

Original Joe's gets \$50,000 to help it reopen

Mayor's office also invests in promoting Tenderloin history

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

THE city wants change in the Tenderloin, and it's putting its money where its public policy mouth is. The latest investments: \$50,000 to help reopen Original Joe's, \$20,000 to launch the Uptown Tenderloin History Museum and \$15,000 to get historical plaques mounted on TL buildings.

The money comes from the city's general fund, a one-time allocation from last year's economic stimulus funds to the Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development for grants to revitalize neighborhood and business corridors citywide. In all, OEWD has awarded \$535,464 to 14 projects.

Original Joe's has been boarded up since October 2007, when fire destroyed its kitchen and smoked out the 30-room Moderne Hotel upstairs. Owners Marie and John Duggan have periodically announced they will bring the landmark restaurant back.

The city's grant may provide the needed leverage. Or not.

Amy Cohen, director of neighborhood business development for OEWD, said the grant — to North of Market Neighborhood Improvement Corp., which will handle the agreement with the Duggans — is still being negotiated.

The Duggans' proposal asked for \$145,972 to partly repair Joe's — \$6,500 to demolish and drywall the interior; \$22,472 to improve the façade; and \$117,000 to install new heating, ventilation, air conditioning and water heater systems.

The proposal said that if that was too much for the city to handle, the Duggans had "other sources" to make up the difference. Cohen said John Duggan had estimated the total cost of reopening Joe's at around \$1 million and seemed confident he could raise it. He projected reopening the restaurant in October.

The Extra tried to confirm and update progress on Joe's, but repeated calls to Duggan were not returned. Joe's ground floor was still boarded up on March 19, but workmen were clearing furniture out of the second floor hotel.

The city's grant is only a third of the request, and Cohen says that 50 grand can go toward any costs that will help reopen the beloved eatery.

The shuttered Joe's is a hard-to-ignore eyesore, right in the crosshairs of the city's campaign to turn Taylor Street into an arts corridor.

"We consider Original Joe's to be a linchpin, but there's a caveat — we can't force it to open," Cohen said. "If the owners can't reopen Joe's, at least façade work will make it more leasable to someone else. As it is, it doesn't show very well."

She's not alone in wanting Original Joe's to return to the Tenderloin. One support letter for the Joe's proposal came from EXIT Theatre Artistic Director Christina Augello and Managing Director Richard Livingston.

Joe's, they say, was "the most important business for our patrons, staff, artists and volunteers. They went there before shows and after shows and the loss . . . [has] left an empty hole in the neighborhood."

Cohen hopes the grant will encourage other investors to commit to Joe's renovation.

"It was our suggestion that the Duggans include exterior repair in their proposal," Cohen said. "Everyone's watching Original Joe's — an improved façade can make people more excited. It can build a buzz."

Part of Economic and Workforce Development's negotiations on the grant involve what happens if nothing happens.

"We put conditions on the money," Cohen said. "If Joe's doesn't reopen in a year, they give the money back, although it can be renegotiated if



PHOTO BY MARJORIE BEGGS

The 50th plaque mounted in the Uptown Historic District summarizes the Ambassador Hotel's history.

things are under way. And if they open another active retail business in the space, that would be okay, too.

"But of course we hope it will be Joe's."

MUSEUM TO BE A DESTINATION

In his proposal, Tenderloin Housing Clinic Executive Director Randy Shaw said the Uptown Tenderloin History Museum will improve the neighborhood's image, stimulate business, create jobs and give the TL "what it has long lacked: a prime daytime destination that attracts tourists and others into the heart of the community."

And it will be more than a museum with exhibitions of the neighborhood's colorful past — jazz joints, rock recording studios, musicians hanging out at the Musicians Union, swinging hotels, tea dances and more. The museum will mix in live music, community events and a cafe, and it will be the starting point for neighborhood tours, including one of an occupied SRO.

Shaw began envisioning the museum a couple of years ago, about when he started pushing for the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District.

The 6,400-square-foot museum will be in the Cadillac Hotel, at the corner of Eddy and Leavenworth, where Tenderloin Housing Clinic has a 50-year lease and now houses one of its programs.

His target opening date for the museum is early 2012.

Like the Original Joe's grant, the \$20,000 museum grant will cover only a portion of the work to get it up and running: repainting the lower level of the Cadillac exterior, designing and fabricating a sample corner window exhibit, and mounting banners above the windows, illuminated at night, that announce the site as the museum's future home.

Shaw estimates that he needs about \$3 million to get its doors open. One option for raising a big chunk of that is a \$2 million HUD loan, he said. On Jan. 14, the mayor announced plans to create an \$11.5 million pool of low-interest loans through HUD for mid-Market and Tenderloin projects that

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PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Original Joe's, the most important restaurant in the Tenderloin, caught fire in 2007 and has been shut since.

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