

# Why no Y? TL leaders confront the association

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ting pressure on the parent association to make good on its years-old commitment. Tenderloin movers and shakers have joined the nascent campaign, and the logjam may be starting to break up.

"I'd been working in the garden with seniors and heard so much complaining and dissatisfaction," says Kasey Asberry, once a Central employee but now a volunteer who directs the garden project as part of her master's degree program at S.F. State. "They felt ignored by the association and wanted what they believed had been promised them — a new Y." Many also wondered why the old Y had to be sold and couldn't be renovated.

"There were moves to renovate the building going back 30 years, but the cost was always astronomical, as much as \$25 million in 1998," says Carmela Gold, Central Y's former executive director. "We even started capital campaigns, but the reality was that the building was too huge for us to operate — we only needed about a third of it."

## PROMISE OF A NEW FACILITY

By the early 2000s, Central staff, its board of managers, and the board of directors of the association had agreed that building a new facility was a smarter option, Gold says.

In 2005, she announced at a community meeting that 220 Golden Gate was for sale, the swan song for the grand, columned, Italian Renaissance Revival building with its 30-foot by 80-foot pool, gyms, showers, lockers, meeting rooms, restaurants and, upstairs, the 140 "sleeping rooms with hot and cold running water and a telephone in every room," as advertised when the Central Y opened in 1910.

Gold said that the Y was moving forward with a plan to house Central in a building with the Hastings garage and



RENDERING BY MWA ARCHITECTS

Rendering shows an open and airy lobby was planned for a new Central Y.

hoped to break ground, according to a press release, in 12 to 18 months.

Now, seven years and no new Y later, Asberry remembers how close it seemed back then. Charles Collins, association CEO, addressed hundreds of people at Central's closing party. "He said he would make it his mission to complete plans for a new Central," she recalls, "that partnerships were in place to make it happen, that the interim site was just that, and he pointed to the architect's renderings of what a new Y might look like."

Then, years of silence.

Asberry agreed to coordinate meetings of a new Friends of the Central Y, inviting "the bigger community to try to kick the project into high gear," she says. At the July 18 meeting, 70 people jammed Central's small meeting room to hear speakers and ask questions.

"The Y is the neighborhood's living room, and what matters is the will to get a new one built," said Elvin Padilla, executive director of Tenderloin Economic Development Project, which coordinates initiatives with community organizations, businesses, foundations and city agencies to strengthen the neighborhood. He assured the audience that "raising the money can be done."

David Seward, Hastings' CFO for 18 years and the school's primary spokesman for the Y/Hastings project, said Hastings is still very much in. "We're committed to keeping the lot available for the Y, and I'm optimistic that the facility will be built," he said, "but we can't promise it will be available in perpetuity."

Central Y members had plenty to say. "I raised my family down the street

and we've been members for 30 years," said Joseph Asberry, husband of Kasey. "The association owes us an answer about why it hasn't delivered. There've been cuts in staff and hours with no dialogue about the future, and we want to know why."

Staff was cut 25% in July, youth programming fell to five days a week from six and fitness room hours were slashed by 18 hours a week.

Kasey Asberry had invited association board members to the meeting. None showed, but they were represented by Chip Rich, vice president of operations at the association.

He seemed surprised by the bluntness of some comments and questions: "We don't just want to be told what's happening — we want to be part of the planning and development and fundraising." And "Are you having discussion with Hastings and, if so, what's happening?"

"Is there a plan to build a new Y in this community? Yes or no?" asked TL CBD Director Dina Hilliard.

Rich's response was a shade below positive: "The commitment is still there, so I'd have to say yes."

Hilliard pushed. "How could you do that without an executive director here?"

Rich was terse. "The decision to build at a new site lives with the CEO and board of the YMCA of San Francisco, not the executive director of Central."

## LONGTIME DIRECTOR OUSTED

That's another messy part of this story. Gold, a tireless, much-admired promoter of the Y and its role in the community, told The Extra, "After 18 years as executive director, I moved to a new half-time position as the director of capital planning for the Central Y in August 2010. The position was defunded in September 2011."

Andrea Jones, named ED when

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