

GOOD NEWS for...

MENTAL HEALTH INFO ONLINE

If you have questions about mental health, chances are the answer is online at www.networkofcare.org, which premiered May 16.

"Regardless of where visitors enter the site, they'll find what they need," said S.F. Community Behavioral Health Services Director Bob Cabaj in a press release. "This not only saves people time, but will help people with mental health issues to lead more independent lives."

The Web site is organized in six categories, but for now, specific San Francisco information is accessible only about seniors, people with disabilities and mental/behavioral health. Within those categories, however, is a comprehensive rundown of services, providers, patient rights and literature about specific disorders.

Users who click on mental/behavioral health can select from community announcements, nationwide news or seven subcategories related to mental health: local services; a library of articles; state and federal legislation; links to nonprofit and government programs; information about insurance coverage; local, state and national support and advocacy groups; and "my folder."

"That personal folder is something we're most excited about," said Belinda Lyons, executive director of the Mental Health Association of San Francisco. "It's a secure location where people can keep private information about medications and important numbers and retrieve them easily. They can give their doctors access to the folder, so it can be checked in an emergency."

Under the library category, people can find facts about hundreds of medications and medical tests, organized alphabetically; articles about legal rights; lists of support groups and how to contact them. The search function is efficient and easy to use.

"I really like the informational aspect of the library," said Alice Gleghorn, deputy director of Behavioral Health. "Someone encountering mental illness for the first time might be too scared to talk to anyone about it. The person — or a concerned friend or relative — can go to this great resource and have understandable explanations at their fingertips."

Some of the library information is available in Spanish, Tagalog, Cantonese, Russian, Vietnamese and Cambodian.

Networkofcare is the brainchild of former Assemblyman Bruce Bronzan, who also was associate dean of the UCSF medical school. He founded and is president of Trilogy Integrated Services, in San Rafael, which launched a much-abbreviated version of the Web site in 2001.

"We started the site with two California counties [Alameda and Sacramento] and only in the seniors category," said Trilogy's publisher, Kathy Sterbenc. "We now have 12 states, are adding two more this summer and have others almost ready to launch. The site has about 70,000 pages, but it definitely is a work in progress."

For San Franciscans, information in other categories — kids 0-5, children and families, developmental disabilities and domestic violence — will come later.

"It's not quite a treasure-trove yet," Lyons said, "but it's got a great structure."

The press release from the May 16 launch says the site is ADA-compliant and "Bobby-approved," which means that the Center for Applied Special Technology has tested it and found it accessible to people with disabilities.

—MARJORIE BEGGS

If you have some good news, send it to marjorie@studycenter.org or tom@studycenter.org.

Hastings is ready – Y not

430-car parking garage first from joint venture

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

AFTER nine months out of the spotlight, the Hastings-YMCA joint building venture at Golden Gate and Larkin took center stage again at the May Tenderloin Futures Collaborative meeting.

"We think this is a building that radiates light," said Hastings CFO David Seward of the 430-car garage with 9,200 square feet of ground-floor commercial, which will replace a 200-car surface parking lot. "The kind of retail — restaurants or cafes — is very important because it helps create an urban campus with street activity day and night. We don't want any dead storefronts."

The seven-story structure — with wide sidewalks and trees and plants along the sides — is a far cry from the eight-story, 873-car garage Hastings proposed in 2002 that drew heavy fire, including arrests of protesters, who insisted on housing, not cars.

The project's new draft supplemental EIR was published April 22 and a lightly attended hearing held May 11.

"Four testified in favor of the new plan," Seward said, "and one was opposed — a representative of the Sierra Club who, speaking on behalf of Transportation for a Livable City and the Bicycle Coalition, indicated that 430 stalls was too much parking. Those in favor said safe parking was needed to promote more evening activities."

Public comment on the EIR closed June 5. Lacking serious flak, Hastings' board of directors has calendared an EIR certification hearing for June 29.

As a state entity, Hastings' board, not City Planning, controls the project, including the EIR approval.

Seward said he expects the 18 months of construction to begin next spring. Then he fielded questions.

What happened to the student housing?

That idea was dropped a year and a half ago, when the joint Hastings-YMCA project changed from one structure to two, Seward said, and it wasn't feasible to have housing within a garage.

How will the parking spaces be allocated? asked Rachel Hiatt, county Transportation Authority planner.

Seward said 300 spaces will be for Hastings staff and students; 130 are for the public.

The self-park garage will open at 6 a.m. and close no later than midnight. There will be an attendant, and all floors have emergency phones and closed-circuit monitors. Hastings will hire a 24-hour security guard for the first few months to determine how safe the garage is.



Rendering of Hastings' proposed parking garage at Golden Gate and Larkin Streets by project architect International Parking Design.

Y DEAL LAGS BEHIND

Seward passed the baton to YMCA Executive Director Carmela Gold. At the September Collaborative meeting she announced that the for-profit housing developer A.F. Evans would purchase the Y and renovate it for low-income housing. Evans also bought two adjacent vacant lots owned by the Y, she said, where it would build market-rate condominiums. The developer needed a year, Gold said, to line up financing. The year is up.

"We plan to ink a formal deal with A.F. Evans in August," Gold said. "That's when it expects to have secure funding to build units for the chronic homeless population."

The Y's future is less certain.

"We're looking for an interim site, but we're also looking at staying here longer while continuing to work with Hastings on building our facility next to the garage," she said. "But that may be tight — it's a very expensive project."

Does that mean the Y might consider building its new facility somewhere else, The Extra asked, and if so, can Hastings go forward in its plans without the Y?

"Yes, we would consider building elsewhere," Gold said.

"And yes, we can go forward," Seward said. "We're going to build a development pad with perimeter retaining walls for the Y option, but if that doesn't happen, Hastings will build student housing with some athletic facilities there."

Even if the Y builds on the Hastings site, the construction of the two buildings is unlikely to be concurrent. Seward explained that, unlike Hastings, the Y is subject to the city's time-consuming permit, EIR and design review processes.

"We haven't approached Planning yet," Gold said. "If it wanted to, it could shave off six months to a year of the process. That would save us a lot of money and would mean much less disruption for the community."

A.F. Evans' development plans for the Y site are already pretty firm. Ruthy Bennett, Evans' senior project manager, told The Extra that the 18-month rehab would start in 2008. The building, an SRO with 150 units and on-site case management, will get tenant referrals from S.F. Public Health's Direct Access to Housing program. ■



CENTRAL CITY EXTRA is published monthly by San Francisco Study Center Inc., a private nonprofit serving the community since 1972. The Extra was initiated through grants from the S.F. Hotel Tax Fund and the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund. It is now assisted by the Kosbland Committee of the San Francisco Foundation. The contents are copyrighted by the San Francisco Study Center, 1095 Market Street, Suite 602, San Francisco, CA 94103.

PHONE: (415) 626-1650

FAX: (415) 626-7276

E-MAIL: centralcityextra@studycenter.org

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER: Geoffrey Link

SENIOR WRITER/EDITOR: Marjorie Beggs

REPORTERS: Tom Carter, Anne Marie Jordan, Ed Bowers

DESIGN AND LAYOUT: Lenny Limjoco

DESIGN CONSULTANT: Don McCartney

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Lenny Limjoco, Mark Ellinger

CONTRIBUTORS: John Goins, Adrian D. Varnedoe, Diamond Dave, William Crain, Mark Hedin, John Burks, Eric Robertson

EDITORIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

David Baker, Michael Nulty, Debbie Larkin, Nicholas Rosenberg, Brad Paul, Tariq Alazraie

Central City Extra is a member of the SAN FRANCISCO NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION