The return of mid-Market Redevelopment

PAC reconvenes
— dusts off plan
in limbo 5 years

BY MARK HEDIN

OR decades, San Franciscans and their public servants have agreed: Something must be done about mid-Market. Since its heyday the blocks Fifth Street to Eighth, a once-burgeoning, family-oriented theater district, have deteriorated until now there are 27 boarded-up properties.

Mayor Newsom waded into the morass in January, announcing a Central Market Partnership "to renew and coordinate efforts to revitalize" the neighborhood, through redevelopment.

To this end, the Redevelopment Agency, backed by a near million-dollar budget, is reconvening the Mid-Market Project Area Committee (PAC), a group representing neighborhood residential and commercial tenants and property owners, businesses, civic, social service and arts and cultural organizations, to formulate plans for both sides of Market from Fifth Street to just across 10th

"If there's any

area that needs

it, it's really

this area."

Lisa Zayas-Chien

PROJECT AREA MANAGER

Street, including saw-toothed blocks north of Market and on the south side roughly to Minna Street.

The committee now being reconstituted — 12 of its 33 seats were open for voting at an April 28 meeting — was first convened in 1995. A

plan was finalized 10 years later in 2005, but only after 97 meetings, 183 subcommittee meetings, 14 community workshops and 172 community group meetings, documented in 16 newsletters, some published in four languages.

The 2005 plan called for dedicating \$100 million to housing, with the expected addition of 3,300 new dwelling units, 32% of them — a projected 1,221 units — to be permanently affordable. Art and culture was to get \$40 million to refurbish theaters and meet the needs of nonprofit arts, cultural and entertainment organizations. The plan also called for phasing out adult-oriented venues through attrition.

Overall, the plan anticipated

> CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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10 YEARS, 100 EXTRAS

Newspaper reaches a major milestone

PAGES 2, 6, 7



GRANT BUILDING SWAN SONG

In afterlife it'll be a happenin' hotel

PAGE 3

LUNCH: SENIORS ONLY

They get more than a meal

PAGE 4



Photo by Lenny Limjoco

This boarded-up stretch is in the 900 block of Market Street.

CENTRAL CITY

SAN FRANCISCO

Photo courtesy Janice Merce

Sam Varnado, shown here in his apartment in 2004 with his cat, Mimi, was a formerly homeless, recovered alcoholic dedicated to others.

Sam Varnado, 59

He always came to the aid of alcoholics, addicts

BY TOM CARTER

HE impact Sam Varnado had on the lives of alcoholics and addicts was in great evidence at his memorial service April 13 in a community room of a low-cost family apartment building at 555 Ellis St. One by one they stood, gave their first name, declared their addiction, got greeted noisily by the others, then told of their experience with the charismatic man they said never stopped giving of himself. Some said he saved their life.

Mr. Varnado's fervent message that they counted for something — even when they were soiled and wallowing in a gutter someplace — gave them strength and hope to carry on, they said. Indeed, they agreed that Mr. Varnado would drop everything in a second to come to the aid of an alcoholic in trouble.

Some sentiments were delivered through tears as more than 40 mourners — the majority of them in recovery — told how special Mr. Varnado was to them.

A Vietnam War veteran, Mr. Varnado died March 30 at Veterans Administration Hospital after battling liver cancer for five weeks. He was 59. From his Facebook page it was known he attended college in Arkansas in 1972 and came to California a year or two later.

"He was an amazing man," said Rev. Glenda Hope, executive director of Network Ministries, who conducted the memorial. She had known Mr. Varnado since 1996. She let him run AA meetings at the Network Ministries office.

"They called it Sober Across the Board,"

Hope said. "And it was (held) in our former 366 Eddy St. space until we moved in our computer center and then it went to the William Penn Hotel at 160 Eddy."

Mr. Varnado, once a homeless alcoholic, led the sessions for more than 10 years at 8 a.m. six days a week, convinced that same time, same place was essential — safe familiarity for anyone in need. His "keep coming back" invitation became his mantra. And on Sundays, Mr. Varnado volunteered all day at Laguna Honda Hospital.

"Sam was an extremely selfless person and gave all his time and energy to others," said his friend, Abdi Habad, who had visited him in the hospital. "Sam related to other addicts and alcoholics in a special way because he knew the suffering of addiction."

Mr. Varnado was an imposing figure — well over 6 feet tall, handsome, with a bass voice and warm smile that had wondrous melting powers.

"He'd stop me on the street and say, 'Come to a meeting,'" said one woman. "He helped me save my life. He was there no matter what shape you were in, even in the gutter."

"He was there 24 hours for everybody," said one man. "He was a patriarch and mentor, a friend to everyone," said another, as more stood and tried to find fitting phrases equal to the love that welled up:

"He never met a stranger."

"He was a stalwart, the JFK of recovery."

"He was smart as a whip — he helped me with my English composition when I was in school."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10