

Loophole allows \$500,000 SROs sold as condos in west SoMa

300 units in works; task force trying to halt the trend

BY TOM CARTER

PRIVATE developers are using a loophole in the Planning Code to build SROs South of Market that they can rent at market rate or possibly sell as \$500,000 minicondos. But a citizens advisory committee is bent on stopping the nascent trend they believe is misdirected.

SROs can only be built in certain parts of western SoMa and nowhere else in the city. More than 300 SRO units are in the Planning Department pipeline.

One of the largest projects — 102 units, each a scant 250 square feet — is to be completed in November at 77 Bluxome St. Ironically, Charles Breidinger, who owns it with his brother John, sits on the committee that would condemn the practice. The brothers have another market-rate SRO project slated for 32 units at 1140 Howard St.

“It was a different era and nobody dreamed how prices would take off.”

John Elberling
HEAD OF TODCO

disabled on fixed incomes who can't afford more than a small room. Most SROs are built or renovated by non-profits.

But the code didn't limit building to nonprofit developers or say SROs had to be rented to poor folks.

“We wanted to encourage the rebuilding of SROs after the '89 earthquake,” says John Elberling, who served on the council and heads TODCO, a neighborhood nonprofit developer. “And we limited it to just SoMa to see if it could work. It was a different era and nobody dreamed how prices would take off.”

Now, anybody can put up an SRO in SoMa's special use district, “mapping it out as a condo to rent, or to sell anytime,” Elberling says. “It's typical.”

And it's a far cry from what the problem-solving committee had in mind. The example was set by the first private developer to use the code in 1997. That's when the Yerba Buena Commons opened at Third and Harrison: 257 rooms, all affordable, most of them 200 square feet. In early July, it had 10 vacancies on Craig's List, twice the usual number because the recent management change hasn't caught up yet, a Commons spokesman said. And for an income under \$31,680, with three

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

DALY SAVES THE DAY

Gets the money for Bindlestiff



PAGE 3

SATURDAY NIGHT AT 7-ELEVEN

Celebration turns into birthday bash

PAGE 4

TENDERLOIN OBITUARIES

Neighborhood activists
Dunn, Walkup, others

PAGE 7

CENTRAL CITY

EXTRA

SAN FRANCISCO

FARMERS' MARKET MILESTONE



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Mariachis stroll through U.N. Plaza as the Farmers' Market celebrates its first 25 years.

25 years, still fresh

Heart of city greengrocery turns silver

BY JOHN GOINS

THE closest thing to a supermarket for the Tenderloin — with its cornucopia of fresh produce at affordable prices — is the Heart of the City Farmers' Market at U.N. Plaza. On June 21, the market marked its 25th anniversary.

The farmers' market is the main source of fresh fruit and vegetables for the salad bowl of ethnic cultures here who welcome a taste of home, and the seniors, disabled and other fixed-income folks who need fresh food for the many health benefits. The market is a resource that grew organically — and quickly — by word of mouth.

“When we first started we had 12 booths,” Heart of the City Manager Christine Adams said with a laugh. She was seated in her white van in front of the federal office building at the market. “We weren't even on the plaza. We were in a little walkway between the federal building and 10 United Nations.”

But now, on Wednesdays, Heart of the City averages about 50 booths, she said, and Sundays, close to 40.

John Garrone, who sells specialty mushrooms he grows on a farm in Moss Landing just north of Monterey, wasn't sure how many customers come to his busy stall. “I have no idea. The only estimate I can go by are the bags. We use somewhere between 500 to 1,000 bags, but not every customer uses one bag,” Garrone said he had been working at the market for “well over 20 years.”

In addition to the usual white buttons and crimini, Garrone always carries oyster mushrooms, shitake and portabellas plus half a dozen other varieties, and, when in season, wild chanterelles, morels and, occasionally, even white and black truffles.

The most booths ever were 98, said Adams. “That was around 1987. But there was a lot of repetition. We had four fish trucks selling the same thing. I found that when the market is packed like that, it looks good, but people aren't making the money.

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



A colorful sign proclaims the silver anniversary.