"If you do a mixed use project, more people will see it as beneficial," Paul said, adding that as planned, the project will draw fire from not only Tenderloin activists, but also SPUR and the Bicycle Coalition. Seward agreed to take the suggestion back for discussion.

"I think once again the Tenderloin is being asked to become the savior for out-

we can find a way to partner on this," said St. Anthony's outreach worker Roscoe Hawkins.

There were practical suggestions. "I'd like to see the retail space benefit the neighborhood, maybe a grocery store," said Beverly Karnatz, Lutheran Social Services regional director. The project summary says the 7,200-square-foot retail space would contain "Hastings' bookstore, a coffee shop, and other college and community-serving retail uses."

And there was official concern. "From a taxpayer's point of view, I want to see the financials of the project," Supervisor Chris Daly said. The Civic Center garage is never full, he said, contradicting Seward's earlier comment that it was overflowing, "at 160% capacity."

After the Hastings reps left, the Collaborative decided to move posthaste to stop the project as planned. Comments about the draft environmental impact report (EIR) must be sent to Seward

by Dec. 31, followed by 45 days of public comment before the project can be approved. Hastings wants construction to start August 2002 and be done by January 2004.

"They've moved all these steps, they have all these drawings, and almost no one in the community knows anything about this," said Shaw.

The group quickly put together a subcommittee with an ambitious agenda: Meet with Assemblywoman Carole Migden and state Sen. John Burton in early January to get their support for stopping the state-funded law school's project. Go to them armed with an alternative sketch of a building that incorporates the community's use and design concerns ("It looks like one more institution, a block of cement," said Karnatz); financial reports on current garage use to disprove need, which Supervisor Daly said he'd get; and a list of demands for incorporating neighborhood benefits into the project.

In the little time left of the meeting, the group decided to invite someone from Friends of Recreation & Parks to the next Collaborative meeting. The problem? The Friends, who made a \$5,000 grant to upgrade Boeddeker Park, sent out a fund-raising letter lauding its "thriving flower garden." What the community actually got, said Connie Latch, park advisory board member, "was a travesty, unusable."

Latch, an active Church of Scientology member, told the Collaborative that she had no news about a pending sale of the 35,000-square-foot Scientology building on McAllister at Leavenworth, but was glad to hear that

siders," said Paul Leaman, operations manager for the Community Housing Partnership. "So how does this garage benefit the neighborhood?"

"It allows us to upgrade housing," Seward responded, though he conceded that it was housing for law students only. "But without it, the students might take away other low-income housing from residents. Also, with all the new growth and without the garage, people will be looking for parking, which will congest the streets."

"Thanks," said Leaman politely, "but that's a non-answer."

This project, Shaw told Seward, is another attempt to "wall off Hastings from the Tenderloin. That wall is an insult to the neighborhood."

Seward and four Hastings colleagues stuck around after the formal presentation to hear more comments.

There were rumbles. "Hastings has moved this project forward with no prior consultation," Shaw said. "You shouldn't assume that we're going to just go away. It's your call — a war or a settlement."

There were conciliatory comments. "It would be good if

2ND MEETING, 1ST HOT-BUTTON ISSUE

Marjorie Beggs



Computerized rendering of the proposed Hastings parking garage, looking southeast from the Federal Building Plaza.

Halt Hastings' hasty plan

Hastings Law School has announced plans to build a mammoth, seven-story parking garage at Larkin and Golden Gate. The project, on the site of the former Philadelphia and Eureka residential hotels demolished by the school in 1989, is the latest effort by Hastings to "wall off" the Tenderloin from the school and the Civic Center. The school's previous proposals for the site — including a new courthouse, a state office building, a "Space Law" center and a 40-story office tower — were all defeated by community opposition. Such opposition is now essential to defeat the current, ill-conceived plan.

Hastings has long been known as "the law school that ate the Tenderloin." Never comfortable with its proximity to our community, Hastings evicted the tenants from its two SROs on Golden Gate prior to demolishing all 85 units in a still-controversial post-earthquake act. Hastings denies any responsibility for replacing those SRO units, and its plan for a parking garage flies in the face of longstanding community and citywide support for housing at the site.

Hastings' contemptuous attitude toward the Tenderloin is a function of its ability, under the state Constitution, to bypass local planning and zoning laws. It does not need formal city approvals for its development schemes, so Hastings proceeds without regard to community opposition to its plans. Prior to any community meetings about the parking garage plan, Hastings had already completed architectural drawings and even picked out the street trees for the site.

Under Hastings' plan, the frail elderly at St. Anthony's new beautiful Madonna Apartments on Golden Gate will look out over an 873-space parking garage. The increased traffic will make the area a virtual speedway, putting the many elderly who are not able to cross the street before the light changes particularly at risk. The south side of Golden Gate Avenue will become a ghost town on evenings and weekends, reducing neighborhood safety. All to create more parking in the section of the city with the greatest access to mass transit — and where an underutilized Civic Center parking garage sits a block away.

Opposition to Hastings' plan is quickly generating one of the broadest and most diverse coalitions in the city's history. There is simply nobody outside Hastings who thinks a parking garage is anything but a destructive idea.

But for all the opposition we can muster in the Tenderloin and citywide, stopping the garage and getting housing built at the site requires the support of our state elected officials. Art Agnos sided with the Tenderloin against Hastings in the battles of the 1980s and we need Assemblywoman Carole Migden and state Sen. John Burton to support our struggle today. Our legislators may have to force Hastings to do the right thing, because this is not an institution with a history of responding to reason.

The proposed parking garage site represents an opportunity to both replace the demolished housing and to integrate our community with the Civic Center. There are many ways for Hastings to achieve a "win-win" result, but they will not do so absent community action.

Randy Shaw is director of the Tenderloin Housing Clinic.

the Boys and Girls Club of S.F. was interested in it.

Club President Jim Richards later told the *Extra* that Scientology hasn't responded to the Club's offer to buy. "I've looked at 17 sites in the Tenderloin so far," Richards said.

Before the meeting adjourned, Hawkins told the group, "I just want to say that these Collaborative meeting are great!"

"The meetings ARE going in the right direction, taking on important considerations," Leaman told the *Extra* later. "I used to attend Task Force meetings. The makeup of the group has changed a little, but for the better. The people around the table have much more experience in the neighborhood."

The Tenderloin Futures Collaborative meets next on Jan. 9, 2002, 10 a.m., Poverello Room at St. Anthony's, 121 Golden Gate. ■



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