

Walk-to-work housing OK'd and a vote to ban garages

As befits an inner-city organization in a transit-first metropolis, the Tenderloin Futures Collaborative spent a good portion of its June 12 meeting talking about wheels and where to stow them. Three of the four main agenda items had something to do with parking and cars.

Biggest was the news that Hastings was about to capitulate in its plans to build an 885-car garage at Golden Gate and Larkin, a direct response to a letter from state Sen. John Burton threatening to cut off Hastings' state funding if it proceeded with the project.

Sen. Burton, in turn, was responding to fierce community pressure to include housing in the project, begun back in December 2001, when a contingent of Hastings officials, architects and engineers formally presented their plans to the fledgling Collaborative.

Too many cars, too ugly, too hasty—ramming through the project without public input, said the Collaborative. It formed a committee that pushed for greater community scrutiny of the plans, notified Burton and other public officials of what Hastings was up to and began talking about alternative, mixed-use plans.

On June 26, the Hastings board of directors reluctantly rescinded its decision to approve the garage and voted to form a blue-ribbon committee to review the voluminous material already devoted to the garage project.

17 affordable units at Van Ness and Turk

Developers Pat and Anthony Theophilos told the Collaborative about their proposed 141-unit apartment complex at 724-30 Van Ness at Turk. They're targeting the 6,000 people who work in the Civic Center — folks who'd be thrilled to be able to rent market-rate apartments and walk to their jobs, Pat Theophilos said, so the complex will not provide parking places for every unit, as required by law. Instead, the ratio will be just under 1 in 3.

"It's the only 'controversial' thing about our plans," she said. "We want a 1:2.8 ratio and Opera Plaza [its cater-corner neighbor] wants 1:1."

The privately funded complex comprises two buildings connected by a common plaza. The building on Van Ness will be 13 stories and 6,600 square feet, the one on Turk nine stories and 8,800 square feet. The studio and one-bedroom-with-den units will rent for from \$1,100 to \$2,100. Per city ordinance, 12% of the units (17

Futures Collaborative

CARS TAKE A BEATING

Marjorie Beggs

units) will be affordable or below-market, that is 30% (\$770 a month) to 60% below the city's current median rents, according to the HUD definition.

"We think this fills a gap in the housing market," said Anthony Theophilos, who said the project has the support of the Housing Action Coalition, Tenderloin Community School, TNDC, City CarShare and the S.F. Bicycle Coalition.

And those pesky cars? "We think most tenants won't own cars," Pat Theophilos said, "and we also want to encourage people to take public transit." There'll be "lots of spaces for bicycles" plus two CarShare vehicles, which tenants can use when they need to, say, get out of town fast.

On June 20 the Planning Commission unanimously approved the project's request for the parking variance.

Quick vote to ban stand-alone garages

The Redevelopment Agency's Lisa King was making a presentation to the Collaborative about the Mid-Market Project Area Plan when Richard Allman, interim chairman of the Tenderloin Sidewalk Improvement Program, asked

about AGI's plans to build a six-story parking garage at Turk and Taylor.

The parcel is within the proposed boundaries of the project area, which includes four triangular blocks that jut off Market into the Tenderloin. But no one at the meeting had much information about what AGI was up to, so the group moved on to discuss whether tax revenues that accrue to Redevelopment will actually stay in Tenderloin (yes, probably), whether the Mid-Market PAC includes Tenderloin reps (yes, and there are still open PAC slots) and how involved Redevelopment plans to get in developing housing in the area (a lot, maybe).

King said Redevelopment hopes to designate the area as a special use district and is looking to rehab 87,000 square feet of housing. Also, the area

has 4 million square feet of empty or underutilized space. Redevelopment hopes to develop half of that for housing, and half of that as affordable housing, she said.

The idea of the AGI garage must have stayed in the back of people's minds. As the the Mid-Market discussion wound down, Brad Paul, housing specialist and former staff of the Lower Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force, had an idea:

"I think the PAC should introduce and pass — right away — a ban on any new free-standing garages in the area," he said. "Once they're built, they're gone for housing."

Paul made a motion on the ban, which was seconded, and all Collaborative members voted to let the PAC know its collaborative mind.

Fun and games — a free circus for kids

It was about clowns, not cars, and it was good news for the central city, Pat Wiley of Rec and Park told the meeting. She'd arranged for Make*A*Circus to come to the 6th and Folsom playground on July 19 and Children's Playground in the Tenderloin on July 31.

Free to children of all ages, the Make*A*Circus show opens with trapeze, acrobatics, human pyramid-building, stilt-walking and clowning by professional circus artists accompanied by a live band. The performers then teach a few moves to audience members (there's a special workshop for children under five), and invite them into the ring — instant stardom for even the littlest juggler.

Shows start at 1 p.m., but it's best to get there by 12:30 to get seats. For more information: 554-9532. ■

The next Futures Collaborative meeting: July 10, 10 a.m. 121 Golden Gate Ave.

City policies collide: transit-first vs. zoning

The city's transit-first policy is in conflict with its zoning requirements, according to Amit Ghosh, chief of Comprehensive Planning for the Planning Department.

Zoning law requires that parking spaces be made available when new housing and other projects are developed, yet this flies in the face of the transit-first policy, which is embedded in the city's Charter, Ghosh said. Zoning and transit first use a "different set of lenses," he said, with "the parking supply being one of the biggest elements that influence travel mode choice."

At the June 17 Board of Supervisors meeting, District 1 Supervisor Jake McGoldrick requested that a hearing be held to discuss this internal struggle. He proposed that the city adopt a Citywide Action Plan, which would include the transit-first policy. This would, in effect, put the differing lenses into one pair of glasses by guiding planning initiatives to improve housing, neighborhood services and transit. The board assigned McGoldrick's proposal to the Transportation and Commerce Committee.

Although some people claim that the rat race of cars searching for parking only adds to street congestion, Ghosh said that if there's less parking available and more emphasis on developing alternate transit modes, there'll be fewer cars driven in to fill the spots. This, in turn, motivates drivers to turn to public transit.

Adding slots for cars is "like dealing with obesity by loosening your belt," Ghosh said.

But, if the Planning Commission's approval of the Van Ness and Turk apartments on June 20 is any indication, transit-first may be getting the upper hand.

Karen Oberdorfer

City Planning still scrutinizing Fox-Warfield parking plan

from page 1

have told him about the plan.

AGI's latest submission was an attachment to the original plans of an addendum that shows a seven-story garage with retail on the ground floor. After the changes are incorporated, Miller said, the Office of Environmental Review gets another crack at it. Miller said the environmental review staff is concerned that the location is at a "sensitive traffic intersection" (Sixth and Market), and an additional 100 or so cars pulling in and out of the structure might disrupt the flow-through traffic.

Following the environmental review, there will be an additional 20 days of public notice during which the project could be opposed and then the Planning Commission will review it at a public hearing, Miller said.

At press time, Miller said he'd notified AGI of the need for more environmental review. He said the additional report could take about three weeks.

Tao also plans on pounding the pavement to get the project off the ground. "I'm going to be going to neighborhood groups," Tao said, to explain the proposal and hear their concerns.

He has already made several presentations to the Mid-Market PAC with AGI's various early plans, and the latest incarnation with the seven floors and ground floor retail he was scheduled to present at the PAC's July meeting. He will be presenting to the Futures Collaborative on July 10 and on the same

date he'll also show plans to NOMPC. If there is too much public resistance to this project, Tao said, "our only other option [with the space] is to do nothing."

Mid-Market PAC Vice Chair Carolyn Diamond said the PAC needs more information before they can take a stand. Nowadays "you have to give back a lot more to the neighborhood," she said, and the PAC wants to know what this project has to offer the neighborhood.

She also said that the PAC's general plan has been in the works so long that all of its goals and objectives are out of date. When SoMa was bustling, the parking goal included development of two parking garages. But now that the "economy's tanked," Diamond said, "it would be wise to review the parking goals."

Nighttime use is what AGI hopes the project's parking and restaurants will capture. It's behind the Warfield, across from the Golden Gate, and a block from EXIT Theatre. During the day the lot is sometimes not filled, Tao said and at night when there are shows, it often holds more than its normal capacity with valet parking.

But adding more parking, said Howard Strassner, transportation chair of the Sierra Club's San Francisco chapter, only increases the cars on the road.

"Every time you build a garage you induce someone to decrease use of transit. It builds congestion," he said. ■

Some regrets about the arrests

Five days after the direct action in the battle with Hastings, Collaborative members had little to say, though the action was the turning point in the community's victory.

"I was disappointed," said St. Anthony outreach worker Roscoe Hawkins. "It put a bad reflection on us." Hawkins was especially disturbed that not every one was able to have their turn speaking during the public comment period before garage protesters took over the microphone.

Sam Dodge, head of the SRO Collaborative, said: "It didn't come off exactly as planned. Apologies to the people here." He said that originally they wanted Randy Shaw to speak at the very end before starting the chanting, but his name got called too early. And suddenly the sit-in was happening.

"Hindsight's 20/20," he said.