

# The Hugo: City's first eminent domain case in 25 years

BY TOM CARTER

A SOMA community up in arms over a blighted building that's been a neighborhood black eye for years finally persuaded the Redevelopment Agency Commission on Jan. 15 to start official eminent domain proceedings against the owners of the Hugo Apartments at Sixth and Howard streets, vacant for 20 years.

"We've worked hard and we care about our neighborhood," resident Lisa Hasen told the committee. She said the Hugo has been like "a Godzilla footprint smashing homes" in the vastly improved Sixth Street Redevelopment area that's trying to molt its skid row reputation.

In December, SOMPAC, the Redevelopment Agency's community advisory committee, recommended eminent domain.

The four-story building has been fallow and deteriorating since a fire in 1988. But in 1997, with the owners' permission, sculptor Brian Goggin and his artistic friends put up Defenestration on the façade of the Hugo, an art project that looks like the household furniture and appliances are flying out the windows. It has attracted international attention. Below discolored painted brick in the stories above, the Hugo's ground floor walls are covered with plywood and mesh metal screens and slathered with wild, cartoon-like murals.

But saving whimsical art wasn't a concern of 15 community members whose patience had worn thin.

They pleaded for adoption of the requisite Resolution of Necessity to move on the Hugo. No one opposed it. Some cited a history of building citations the owners had ignored over the years. Others said the abandoned building discouraged prospective new businesses from locating in the neighborhood.

"It's clear what's going on," said Paul Lam, rep-

resenting a nearby business. "(The Hugo's owners) wait, wait, wait and wait until the price goes up, and the community has been paying the price."

"This (Sixth Street) is the gateway (to the city) and it's an embarrassment," said John Melone, a member of SOMPAC, which advised Redevelopment to make the owners an offer, then begin eminent domain proceedings if the offer is refused.

After public comment closed, Commissioner London Breed said she could "appreciate artistic value but this is a terrible-looking building. I know there's a cloud over Redevelopment because of

## SOUTHSIDE

what has been done in the past. But I hope we move forward."

It has been 25 or more years since Redevelopment exercised the eminent domain option that requires provable conditions of blight, which the Hugo has on several counts.

"We have fulfilled all the legal steps for the resolution and we have a community that's very offended," Commissioner Ramon Romero said. "We've watched this deterioration for many years. We don't like to use this power, but it's important."

On Romero's motion, the resolution passed 6-0-1 with Commissioner Darshan Singh abstaining.

The resolution means that Redevelopment will commence eminent domain proceedings in Superior Court within six months. The court then decides the price for Redevelopment to pay if the owners haven't already sold the building by then or declared they want to renovate and demonstrate they have the funds. Either would eliminate Hugo's blight status and end the eminent domain process.

A third possibility is for the husband and wife owners, I.M. (David) and S.I. Patel of Hillsborough, to agree with Redevelopment on a compromised sale price. The agency wants to tear it down and

build affordable housing.

The Patels rejected Redevelopment's \$3.25 million offer last year. They subsequently hired Sam Patel of CSV Hospitality Management to get an appraisal and represent them.

Sam Patel, not related to the owners, was at the hearing but did not testify. He responded to a question from Singh during the commission's deliberations, answering from his seat that he estimated the Hugo's worth at \$5.6 million.

TODCO, which transformed the burned-out Delta Hotel at Sixth and Mission streets into the splendid Bayanihan House, offered the Patels \$1.9 million in the late 1990s, the Redevelopment document in November says. In 2000, the Patels also rebuffed an AF Evans offer.

In a meeting in October 2006, I.M. Patel's son-in-law, Jack Patel, told Redevelopment staff that the family had recently rejected a \$4.6 million offer because they wanted \$5 million.

According to a Redevelopment document, in an April 2007 meeting at the Ramada Hotel on Seventh Street, which the Patels also own, the owners said they would sell for \$7 million. Apparently, according to a conversation the memorandum quotes, the owners thought the city had upped the corner's 50-foot height limit to 85 feet. But that change remains merely a recommendation by City Planning in its Eastern Neighborhoods Plan, with no adoption date in sight.

Then in July, the owners reversed course and said they wanted to develop the Hugo themselves.

"Now we're \$2.4 million apart," said Sam Patel in the hallway after the hearing. "And we're in the process of selecting a third appraisal."

If negotiations go astray, Patel said it was unlikely the owners would let eminent domain run its course, with expensive lawyers on both sides slogging through the system for "maybe two years." It's "50-50" the owners would renovate, he said, and wind up with 69 livable apartments. ■

## TENDERLOINHEALTH

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### Outreach and Community Events February 2008

#### Health Promotion Forum

**Topic:** Black is Beautiful, in recognition of National Black/HIV Awareness Day

**Speaker:** Taylor Morrison & Luther Carthen of TLH and TLH alumnus Blackberri

**Date/Time:** Thursday, February 7, 2 pm - 3 pm

#### HIV Treatment Forum

**Topic:** Staying On Top of Your HIV

**Speaker:** Jennie Vanderlaag, Gilead Sciences

**Date/Time:** Monday, February 11, 3 pm - 4 pm

#### Client Advisory Panel

Come talk with Tenderloin Health's Board Client Representative(s) and program managers about plans for Tenderloin Health. Also provide input on new services and how we can improve.

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, February 13, 11:30 am - 1 pm;

Wednesday, February 27, 11:30 am - 1 pm

#### Volunteer and Intern for Tenderloin Health

**Orientation:** Sunday, February 10, 12 pm - 6:30 pm

220 Golden Gate Ave., 3rd Floor  
lunch provided

You must register for volunteer trainings.  
Stop in/call Emilie (415) 437-2900 ext. 234.

For a schedule of our current groups or for more information  
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## OBITUARIES

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"He was a kind person, always told it like it was," Fagan told The Extra. "I remember that when we were doing the story, he seemed genuinely ready to get off the streets."

The last time he saw Mr. Dick was several months ago, Fagan said. "He seemed quite frail, but then, I was always amazed that he just kept going — he had that homeless look, thin and tough."

Ward said that the last time he stopped by the hotel to take Mr. Dick out for coffee, a monthly ritual, he learned that he had died.

"Mike was a sweetheart of a person," Ward said, "a gentle person with no pretensions, no meanness in him."

Ward told Fagan about Mr. Dick's death. Both said they would have been at the memorial had they known about it.

At the gathering, Coast Case Manager Brady Skinner recalled how Mr. Dick had attended hotel meetings and coffee hours, and even helped decorate the lobby for the Christmas holidays.

A woman who identified herself as Miss Toni sang a sweet, slightly off-key song to remember Mr. Dick, "a great person," she said.

"We'd nod, but I didn't really know Michael well," said Joe Jackson, a Coast resident for 20 years who's seen the hotel change for the better. "Ten years ago, when someone died, the fact was ignored — they'd change the bedding and turn over the room. Now we have social support staff, social hours, a community room, memorials like this. We're becoming a community here."

Staff said they couldn't comment on the cause of Mr. Dick's death but all considered it untimely. ■

—MARJORIE BEGGS

### CHUI Y. TAO Tenderloin's oldest resident

Chui Y. Tao, a devout Chinese woman with a radiant smile — believed to be the oldest person in the Tenderloin — died Dec. 28, 12 days after celebrating her 96th birthday.

Mrs. Tao, weak and cyanotic, was taken to California Pacific Medical Center by ambulance Dec. 20 from TNDC's Turk-Eddy Preservation apartments, coincidentally during a memorial service for Bernard DeFoe, also a resident.

Mrs. Tao had suffered a heart attack and it prevented her from swallowing food, her daughter, Anna Cheung, said later. But the old woman refused feeding tubes. A week later, she died in her sleep.

"It was like a candle burning out," Cheung said. "In the Chinese way of counting, she was 99."

Cheung had treated her mother and friends to a birthday dinner on Dec. 15, the day before her birthday, at the Tong Palace restaurant on Clement Street, as she had for the past five years. It was a festive occasion.

Mrs. Tao had been in fair health until May when she started using a walker indoors and a wheelchair outdoors, aided everywhere by her faithful care-

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