Redevelopment Agency demise a body blow to Sixth Street

$4 million a year lost, along with the loss of momentum

BY BRIAN RINKER

WHILE city agencies scramble to fill the gaps left by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, projects to revitalize the Sixth Street Corridor have ceased, funding is gone, and the future is uncertain.

“We fear,” says Jenny McNulty, executive director of Urban Solutions, “that without support, the revitalization efforts of Sixth Street might be reversed and it will be once again filled with shuttered businesses.”

In more than 20 years, Redevelopment spent $85 million trying to revitalize a 70-acre area south of Market Street. It concentrated on the Sixth Street Corridor, an area notorious for crime, homelessness, alcohol, drugs and worse. With its public advisory committee SOM-PAC, and community-based organization, Urban Solutions, an open dialogue with the diverse community occurred and slow growth began.

Initially, the agency was only authorized to re- pair damage caused by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and develop affordable housing. Then, in 2005, the agency increased its scope and officially began to combat neighborhood blight and encourage economic growth.

“It is not the same Sixth Street it was,” says Mike Groso, senior project manager of the former Redevelopment Agency. “It is a much better place now.”

The agency spent $66 million over the years on affordable housing, creating 1,100 new and renovated units. The Public Initiative Development Organization, a nonprofit arm of Redevelopment, owns and operates the $23 million Plaza Apartments on Sixth and Howard.

“We can’t continue to support the businesses without the funding.”

Jenny McNulty

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Urban Solutions

Art is thriving in SROs

Amazing residents surrounded by their own creations

BY TOM CARTER

THERE are many artists in the Tenderloin. Home is often an SRO, where life can be rich and varied. “It takes all kinds” is practically a neighborhood mantra. The three people profiled here are both SRO dwellers and artists. One works with beads, one combines art with compassion, the other raises collecting to a curatorial art. Our kind of stars.

ARTIST ON THE RUN

Anyone visiting affluent but insular Mexico Miller is astounded by her walls and inclined to call her eighth-floor room in the Alexander Residence a “museum.”

More than 130 masks from all over the world share wall space with seven of Miller’s large, colorfully beaded artworks, plus paintings she has created, mostly images of gods from old Mexico. Some of the beaded pieces took her a year to make.

“I work five to 12 hours a day, seven days a week,” Miller says, “it’s just something I must do — I’m an artist. And I don’t go anywhere or spend any money — except this one thing I must do — I’m an artist. And I don’t go anywhere or spend any money — except when I travel.”

For several years that meant Mexico, cheap and accessible. In every town, she makes a bedline to the mercados to find merchants’ shelves in 5- by-10-foot stalls

wildly bedecked with colorful strands of tiny plastic beads that she uses to create her intricate tapestries.

“A pound of beads may cost $100 here, but just $20 there,” she says, as jocular and disarming as Julia Child. “It pays me to go and they treat me like a queen because I clean out their shelves.”

She has been to Puerta Vallarta, La Zapatilla, Zapatopan recently. In Zaptilla she was inspired by the quality of glass sculptures children make at an art school from melted down pop bottles. In Zapatopan, she sought out the Huichol Indians, the peyote yarn painters who also work famously with the same small beads. She thought she might learn something from them.

“But they are very protected by the government.” Miller said. “They smoke peyote — and I have no judgment on that — and come down out of the hills and sell their stuff, which is pretty high-priced — a mask is $100. Then they go back up into the hills to their mud huts. I found them unfriendly and uncommunicative.”

Squirrelled away in drawers in her living area are more than a dozen large shoeboxes each holding at least 10 plastic bags of tiny, colored beads, some fluorescent or iridescent. She uses tweezers to fix them to a glued surface. But now she is painting a 2- foot-square cityscape that must be finished before she turns to a new beading project.

Another work is a slightly smaller painting, “It’s my concept of the world. It’s disarming as Julia Child. “It pays me to go and they treat me like a queen because I clean out their shelves.”

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Feds force last pot shop in Tenderloin to close

BY TOM CARTER

They are looking to private-sector funding, provided. Proposals for Sixth Street will be presented many special programs with profits to help the community, such as free medicine once a week for 60 destitute patients suffering from cancer and HIV, free lunches and grocery giveaways, even aid to a hospital in Africa fighting HIV/AIDS.

U.S. Attorney Melinda Haag sent the threatening letter Nov. 25 to O’Farrell Properties LLC, owner of 669 O’Farrell St., where Sanctuary occupied the storefront. She cited its federal violations and said the property was “subject to seizure and forfeiture.” Sanctuary had to fold within 45 days of the letter, which was Jan. 7, or else.

Welch, hospitalized with an aorta blood clot, feared the worst.

“If they close us down, I think all of us (eight employees) will be homeless,” he said then. “It’s hard to fight from a hospital bed.”

The reason the U.S. attorney picked on Sanctuary was believed to be its proximity to Tenderloin Children’s Playgound directly behind the dispensary, Welch said, based on a conversation he had with a spokesman at the U.S. attorney’s office when he was trying with no luck to speak to Haag.

The statewide crackdown was ostensibly aimed at pot shop profiteers. At least three of the city’s 26 dispensaries have closed since November. The Drug Enforcement Administration has sent requests for records from 11 dispensaries, the Examiner reported Feb. 13.

“A business typically notifies the tax collector of its closing when the bill comes,” said Public Works spokesman Michael Welch. “The Department of Health, which oversees the dispensaries. The tax collector then notifies the property owner or the lessee. It could be after they file a notice of closing with the county tax collector. If DPH notices the closure during route work, we will notify the tax collector.”

Sanctuary did not notify DPH or the tax collector of its closing. Welch said it had not paid its 2012 license fee, he said, and “it’s unclear to me whether they are out of business.”

California’s 1996 Compassionate Use Act was drafted as a tax-exempt, non-profit,state, lacking regulation, profiteers moved in.

Four years ago, Welch distributed Sanctuary money. “Things will go on.”

With SOMPAC gone, the community’s access to city officials through Redevelopment also gone, the community input cut off.

“The PAC was unique in one way,” Stadlman said. “It deliberately set up to collect all the diverse aspects of the community. The PAC brought a complete cross section of people together.”

Henry Karnilowicz, president of the South of Market Business Association, agreed. “The community input was cut off.”

Karnilowicz has doubts about the substation. He doesn’t question the mayor’s sincerity, but does question the reality of the spending. “It’s been pretty nerve-wracking for the community,” he said.

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Gray Area Foundation for the Arts, left, anchor tenant on Newsom’s Tenderloin Arts Corridor, moved to the Warfield Building after being evicted from Taylor Street. The old Gaiety Theater, right, planned for renovation to be a player in the corridor’s cachet, still sits all bundled up on Turk Street.

Arts District in shambles in just 2 years

Newsom’s vision sours as new phase takes shape

BY JONATHAN NEWMAN

ITH typical Boutrich, Mayor Gavin Newsom introduced a multi-agency conference at Showdogs, then a new hot dog diner, at the triangle of Market, Turk and Golden Gate on the Tenderloin’s southern edge.

Surrounded by young aides from his Office of Economic and Workforce Develop- ment, dark-suited bodyguards, SPD functionaries and media reps, Newsom announced the Central Market Redevelopment that was to push the area’s revival.

It was January 2010 and the spearhead of this renewal was the downtown Arts District, a plan to refashion Taylor from Market Street to O’Farrell into a Tenderloin gateway of galleries, public art exhibits, artists’ studios and general bonhomie in hopes of attracting crowds and shoppers.

The Department of Public Works would redesign pedestrian crosswalks on Taylor and upgrade street landscaping, Newsom noted. An experimental ban on cars eastbound on Market from Eighth to Fifth streets would increase pedestrian traffic, he hoped, and CityPlace, a proposed five-story glass retail mall poised to begin major demo- lition and construction on Market a half-block east of Taylor, would bring new life to the area.

FIGURE 3

THINGS WERE LOOKING UP

Newsom also cited the opening of Gray Area Foundation for the Arts at 55 Taylor St., the endlessly rumored reopening of the fire- damaged Original Joe’s at 144 Taylor and the Art In Storefronts program on Market Street as signs that things were already look- ing up. Six months later, San Francisco play- writer Sean Owens and his production part- ner, Cameron Eng, announced plans to turn the 240-44 Taylor St. storefront into a 300-seat live performance theater.

Mayor Ed Lee has refashioned the Central Market Partnership of the Newsom era — itself a recrafting of the 1995 Central Market Redevelopment Plan — into the Central Market Economic Strategy, designed to “revitalize Central Market and the adja- cent neighborhoods.” Lee’s plan is for the city to partner with private and nonprofit developers, exempt from payroll taxes for up to six years any Tenderloin businesses that create new jobs and revamp the look of Market Street before the boulvard’s sched- uled repaving in 2015.

To date, one loan has been granted from the Central Market Cultural District Loan Fund — $250,000 to Pearl’s Burgers, which opened its fourth location at Sixth and Market — two applications are pending and 11 applications denied or dormant. Part of the difficulty in securing this money for the revival of central Market is that applicants must hire one new full-time employee for each $50,000 loaned, a tough hurdle for most arts groups.

Still, new players have entered the stage. Zendesk, the software innovator, has leased two floors at 598 Market St. for its 150 employees and Burning Man’s Black Rock Arts Foundation has settled in at 995 Market St., leasing space for 30 workers.

Sumski, the octogenarian owner of the 11-story building at Turk and Taylor streets that initially housed Gray Area, moved out a porto steaks. Its 70-year Warfield Building and the Shorestein- owned Golden Gate Theater building, reflect badly and the recent loss of the old Gaiety Theater’s plans with plans to open a restaurant with a 60-foot-long bar and cabaret stage. PianoFight, which operated the CityPlace Building at the intersection of Mason, Turk and Market streets. Meanwhile, ACT has opened a small-box performance space — PianoFight’s lease and the reflux of the Costume Shop — at 117 Market near Seventh Street and recently purchased the nearby Strand Theater with plans to make it a 300-seat live performance theater.

Elvin Padilla, project director of TEPD’s North of Market Neighborhood Improvement Corp., agrees with Sumski about vacancies.

“If the Golden Gate Theater would start running performances again, it would bring people and energy back to the street,” Padilla said. But he still sees youth and tal- ent heading for the Tenderloin, citing PianoFight’s lease and the refurbishing of the 240-44 Taylor St. storefront into gallery/art studio by Hella More Funner, an art collective of Sam Fuchs and Adam Gray, as signs of hope.

In deeding the mayor’s economic strate- gy for Central Market, OWED polled 124 Tenderloin residents and found what they consider the gravest problems in the neighbor- hood — homelessness, lack of cleanli- ness and crime — and its biggest needs: additional housing, jobs for residents, and a full-service neighborhood grocery store.

The Taylor Street Arts Corridor is in shambles, at least as it was originally con- ceived. It is becoming something different — and its biggest need.

And for the 21 Club — the landmark dive bar that Esquire noted — to be the sen- ior arts venue on Taylor Street is just anoth- er real-life example of the Tenderloin mantra. Expect the unexpected.

PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

■

THE CERAMICS STUDIO OPENING

A ceramics studio, the Clay Under- ground, has leased part of old Joe’s as well. It opened in February, offering classes and shared studio space for ceramists at 187 Eddy St. off Taylor.

Tenderloin Economic Development Project is partnering with American Conservatory Theater to build a $100 million mid-Market Center for the Performing Arts at 950 Market St., the intersection of Mason, Turk and Market streets. Meanwhile, ACT has opened a small-box performance space — PianoFight’s lease and the reflux of the Costume Shop — at 117 Market near Seventh Street and recently purchased the nearby Strand Theater with plans to make it a 300-seat live performance theater.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

work, or even sold a single piece, but she has given a few things away. Her piece de resistance — it took a year to paint — is the plumed serpent Maayan god. The stippled orange and green oil painting is 20-by-30 inches. “I have a thing for cultures other than my own,” Miller says. “I feel like I’m a child of the universe anywhere I go.”

Miller periodically goes to the Tenderloin, or she couldn’t stand living here. “You see people throwing up in the street, shooting up, jacking off, it’s a rough place.” She was mugged a year ago. But the grim Tenderloin is ultimately affordable. And because of her Spartan life she’s able to save her nickels and dimes to travel every year or two.

“I get an idea of where I want to go and get books on it and do research,” she says.

Miller wasn’t always a full-time artist. A barber for 28 years, she had had two shops in Carmel Valley, the Clip Joint and the Mid-Vally Barbershop, where she scratched her artistic itch by whittling or painting at a little desk in back. Then she sold the shops to bankroll her lifelong dream — a dive into higher education. And at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, she did quite well, graduating magna cum laude with a BFA degree. Then she got a master’s degree.

She lived in San Carlos. As her savings dwindled, her rent jumped $200, leaving her $6 a month to live on. She got very depressed.” She ended up in San Francisco homeless as she had been for four years in her early 20s in Monterey. But she pulled out of it. She became an Alexander resident with a heightened sense of well-being.

“Love the aboriginal culture, their idea of origin, their religious beliefs,” she says. “They can make art out of just a twig — painting it and putting dots on it. I’ve used dots, too. But that’s a $7,000 trip. Until then, I’ll be eating lettuce sandwiches and peanut butter.”

Todd Hebbron

PROMINENT: POSTCARD OBSESSION

Todd Hebbron got tired after his friend, Buck, didn’t return to the bar from the lobby bathroom in Yosemite’s Ahwahnee Hotel. So he strode over to the gift shop, bought five postcards, and he just kept going.

“If maybe he’d have come back sooner, I wouldn’t have been doing this,” said Hebbron, 62, grinning and looking pleased at the postcards on his busy walls in his neatly organized sixth-floor room at the Ambassador Hotel. He likes sports, too.

The walls are colorfully swathed, dominated by Giants orange and 49ers red. He has 24 Giants schedules, 6 ’49ers, 6 Warriors and 24 pennants. He also has framed pictures of athletes. Thanksgiving church gatherings, seven blowups of Route 66 decal-scenes (he belongs to the nostalgic Route 66 Association), a raft of pins, old maps, two watercolors his stepfather painted and, not least of it, 17 framed postcards. However, it’s an understatement to say the postcards are the tip of the iceberg.

Hebbron has 12,605 postcards that he went on to write since that stimulating bathroom break, Sept. 25, 1974. From then on, Hebbron, a postcard collector before that, wrote them five at a time, being especially prolific when traveling. He keeps a diary with the names. The recipients are his family in Los Altos and other relatives and friends in California, Illinois, Minnesota, Texas, Oregon and Washington.

“My former landlord in Minnesota not only answers, she writes me about twice as many as I send her,” he says. “People are grateful for a postcard correspondence. I’m not a computer person, just sort of old-fashioned.”

Hebbron’s postcard-writing record came in 1994, a year he traveled across country. He wrote 605. Last year he wrote 379 postcards, and he just keeps going.

The ones on his walls are select postcards commemorating milestones, like the 7,000th he sent, and the 9,000th. But Hebbron has embell- ished the postcards to look like fancy certifi- cates. He has numbered and color-coded the postcard and on paper above has written the date, the five addresses he sent the card to, the store he wrote in, plus the town’s name along with its emblem. He puts the special ones in 6- by 10-inch frames. Other formatted postcards he stashes in 157 scrapbooks, most of which are in storage at his parents’.

“I call them picture postcard personal places.”

Some he has given away, like the one near the pickle barrel on the balcony facade at Tommy’s Joynt on Van Ness Avenue.

You could say Hebbron’s life has followed his bliss. In 1982, he wrote a compliment to a postcard manufacturer in Aurora, Ill. It led to an exchange of letters, and a job for him the next year.

Although Hebbron has been at the
Ambassador nearly seven years, he doesn’t like staying long anyplace and soon moved on to work for postcard companies in Phoenix, Portland, San Antonio, and Smith Nowelty Co., here in San Francisco, one of the nation’s oldest postcard companies, where he continues to work periodically, stocking store shelves, among other jobs. “People come in and say this is like a little museum,” Hebbron says pleasantly, proud of the colorful detail he has amassed. Friends have suggested he use his copyrighted format and go into business.”But no,” he says.”It’s not for me. I’m in for the nostalgia of it.”

He thought the place needed brightening up. Sierra suggested in 2002 to Community Housing Partnership, which owns the place, that he paint a tropical mural on a community room wall. CHP approved and furnished the project grew to include a decorative terrarium with flowers and a gurgling fountain under the mural. “I wanted something relaxing,” he says, “a small paradise so people felt connected.”

He went on to organize monthly art and crafts classes downstairs and to furnish supplies, snacks and beverages. Making art is therapeutic, he says. When he finds out what each person likes he suggests a suitable medium. Once a month he organizes recycling, which is more like a garage sale. He makes a flyer and calculates it, then meets with residents a day in advance to preview their pieces, mostly cameras, DVDs and stereo. They do the pricing. At the beginning of the month, the objects go on tables he sets up outside and the sale is on. He includes recycle pamphlets. “A lot of units are full of stuff but it’s not organized properly. If they’ve been homeless and living out of a push cart, they bring all that with them. Some don’t have money for food.”

An invertebrate recycler, Sierra scours neighborhoods on his bicycle for castoff treasures to bring back to the hotel. Sometimes he’ll travel by Muni, so he can haul larger items like a TV and refrigerator, which he has given away to residents who needed them. Sierra’s art — paintings, photographs, collages — are also found throughout the lobby and ground-floor common rooms.

Now, he’s starting to organize a consciousness-raising group to meet on the topic of breathing. He has asthma. There are many smokers in the San Cristina.

“I’m not better than anyone,” he says. “I just want to do things right. I want to bring the best of me wherever I am. Thank God I don’t have addictions. Thankfully, I have ideas.” It’s a huge commitment the diminutive artist has taken on, sustained by his own shyness, which he has overcome.

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**HAROLD ARMWOOD**

34 years of disco dancing

Harold Armwood and Steve Royston were at separate tables in a Hollywood restaurant in 1977 when a mutual friend introduced them. They hit it off, hooked up and went on to spend countless nights at discos dancing the night away in a relationship that lasted 34 years.

After that first year they were inseparable, traveling back and forth from San Francisco to family in Chicago, working as picture framers, bike messengers and day laborers.

Their relationship ended when Mr. Armwood, who had been in ill health and cheating death for several years, died at San Francisco General Hospital Feb. 6. Cause of death wasn’t official, but Mr. Armwood had long been HIV-positive and for two years underwent treatment for Kaposi’s sarcoma.

He is friend.

He believes his actions speak for themselves

You can count on his friendship, strength and loyalty

He is brother

Saying this was the last time he’d be with his longtime friend, Royston went to the table, held up the picture and said to it, “Goodbye, I love you so much.”

Mr. Armwood’s body had been sent to Chicago, where his relatives lived. He was to be buried the next day.

— TOM CARTER

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For more information contact Dina Hilliard 415-292-4812 or dinanomtcbd@att.net

All meeting and committee information is available on our website: nom-tlcbd.org
Architects play role in nonprofits’ survival

BY MARJorie BEggs

Architecture links pro bono pros with groups in need

The faux wood floor is smooth, almost silky, a far better surface for the multipurpose room in the Study Center’s new digs than the stained plywood the group replicated.

The flooring — 879.6 square feet of oak-colored Deco Advantage Luxury Vinyl Plank — came to Study Center freebies to an innovative online program that lets nonprofits match their design or renovation needs with architectural firms willing to pledge at least 1% of one employee’s annual billable hours to pro bono work. That averages about 20 hours a year.

In the last year, five other central city or mid-Market nonprofit projects have used the resources of the 1% Program, which joined the latest public-private partnership to create a new,互助

The Study Center’s floor project was a far cry from De Meza’s other architectural and design efforts — mansions, yacht interiors, corporate cafeterias locally and in New York, Boston and other countries. “Our clients are high-profile, but I’ve always wanted to give back to the community,” says De Meza. His staff suggest ways to do this, and as a result regularly participate in National River Cleanup Day — last year it was San Francisco Creek in Palo Alto — as well as a Christmas gingerbread house decorating party for the kids at Edgewood Center for Children and Families. The firm also donates to Muttville, a San Francisco rescue organization that places older pets in foster and adoptive homes.

Eighteen months ago, a staff member told him about the 1% Program. De Meza pledged 1% and has been involved in three projects. Mostly the 1% project is self-directed, with nonprofits and architects matching the makeovers themselves. Like many matches, it all began with furniture and a floor.

“One project was a Native American client,” says De Meza. “We didn’t have a lot of experience with that kind of facility.” The other was the Project Atrium theater renovation, right across the street from De Meza at the time. “They went with a firm that had a lot of theater design experience.”

But the Study Center’s project was a perfect fit, he says. “It was quick and fair-ly easy. We do office space planning for clients every day. Also, it was a natural progression for us — we have all these connections with vendors who can supply materials pro bono or at cost.”

Study Center Executive Director Geoff Link heard about the 1% Program at an AIA conference and spent some time with the Luggage Store gallery at 1007 Market St. “Jennifer Gustafson, director of interior design, helped Study Center in its relocation,” Link says.

Beggs also headed the pro bono program for the newly created Center for Nonprofit Excellence. They audited and mapped the space, talked with staff of Office of Self Help and Mental Health, and with the office of their director, to determine what they needed. They toured the new quarters at 1275 Mission St. and moved at the end of February to a leased space at 44th and Mission.

“We’re working with Jensen Architects now and it’s been very easy,” Smith said. “They toured our building with Leiasa, a San Francisco real estate consultant, and assessed what we needed most.” Jensen, a high-end firm with offices in mid-Market and the Tenderloin, creates an experience of CAD (computer-aided design) drawings of the entire building, an expensive but essential first step to any renovation.

Public Architecture promotes its matching program on the premise that architectural excellence should be available to all and that sophisticated design can be applied to real problems.

In its 1% Program, a first-of-its-kind architecture-related public service, following in the footsteps of other professions like law and medicine whose members donate time to civic and social efforts. Established in 2005 with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mid-Market 1% Program has received pledges of more than 300,000 pro bono hours worth $38 million annually. Services include analyzing potential new locations, enhancing the aesthetics of an office, creating drawings for capital campaigns, evaluating ADA compliance, building out new offices or renovating old ones and much more.

So far, 308 matches have been made, 75 of them complete, 164 in progress, and another 70 or so just beginning the matching process. More than 570 architectural firms have used the Website to report projects they found in their community on which they are working. The 1% Program, Nonprofit projects are in every state, and the pro bono services come from one-man shops up to huge firms.

In January, the American Institute of Architects signed a partnership agreement with Public Architecture to promote its program to its 150,000 members in 300 chapters nationwide, “a huge step forward for us,” Rey says.
We moved

Central City Extra, as a publication of the nonprofit San Francisco Study
City and a board and a world away from our previous home of
nearly 40 years in the Grant Building at the confluence of Market, Mason and Turk.

The Office of Self Help and S.F. Mental Health Clients’ Rights
Advocates are with us here, too, as they have been for many years.

We’re a block and a half and a world away from our previous home of
nearly 40 years in the Grant Building at Seventh and Market. No one
can appreciate the nuances of Mid-Market more than a longtime business or
resident.