

Disputed 'saw-tooth' blocks added to Mid-Market PAC — yet members plead for TL input

Karen Oberdorfer

There's consensus in the neighborhood that mid-Market needs to be revitalized, but not everyone agrees which blocks should be redeveloped.

After working on the issue since 1995, the Mid-Market Project Area Committee at its April meeting agreed to add one city block to the boundaries of the proposed area and to continue to include four blocks that some in the Tenderloin would prefer left off.

PAC members added the west side of Tenth Street, between Market and Mission, the block where TNDC and the Citizens Housing Corp. are jointly developing affordable housing.

"It's a good addition to the survey area from a public

permitted uses to preserve the Tenderloin as a place for people to live.

Gladstone said that TNDC Executive Director Kelly Cullen had attended a recent PAC Projects subcommittee meeting and told members he objected to project area boundaries that would include four triangular-shaped blocks that face Market and also jut into the Tenderloin, variously called the "triangles" or "saw-tooth."

"Mr. Cullen expressed that there would be opposition from people North of Market," Gladstone said, "not based on good planning and public policy but on their perception that this [PAC] group is encroaching on their boundaries."

Later, Cullen confirmed to *The Extra* that he was con-

the North of Market Planning Coalition was working on developing its own survey area. Her group agreed to leave off the triangle blocks if NOMPC was successful. But it wasn't.

Diamond said she's since reached out to Tenderloin businesses, property owners and residents and held workshops — "[I've] walked in and out of hotels and businesses with flyers. . . . It's never going to be enough."

"I also think there should be some way that we can get consensus on this," Diamond said, "perhaps developing a planning subcommittee or something which brings in the North of Market people. I think it can be resolved."

PAC members seem uncertain about what their critics in the Tenderloin want. PAC members have a general picture, Gladstone said, but he wished that someone adamantly opposed to redevelopment would start attending the meetings.

He moved to continue outreach to the Tenderloin and to hold another community meeting. At the next PAC subcommittee meeting, he said, he wanted to see NOMPC's plans for the specific blocks in contention. "We may have a chance to incorporate some of them into our plans," he said.

Those plans include asking for a Special Use District, which will allow for leniency in height and density from City Planning on a "case-by-case basis."

Also on the PAC agenda, Lisa King, the Redevelopment Agency staff member on the PAC, announced that the area's biggest SRO — the 156-room Chronicle Hotel at 936-40 Mission St. — is for sale.

The Redevelopment Agency could leverage citywide tax-increment money to buy and renovate the old hotel for affordable housing. But PAC members agreed that the \$12 million asking price is too high.

Tax-increment money is the increase in property taxes a project area earns, King explained. Baseline taxes are determined in the first fiscal year after the Board of Supervisors approves a survey area and elevates it to project area status. Tax-increment money can be used for affordable housing anywhere in the city, but is rarely enough to finance large projects, and must be supplemented with city and state funds.

On May 14, Mid-Market PAC will present a plan update to the Planning Commission, including new boundary recommendations, but no action will be taken. ■



Mid-Market PAC area including disputed "saw tooth" blocks.

policy, planning and economic point of view, and it makes a good anchor for that end of the district," said Brett Gladstone of SPUR, a Mid-Market PAC member, one of two who represent business-serving civic organizations.

But the north side of the proposed project area is hotly contested.

"There is honest disagreement around this table about the best type of incentive — zoning, height, density, etc. — for that area," said Richard Livingston, administrative director of EXIT Theatre, one of two PAC representatives from arts and cultural organizations.

In a later e-mail to *The Extra*, Livingston wrote: "When community activists in the Tenderloin were successful in rezoning the neighborhood in the early 1980s, a primary goal was to preserve the residential [character] of the Tenderloin. Many, myself included, felt that the existing zoning was so far out of scale with the existing housing that it was a blueprint for demolition and displacement." The guiding principal of the North of Market Rezoning proposal, he added, was to downsize the height, bulk and

cerned about the encroachment, but he said that he has no objections to the PAC or its members. "I think they're doing a great job," he said.

At the end of the subcommittee meeting, members still voted to keep the triangles in the plan. One reason, Gladstone said, was because most buildings on those blocks have frontages on Market Street.

"This is one of those situations where both points of view are valid," said John Elberling of the South of Market Problem Solving Council, co-member of the PAC with Gladstone. "All of mid-Market benefits in terms of urban planning and everything else. But if you're in the Tenderloin, it isn't just [about] turf. It's having your neighborhood planned in a piecemeal fashion by having those blocks split off from some other overview of the future of the Tenderloin." Elberling said that in the interests of respecting the Tenderloin activists' "bigger picture," the PAC must "tie" its plan to theirs.

PAC Vice Chair Carolyn Diamond said that, years ago, when the mid-Market survey area was first being developed,

Diamond in the rough

A dozen years ago, Carolyn Diamond noticed certain Market Street blocks got the royal treatment from developers, while other areas were still back in the stone ages.

"It didn't take a rocket scientist to notice that there was no development between about Fifth and Van Ness along Market," said Diamond, vice-chair of the Mid-Market PAC and longtime executive director of the Market Street Association, a 120-member nonprofit improvement organization.

So, in 1994, she called on business and property owners along that stretch and organized a series of "power breakfasts" to discuss the underdeveloped mid-Market. Some owners said it was because the blocks were dirty, rampant with drugs, and things didn't seem to be getting better.

But Diamond said she was surprised to hear one point they all agreed on. They didn't think the problem was Market Street. It was the abandoned Greyhound Bus depot on Seventh Street, they said.

"There was 1.3 acres of vacant and empty buildings," Diamond said. People were living in them and "at night they'd have campfires; they burned one building down." At daybreak, these folks would start hanging out on Market Street and create trouble.

Redevelopment gets involved

The new federal building is slated for that spot. But, seven years ago, the bus depot represented a project large enough that just mowing the lawn wouldn't cut it. It was a problem that needed an agency the size of Redevelopment to fix. "At the time we felt we needed a big focused agency with money that was in the business of revitalizing areas," said Diamond.

The state formed the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency in 1948 to improve areas considered "blighted" — proven by the large number of vacant lots and commercial spaces, lack of commercial activity or damaged buildings.

The agency works in Board of Supervisors-defined project areas, but also can develop affordable housing projects throughout the city. With more than 25,000 units, Redevelopment, its Web site says, now is the largest local source for building and refurbishing affordable housing in the city. In fiscal 2000-01, its budget was \$162 million.

"Tried to be inclusive"

"I think [Mid-Market] is a very good project," Diamond said. "It has something for everybody, including incentives for developers to come in and build housing, and we've included social service agencies. We've tried to be inclusive of all kinds of populations, all kinds of services."

The proposed 30-year plan includes the permanent allocation of 130,000 square feet of space for nonprofit agencies. Diamond wasn't sure how much is presently occupied by nonprofits, but she said she thinks it's about that many square feet. This stipulation, she said, is an important safeguard against a real estate market that will surely fluctuate during three decades time, which might drive out low-rent inhabitants, as has happened in the past.

"That's pretty progressive thinking," she said.

But she said some people have the perception that the PAC is heavily weighted as a "businessman's" project. Actually, it's a mixed group, she said, and represents the demographics of the area. And just because some of the members own property, she said, "does not mean their sensibilities are not social or environmental."

— Karen Oberdorfer

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Carolyn Diamond: "I think this is a very good project. It has something for everybody."