INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Agency Commissioners

FROM: Fred Blackwell, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Media Clippings from 02.10.11 to 03.10.11

Enclosed is a collection of supportive and positive newspaper/media clippings that refer to the Redevelopment Agency or an Agency-related project or program.

(Originated by Gia Casteel-Brown, Executive Assistant)

Fred Blackwell
Executive Director

BAYVIEW HUNTERS POINT / HUNTERS POINT SHIPYARD / VISITACION VALLEY:

Attachment 1: SFGate.com: “3rd Street Youth Center & Clinic hopes to expand”, February 20, 2011

MISSION BAY / TRANSBAY / YERBA BUENA:

Attachment 2: SFGate.com: “Huge sculpture to rise from debris of transit hub”, March 10, 2011

REDEVELOPMENT:

Attachment 3: SFGate.com: “Ross Mirkarimi has a plan to jazz up Fillmore St.,” March 3, 2011

Attachment 4: SFGate.com: “CA state senator seeks to fund affordable housing,” March 4, 2011

Attachment 5 The Examiner/sf examiner.com: Elimination of Redevelopment Agencies hurts small business,” March 8, 2011

Attachment 6 San Francisco Bee sanfranciscobeecom: “Cities float alternative to eliminating redevelopment agencies,” February 19, 2011

Attachment 7 SFGate.com: Letters to the editor, Chenfei Ferry Lo, South San Francisco (SFRA Employee) February 25, 2011
Attachment 8:  SFGate.com: Letters to the editor, David Sobel, Mill Valley (SFRA Employee), February 26, 2011

Attachment 9:  SFGate.com: “Mend, don’t end, state’s redevelopment policies,” February 27, 2011

Attachment 10:  SFGate.com: Letters to the editor, Pamela Sims, San Francisco (SFRA Employee) March 3, 2010

Attachment 11:  SFGate.com Politics BLOG: “Mayor Ed Lee goes to Sac for more redevelopment talks – no deal yet,” February 25, 2011

Attachment 12:  SFGate.com Politics BLOG: “Mayor Ed Lee says mayors won’t back down on redevelopment,” March 7, 2011

Attachment 13:  SFGate.com Politics BLOG: “Redevelopment fight takes some new twists as mayors suggest alternative to elimination,” February 21, 2011

Attachment 14:  SFGate.com: “California Mayors offer $1.7 billion redevelopment bond plan,” February 23, 2011
In the former All Night Market, a liquor store in San Francisco's Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood that once served as a notorious breeding ground for graffiti and crime, teens now come to get health care.

The market turned not only into a teen health clinic, but also a community youth center that offers youths counseling sessions, dance and other classes - and a place to simply do their homework.

Over the past five years, the 3rd Street Youth Center & Clinic has grown from having just a handful of patients and a small part-time staff to one that has served more than 1,600 kids. The idea for the combined clinic and youth center came out of efforts by residents to provide something the neighborhood needed.

"When you have a youth center at a clinic, I think it takes away the stigma," said Sharon Papo, executive director of the center. "You could be coming here to do graffiti art or belly dancing. Walking in through the doors doesn't mean you're here for a chlamydia test."

While 3rd Street may not be the only adolescent health clinic and youth center in the city, it serves an area with some of the city's most severe health problems.

Bayview-Hunters Point has the city's lowest percentage of mothers receiving prenatal care in their first trimester and the highest percentage of low birth-weight babies, according to the city's Department of Public Health. The city's West Hunters Point and Sunnydale neighborhoods, also served by the center, have among the highest rates of chlamydia.

The clinic provides a broad range of health services, but more than a third of the patients have come to check for sexually transmitted diseases, a quarter seek pregnancy tests, and almost 23 percent need birth control.

Clinic directors have just started a prenatal program, making 3rd Street one of the state's only stand-alone teen clinics with a prenatal program.

Privacy assured

Terri Redd, a 21-year-old mother of three, has been coming to the clinic since she was 17, primarily because it guarded her privacy. The clinic was not connected to her school, and she didn't have to involve her parents.

"I was really concerned about my health, and I didn't want everyone in my business," said Redd, who uses the clinic for all her primary care needs and also works as a custodian at the clinic. "Because I've been here so long, they're like family."

Demand for the clinic's services have grown so much that plans are in the works to move it from the 2,000-square-foot converted market at 5190 Third St. to Armstrong Place Senior Housing about eight blocks away. The move would gain the clinic nearly 1,000 more square feet, and the center is raising money in hopes of relocating over the summer.

Community health clinics have suffered in the depressed economy. Third Street Youth Center & Clinic is no exception.

"The pace of financial growth has slowed down enormously," said Dr. Ayanna Bennett, the clinic's medical director. "We're kind of plateauing, yet the kids keep coming."

While 3rd Street has lost some funding, it operates with a mix of foundation grants, which account for more than half of its budget, as well as government and individual donations for total annual revenue of about $659,000. The clinic takes Medi-Cal, Healthy San Francisco and other public coverage, but does not accept cash or private insurance.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation is the clinic's biggest funder, but Bayview Hunters Point Community Fund contributed $25,000 in the founding year and now gives $50,000 annually.

Community

Sai Seigel, director of the community fund, said she was impressed the idea for the clinic came from the neighborhood itself. "It really came out of research and the community and what the youth need in the Bayview," Seigel said.

Angelique Thomas was just 15 when she got involved in the effort that ultimately became the center. She helped interview students at her school and youths in the neighborhood to advise the city on what the community wanted.

"They were trying to open up a skating rink and more parks - nothing in the nature we needed," said Thomas, now 24.

E-mail Victoria Colliver at vcolliver@sfchronicle.com.

The first element of San Francisco's long-promised transit hub, a new Transbay Terminal, won't be the 3-block-long station or the tower announcing it on the skyline. Instead, watch for a 41-foot-high sculpture assembled from its predecessor's remains.

The artwork planned for the corner of Mission and Fremont streets would look something like a low-tech Transformer, beginning with toes that once were bollards and culminating in an upraised pointing finger that once did duty as a light pole. Because of the 100-plus-ton weight and gravity-defying form, the sculpture will rise from base isolators, a seismic protection system usually reserved for landmarks on the scale of City Hall and the California Academy of Sciences.

The design by Los Angeles' Tim Hawkinson is to be voted on today by the Transbay Joint Powers Authority, which is overseeing the construction of the downtown terminal for bus service, commuter trains and high-speed rail service from Southern California. But it already has the blessing of the architect for the station, scheduled to open in 2017.

"I'm excited. Tim is one of the most important younger sculptors today, globally, and this will be his first piece in the public realm," said Fred Clarke of Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, the lead designer.

Clarke also is on the jury that selected the artists for the project's public art. He fully expects a range of reactions to the Flintstonian form.

"The very best art always startles you," Clarke said. "There are people who will question it and people who will love it, and that's exactly what we want."

If approved, the artwork would be erected in 2015, two years ahead of the new terminal, with its undulating glass wall. The sculpture's $1.149 million budget includes a $200,000 artist's fee. Its height would be roughly equal to the stainless steel rocket ship on the Embarcadero south of the Ferry Building.
Feathers and granite

Hawkinson works with a variety of materials: He once fashioned a motorcycle from feathers and a bird's skeleton from fingernails. His largest creation is in San Diego, where eight granite boulders form a 23-foot bear.

The San Francisco piece would emerge, literally and figuratively, from the detritus of the 1930s-era terminal and the ramps that connected it to the Bay Bridge.

The feet, for example, might be severed chunks of beams that once supported the ramps. A former round garage column is now envisioned as the figure's left arm, while the right arm might be assembled from two Jersey barriers.

A 'modern marker'

For now, the slabs and debris that have caught Hawkinson's eye are scattered across the construction site amid ever-shifting piles of dirt and concrete, or tangles of steel rebar destined for recycling. A pile of bollards is tucked down one alley, awaiting possible use as fingers or toes. A spray-painted column that might be reborn as a shoulder lies against coarse rubble a block away.

In his statement to the authority and the San Francisco Arts Commission, Hawkinson likened his concept to "a modern marker ... an indication that one is on the right path." Among the inspirations he mentioned were "stacked stone objects created by indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest."

Conceptual design

The design that Hawkinson will present today to the authority's board of directors is conceptual; he is expected to finish selecting the pieces to be used during the next five weeks. Whatever gets pulled aside must be tested for structural soundness.

The 2015 date is tied to the expected arrival of the steel that will bind the salvaged concrete. For cost reasons, it will be part of a larger order for material to construct the terminal's upper levels.

"We're excited at the opportunity to provide art to people" in advance of the terminal's completion, said Maria Ayerdi-Kaplan, the authority's executive director.

Although the proposed piece is the largest element of the Transbay art program, four other major pieces have been commissioned. Two are from Jenny Holzer and James Carpenter of New York. The other two are local, San Francisco's Jenny Chang and Ned Kahn of Sebastopol.

About the center

For more information on the new Transbay Transit Center and its art program, go to links.sfgate.com/ZKXC.
Ross Mirkarimi has a plan to jazz up Fillmore St.
Will Kane, Chronicle Staff Writer
Thursday, March 3, 2011

(03-02) 18:33 PST SAN FRANCISCO -- Compared with the blocks of Fillmore Street filled with sidewalk cafes and strollers, the eight-block stretch that runs through the Western Addition is desolate and dreary.

Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi plans to change that.

He says businesses that use ground-floor storefronts as offices ought to go somewhere else and make room for boutique shops, restaurants and other businesses that will attract pedestrians - and their money - to the hard-up area.

Unlike other parts of the city, which suffer from boarded windows and bolted doors, the Western Addition area of the Fillmore just has too many businesses that don't generate any traffic during the day and go dark after 5 p.m., Mirkarimi said.

He hopes to use city zoning laws to encourage the replacement of offices with vibrant shopping destinations. This "mom-and-pop business corridor" will run along Fillmore from Bush to McAllister streets and provide a huge boost to the economy in the area, Mirkarimi said.

The ordinance, which is to be heard by the city Planning Commission today, would require that every first-floor location along the half-mile stretch of Fillmore have a designated "active use," like an arcade, store or takeout food shop.

If the ordinance is passed, new businesses that don't meet the Planning Department's criteria would not be allowed to move or expand into first-floor locations. Existing offices would be allowed to renew their leases, however.

New offices could move into the upper floors of buildings along the corridor, said AnMarie Rodgers, the Planning Department's manager of legislative affairs.

There are 22 similar districts throughout the city, including downtown and Jackson Square, she said.
"We're not at a shortage of office space in San Francisco. Whether they're on the ground floor or the upper floors makes no difference," Mirkarimi said, referring to commercial offices. "The goal here is to make the Fillmore in Western Addition a cultural destination."

But that's easier said than done, especially when the turbulent economy means many businesses won't open in the next few years.

Still Mirkarimi and others said the area needs new vitality, and this ordinance could be a good way to do that.

"Offices tend to be less of a pedestrian activity," said Todd Clayter, a developer who owns property in the area. "Storefronts cater to a different patronage."

The lifelessness of the area stems from when it was overseen by San Francisco's Redevelopment Agency for 45 years, Mirkarimi said. That agency's goal was to simply bring any commercial development to the area, including fast-food chains and offices, without much thought about the long-term impacts.

But now that the area has evolved, he said, it is time to add nuance to the development.

"Offices. Offices - it makes no sense," he said. "It is part of the hangover from redevelopment's tenure."

If the Board of Supervisors approves the ordinance, it could be five to 10 years before the area sees much of a transformation, Mirkarimi said.

Gabriel Metcalf, head of the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association, a planning think tank, said new pedestrian traffic could redefine the neighborhood.

"It is not so much a problem of vacancies as it is closed blinds," he said. "In order to make Fillmore Street a pedestrian street, we need to get people there."

E-mail Will Kane at wkane@sfchronicle.com.

http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/03/03/BAH9112G42.DTL

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Affordable-housing advocates said Friday they support a state senator's plan to secure money for low-income homes if Gov. Jerry Brown is successful in dissolving redevelopment agencies under his proposed austerity budget.

The support for the plan by Sen. Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord, was seen as a sign of a crack in the coalition of non-profit organizations, builders and government officials that have been seeking to protect the agencies.

Julie Snyder, policy director for Housing California, an affordable-housing advocacy group with member organizations across the state, called the plan a "win-win."

"Legislators and the governor can help lower-income Californians — who will be deeply affected by other devastating cuts — and still balance the budget," she said.

DeSaulnier's plan endorses the governor's strategy of using redevelopment agency funds to help pay down the 2011-2012 budget deficit.

After that, affordable housing would be added to the roster of schools, fire departments and other locally provided services that the governor wants to fund with money now going to redevelopment agencies.

The senator's plan puts regional governmental bodies, such as the Southern California Association of Governments and the Association of Bay Area Government, in charge of distributing the money to cities that want to use it for affordable housing.

The funds are currently managed by redevelopment agencies, some of which have been criticized for spending too lavishly on administration and other over head expenses.

The proposal could be added to a budget package the state Legislature is set to vote on next week.

"I'm good with the governor's proposal, but this is an option," DeSaulnier said. "It basically gives local government the power to deal with housing set-aside money in a much more efficient way in the future."
Carroll Wills, a spokesman for California Professional Firefighters, which has fervently supported the governor's plan to use redevelopment money for local services, said his group saw the senator's plan as a good one.

"It's consistent with the notion that government funds should be used to provide for those who need to be provided for at the base level," he said.

A message left at the governor's office asking whether Brown would support DeSaulnier's plan was not returned.

Kathy Fairbanks, a spokeswoman for the California Redevelopment Association, stressed that the proposal has not been formally introduced as part of any legislation. The organization opposed any plan that dissolves the agencies, she said.

Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing executive director Paul Zimmerman said his organization would prefer an outcome that preserved the agencies. But with legislators seemingly on their way to dissolving the agencies, he hoped DeSaulnier's proposal would be enacted.

"This proposal offers a both positive and effective solution to preserving this important affordable housing funding," he said.

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Elimination of Redevelopment Agencies hurts small business

Redevelopment agencies are on the verge of being eliminated in California, and disadvantaged communities will pay the price. Citizens don’t understand the Redevelopment Agency or its impact well — but a year from now, legislators may rue the day they acted so hastily to eliminate it without planning to continue its most basic functions or giving local communities an opportunity to weigh in.

The Redevelopment Agency has been a major source of funding for small-business development and job training in San Francisco, providing loans to small businesses and contracting with local nonprofits such as Urban Solutions, Renaissance Center and the South of Market Employment Center to deliver innovative programs. These organizations have had a tremendous impact, spurring job creation and the development of new businesses, and helping people overcome barriers to employment and find jobs.

On Sixth Street south of Market, Urban Solutions’ business attraction and retention efforts have led to a reduction in the retail vacancy rate from 43 percent to 9 percent. Thirty new businesses have opened on Sixth Street over the past seven years — businesses such as Miss Saigon Restaurant and Mi Tierra Market, that are meeting the needs of neighborhood residents and turning the street into a destination for people reluctant to set foot on Sixth Street. Urban Solutions has managed 103 façade- and tenant-improvement projects on 32 buildings with design services from nonprofit Asian Neighborhood Design. Redevelopment’s investment of $1.4 million in grants has been a catalyst for $3.5 million in private investment.

In the Bayview, from 2008 to 2010, Renaissance assisted residents in creating or retaining more than 200 jobs. In 2010, they served more than 500 clients, and five clients opened new storefronts along the Third Street corridor. Renaissance also founded a business incubator in the South of Market neighborhood in 1995 with funding from Redevelopment, which has served 142 clients since inception, 86 percent who are successfully in business today. In 2010, Renaissance and Urban Solutions helped businesses create 62 jobs.

The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency made terrible mistakes with urban renewal
programs in the 1960s and '70s, which were very destructive to the African-American community in the Western Addition, with long-lasting consequences.

Since that time, there has been a complete reversal of those practices. The Redevelopment Agency of today is building extensive amounts of affordable housing, funding the rebuilding of the Transbay Terminal as a regional transit hub, helping to develop Mission Bay as a biotech hub, and supporting basic services such as street cleaning and community guides in the South of Market area. Redevelopment staff is advised by diverse community committees, which review projects at a local level.

Local businesses, community organizations and community members have worked so hard to improve conditions in low-income neighborhoods. I for one will be sad to see this progress quickly unravel with a blunt cut to Redevelopment.

Jenny McNulty is the executive director of Urban Solutions, a nonprofit organization that helps small businesses succeed. Urban Solutions has led economic revitalization efforts on Sixth Street with funding from the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency.

Op Eds  Opinion  Jenny McNulty  opinion  Redevelopment Agencies  Small business

Source URL: http://www.sfexaminer.com/opinion/op-eds/2011/03/elimination-redevelopment-agencies-hurts-small-business
California's 10 biggest cities plan to counter Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to eliminate redevelopment agencies by suggesting the agencies help the state borrow to solve part of this year's budget deficit.

The counterproposal, based on a plan circulated by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, calls for allowing the agencies to divert about $200 million a year to the state for 25 years. That money would allow the state to finance a $1.7 billion loan to help bridge its $26.6 billion budget gap.

The plan also would require the agencies pass more tax money to cities to pay for local services and give about $50 million annually to schools.

The cities' proposal, which is still evolving, promises to intensify an already heated campaign by local governments across the state to push back Brown's redevelopment plan.

Brown has proposed saving the state $1.7 billion in the coming budget year by eliminating the redevelopment agencies, which are allowed to keep some property tax revenue that otherwise would go to local schools, cities, counties and special districts.

The state spends its own funds to help local governments make up for much of that lost revenue.

The League of California Cities has said Brown's proposal violates the recently passed Proposition 22, which prohibits the state from raiding local government funds.

Villaraigosa's plan calls for a ballot measure amending Proposition 22 to allow the diversion of money to the state.

State officials dismissed the idea of borrowing money to balance the budget. Brown spokesman Gil Duran said in an e-mail that while the Governor's Office hasn't seen a specific proposal, "there is a rumor that the mayors will propose some kind of Wall Street scheme to save redevelopment agencies."

"The governor has made it clear that any plan involving smoke, mirrors or gimmicks will be dead on arrival."

Mayor's offices in Los Angeles and San Diego acknowledged such a plan was in the works but declined to discuss details. The Bee received two drafts containing different versions of the plan.
Villaraigosa spokeswoman Sarah Sheahan said saving redevelopment agencies was key to helping the state's economy recover.

"Mayor Villaraigosa has been vigorously working with leaders across the state to develop the alternatives Gov. Brown has requested and save this economic development program at a time when we need it most," Sheahan said.

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Call Jack Chang, Bee Capitol Bureau, (916) 326-5543.
Why should redevelopment agencies exist? My personal selfish answer: Because I work for the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, and I don’t want to lose my job. But, what is it for the community?

My mom lives (and late grandmother lived) in Chestnut Creek Senior Apartments in South San Francisco. She, along with her apartment mates, always express their gratitude that they can live in such a decent apartment.

The South San Francisco Redevelopment Agency had a very important role in building this apartment. But most residents have not even ever heard about redevelopment agencies.

My point is the roles of redevelopment agencies, which work behind the scenes, are very important for the community, although few have heard about the agencies.

So please help us encourage the legislators in Sacramento to keep redevelopment agencies alive.

Chenfei Ferry Lo, South San Francisco

Speier’s bold disclosure

Brava to Jackie Speier for revealing her personal story of an abortion in a House speech last week ("Angry Speier talks about her abortion," Feb. 19).

Why a group of mostly men should have any control over a private matter that should be between a woman and her doctor is beyond me.

If this same group showed as much concern for the children who are born to these unfortunate women, perhaps I could see them as more than mean-spirited hypocrites who want to keep women in their place.

Jan Rhodes, San Francisco

Don’t intrude on our marriage

President Obama has ordered his lawyers to stop defending a federal law that bans recognition of same-sex marriage ("Major victory for gay rights," Feb. 24).
Last week the House of Representatives passed HR1, which would eliminate funding for AmeriCorps programs like Teach for America, Coaches for a Healthy California and Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

California would lose $50.9 million in AmeriCorps education awards alone. As our budget continues to crumble and organizational budgets continue to shrink, we literally cannot afford this loss.

Across California, volunteer programs have an immense daily impact. They keep struggling communities afloat, kids in school, crime down and hope intact. As these rocky fiscal times persist, the demand for volunteers that includes teachers, coaches and mentors who provide safe places for our most vulnerable populations is going to increase. Reductions of these services would magnify the existing dire impact of the recession on communities, families and children who already live with less.

And it’s just not smart policy. Volunteer services leverage public dollars into maximum positive outcomes for communities and reduce the stress on government services. Please call, write and visit representatives and demand they protect these services.

Janet Carter, executive director,
Team-Up for Youth, Oakland

Redevelopment miracle

Shockingly, Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed to eliminate redevelopment agencies throughout California. As an employee of one of those agencies, I can personally attest to the accomplishments of redevelopment.

Just this week, a small miracle happened: A veteran of the Iraq war bought his first home in San Francisco. This type of miracle is a daily occurrence across the state, thanks to redevelopment funds that build affordable housing for working people. Imagine San Francisco without redevelopment of the past two decades: 10,000 fewer affordable homes; no chance to visit Yerba...
Buena Gardens, shop at the Ferry Building or spend an evening at Yoshi’s in the revitalized Fillmore. Residents of cities around the state would have similar sad stories.

Has the former mayor of Oakland forgotten his success in redevelopment? Perhaps he should restore his memory by looking into the faces of thousands who would be without affordable housing if the state dismantles its redevelopment program, or into the faces of construction workers who will remain unemployed for months (or years) without redevelopment projects, or into the eyes of children who will have fewer parks, museums and schools to attend. Especially in these tough economic times, we need redevelopment more than ever.

David Sobel, Mill Valley

Marriage and constitution

Barack Obama swore on Jan. 20, 2009, to "preserve, protect and defend" the Constitution. His dictatorial decision not to enforce our laws on marriage (“Major victory for gay rights,” Feb. 24) violates that oath.

The Constitution grants the courts the power to rule a law unconstitutional. A president does not have that power. Preserving and protecting that structure means defending every existing law not overturned by a competent court. My father, as a 19-year-old, fled from a whimsically oppressive socialist dictator and joined the U.S. Army to defeat that socialist.

I’m proud that my adult son recently Facebooked the question: Shouldn’t our president abide by our founding document? Obama casts aside our Constitution in order to grab votes on a current social issue. As the character of Thomas More asked in the play (and movie) "A Man for All Seasons," if you throw away all the laws in order to combat the devil, what do you have left to stand on?

David Altschul, Berkeley

Accentuate the positive


Now if only we could apply his advice to the entire world around us, we’d all be a happier, healthier and more content. Look at all that is good ... stop accentuating the negative.

Barbara Bedell, Rio Vista
In California, redevelopment can be an invaluable tool to provide the seed money and regulatory support to transform blighted and contaminated areas that would otherwise be unappealing to developers. The positive effects of redevelopment are apparent in the way San Francisco has turned a former railyard at Mission Bay into a thriving biotechnology hub, Oakland has infused its downtown with housing and vitality, and Emeryville and many other communities up and down the state have used the law to attract businesses and build affordable housing in areas of terminal neglect.

The concept behind redevelopment is sound: to take an area that has exhausted its economic viability - due to aging infrastructure, dilapidated buildings or contamination - and allow a local government to borrow against future property-tax growth to address the underlying issues that chill any hope of recovery through marketplace forces alone.

If Gov. Jerry Brown's plan to eliminate the state's 400 redevelopment agencies and seize their uncommitted property-tax allotments (starting with $1.7 billion this year) goes through, California's cities and counties will be left without a well-established means to bring new life to brownfields and former military bases, or steer development into urban areas where public transit is a reasonable option.

It would be a grave mistake for California to discard this tool for stimulating economic activity and new housing (one of the conditions of the law is that 20 percent of an agency's property-tax allotment must be spent on affordable housing). No one knows the value of redevelopment better than Brown, who as mayor of Oakland expanded redevelopment areas and used its subsidies and powers of eminent domain to advance his vision of luring 10,000 residents into a decades-dormant downtown.

Yet it would be equally foolhardy to accept the arguments of redevelopment agencies that they do not require tightened oversight, that decisions and accountability on how they spend their share of property tax revenue (now about $5 billion a year statewide, or about 12 percent of total property tax collections) should be kept at the local level.

There are two problems with their leave-us-alone argument. One, the state has a legitimate interest in whether that money is spent wisely. Each year, it sends about $2 billion from the general fund to backfill the portion of those redevelopment funds that would have otherwise gone to public schools.
It makes no sense for the state to subsidize projects that would be at cross purposes with state goals, such as those that promote suburban sprawl - thus clogging highways, overburdening scarce water supplies and elevating carbon emissions.

Also, amid all the examples of exemplary redevelopment are too many cases of government-supported boondoggles. The latest example of frivolity is the $6 million pumped into a Sacramento redevelopment that will feature a "mermaid bar" with the "largest nightclub aquarium in the world." If the good people of Sacramento want to curb basic services so they can have drinks with an underwater show, so be it - but they can do so without the help of the rest of us. Similarly, if Santa Clara wants to use redevelopment funds to lure the 49ers from San Francisco or San Jose to lure the A's from Oakland - as each does - it's flat-out wrong to ask taxpayers in San Francisco and Oakland, or anywhere else, to make a contribution to those stadiums.

Also, the fact that Oakland's redevelopment covers the salary of the mayor and 17 police officers, and can donate $2 million for an East Oakland recreation center, suggests a cash flow well in excess of its assigned mission.

When properly applied, redevelopment can work miracles for city life, for the economy and for the environment. It should be preserved - with reforms that sharpen its focus and tighten the accountability on this use of government powers and tax dollars.

How it works

-- A city or county declares an area "blighted" and thus targeted for redevelopment.

-- The area's level of property-tax revenue is frozen at its current level. Any growth in future revenue beyond that base is available for use by the redevelopment agency.

-- The agency is allowed to borrow against its future allotment of property taxes to purchase land, build streets and sewers or subsidize development in the redevelopment zone - a scheme known as "tax increment financing."

-- The state then subsidizes local redevelopment by backfilling the portion of property-tax growth that would otherwise have gone to schools.

How to fix it

-- **Tighten what qualifies:** The definition of a "blighted" area has been so broadly interpreted as to be rendered meaningless.

-- **Limit state subsidies:** Projects should advance a state objective (such as transit-oriented development, urban infill, military base conversions or projects that could show a clear net gain to the state coffers) to qualify for the state backfill to schools.
-- **Stop the slush funds:** The use of property taxes collected by redevelopment agencies should be limited to advancing the original purpose. Local governments are routinely tapping redevelopment funds for everyday expenses or for pet projects that (as Gov. Jerry Brown, the former Oakland mayor put it) "they wouldn't otherwise let you" do.

-- **Limit the life of redevelopment zones:** California allows redevelopment zones to run 40 years - far longer than other states - and they are routinely extended beyond that. In effect, once a zone is created, its increased property-tax revenue becomes roped off for the redevelopment agency to spend long after an area has been revitalized and is no longer in need of special government help.

-- **Stricter oversight:** If the state is going to continue to subsidize redevelopment projects, then it has every right to demand stricter accountability on the creation of those zones and the way the money is spent.

http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/02/27/EDEI1H57AF.DTL

This article appeared on page F - 10 of the San Francisco Chronicle

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No financial pipe dreams

If the San Bruno gas explosion doesn't underscore the need for engineering standards, governmental regulations and honest workmanship inspections, I don't know what will.

We have seen what faulty welds, inadequate testing and shoddy inspection can lead to, making us wonder: What's next?

Lack of strict enforcement makes it too tempting for contractors to underbid on projects and make it up by cutting corners and using cheap labor, then trusting luck or not being around when something eventually goes wrong.

This might result in short-term gain for the business, but as a society, should we allow such risks to be taken? I don't think so - neither in projects that make something tangible, nor in financial pipe dreams that don't.

Jorg Aadahl, San Mateo

PG&e: serving the public?

As we read in The Chronicle on March 2 ("Flawed section apparently built from scraps, utility says"), PG&E manufactured a high-pressure pipeline from scraps, then practiced a casual disregard to properly identify the pipeline as seamless or welded, and then performed future pressure testing that, per expert opinion, was totally inadequate throughout the years.

And, the decision not to install automatic cutoff valves to a 30-inch diameter, 50-year-old, high-pressure gas line 4 feet underground, through heavily residential neighborhoods, was in retrospect an extremely poor one.

Finally, despite the decision not to install the cutoff valves, there was apparently no emergency training to anticipate a catastrophic explosion or what to do to control it. Otherwise, it would not have taken more than an hour to turn off the gas by some casual employee.

In total, what do these (lack of) actions say about the safety practices by a monopoly that is here to serve the public?
Robert Bialon, San Bruno

Remembering their loss

During the National Transportation Safety Board hearing this week about the PG&E explosion ("Feds take leading role in making PG&E safer," March 2), some answers were revealed, though other questions emerged.

The quality of the hearing reflects the dedication of Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Hillsborough, to the truth and to preventing this tragedy from being repeated.

Yet we must not forget to honor those who have suffered greatly from the San Bruno fire. I wonder if their families were able to watch the proceedings on television, or whether it was too difficult to listen to the chain of seemingly inconsequential decisions that resulted in this enormous tragedy.

Perhaps they can take some comfort in the knowledge that the entire first row of seats had been reserved for them. Additionally, two bouquets of flowers awaited them in the private family viewing room removed from the crowd to serve as a thoughtful reminder that their important loss of loved ones will not be forgotten.

John Maa, San Francisco

Why the state needs redevelopment


While much of redevelopment isn't sexy, it is needed. By whom? By the thousands of people who live in affordable housing.

One example of this housing is in San Francisco: Mission Creek senior housing, a beautiful development in Mission Bay.

The wonder of this development isn't the building, it is the seniors living there. Without housing, many of these individuals would be homeless, using a large percentage of local safety and medical resources. Instead of repeated visits to San Francisco General Hospital, these people are safe in their own units.

As Don, a formerly homeless senior, said when he first saw his unit, "I think I just reached heaven." There are over 1,400 affordable housing units in the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's funding pipeline. These units will house more than 4,200 residents, including families, individuals and seniors like Don. Without redevelopment funding, none of these units will be built.
I appreciate the difficult decisions the state's leaders have to make. I just hope they don't forget seniors like Don and the many others who will not be as lucky as Don if redevelopment funds are no longer available.

Pamela Sims, San Francisco

Letters save a chronicle subscription

After a particularly hectic week, I found myself several days behind in my reading of The Chronicle.

I've been a newspaper junkie my entire life, starting with my delivering the Washington Post as a child. However, I often question whether to continue subscribing given the time necessary to stay current. And then I read two succinct, articulate and absolutely spot-on letters to the editor in the Feb. 22 edition ("Overplaying the race card" submitted by Wendy Lin and "Count yourself lucky to live in San Francisco" by Matthew Novak) and realize why I renew my subscription and make the effort to read each day's edition.

Thanks, fellow readers!

Christopher Beach, Alameda

http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/03/03/EDA81I2C8D.DTL

This article appeared on page A - 11 of the San Francisco Chronicle
Mayor Ed Lee goes to Sac for more redevelopment talks -- no deal yet

We caught up with San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee this afternoon, who was on his way back from meetings in the Capitol on redevelopment. Lee, along with the state’s other nine big city mayors, have been pushing Gov. Jerry Brown to embrace an alternative to eliminating the economic development program, as the governor has proposed in his budget plan.

Brown was actually in SoCal today, scooping up endorsements from business groups for another controversial part of his budget plan: Asking voters to approve about $14 billion in tax increases and extensions. But Lee, who was representing the mayors, met with top staff members from the governor’s office as well as his department of finance.

Lee said the meetings were productive and that both sides are continuing to work on options. But from the outside, it looks like the two sides are still miles apart: Brown’s proposal calls for eliminating the entire program, giving the state an estimated $1.7 billion in extra revenue next fiscal year alone.

Meanwhile, the mayors want to hand over a more conservative $200 million a year, which the governor has warned could run afoul of state law that prohibits borrowing to plug the state budget; and Brown has made clear that he wants to avoid gimmicks -- such as borrowing -- in solving the state’s $26.6 billion deficit. Plus, it appears the $1.7 billion would be a one time thing;(compared to $2 billion) Officials warned this week, the plan: Asking voters to approve about $14 billion in tax increases and extensions. But Lee, who was representing the mayors, met with top staff members from the governor’s office as well as his department of finance.

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Still, Lee was upbeat. “They complimented us for putting together a serious proposal,” he said. “By no means are the issues resolved -- they had concerns, and at the same time we were able to tell the governor’s office that the $1.7 billion they think they will get by eliminating redevelopment is not there. We think the value is closer to $1 billion.”

Lee said he understands that the governor wants a long-term funding source, and said they are going to continue to work with state leaders.

“This thing is moving fast ...we’re going to have a lot of intense exchanges of information over the next two weeks,” he said. “The good part is that they acknowledged the value of the redevelopment projects we have in San Francisco. Ultimately, the decision has to reflect whether projects can be saved or not.”

As Lee met with officials this morning, state lawmakers were also mulling over the redevelopment proposal in a joint conference committee. During that meeting, Sen. Bob Huff, R-Diamond Bar (Los Angeles County) floated a proposal of his own, which would also include borrowing.

Huff suggested allowing redevelopment agencies to "opt-in" to a program where they could put 10 percent of their redevelopment revenues into a fund that would be controlled by local governments. Those local jurisdictions could then borrow against that revenue stream (thereby avoiding the rule that prevents the state from borrowing to balance its budget). Huff suggested using any extra money to pay off the state’s rising bond debt.

Mayor Ed Lee goes to Sac for more redevelopment talks -- no deal yet : SFGate: Politics...

But Michael Cohen, Chief Deputy Director of the Department of Finance, immediately expressed misgivings about the proposal -- much as officials have about the mayor's plan. Earlier, officials from the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst Office had compared to the mayor's idea to a now-scuttled plan to sell state buildings and then lease them back.

"Proposals to borrow make me nervous, particular if we are borrowing at a higher interest rate to pay off lower interest rate debt," Cohen said.

Posted By: Marisa Lagos (Email, Twitter, Facebook) | February 25 2011 at 05:00 PM

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Benioff
10:51 AM on March 3, 2011

Then why is Obama stepping past Lee in Gavin's direction while Lee holds on for more attention?

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3/9/2011
Mayor Ed Lee says mayors won't back down on redevelopment

We caught up with Mayor Ed Lee on Saturday, after he appeared with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi at an event -- and the mild-mannered mayor made what may be his strongest comments to date on the state's proposed elimination of redevelopment.

Lee is one of the state's big city mayors opposed to the governor's plan to help close the state's $26.6 billion budget gap by doing away with the program -- and he's traveled to Sacramento more than once to help make their case.

While Gov. Jerry Brown and his staff have met with the mayors several times -- and expressed interest in hearing their ideas on how to save redevelopment -- things are not looking good for redevelopment supporters. Brown's office thinks that the mayor's alternative plan could violate state law, and last week a joint legislative committee approved a budget plan that includes the program's elimination. The Legislature could vote on that budget as soon as next week.

Lee said he hasn't given up, however. He said the plan passed by lawmakers on that committee is "totally unacceptable," and "places in jeopardy all of the private investments and incentives we have in San Francisco."

"We're still in there, fighting very hard to make sure they pay attention, and we're still pushing our proposal," he said, adding that the governor and his staff are "pretty firm" in their belief that they have to fully eliminate the program to get around state laws that prohibit the state from borrowing or taking redevelopment money. Those laws have prompted the League of California Cities and the California Redevelopment Association to threaten lawsuits over the governor's plan.

Lee didn't rule out legal action, but he wouldn't commit to joining the league and association either.

"If the dialogue doesn't proceed, we will get to a place they don't want to be with the mayors," he said. "Clearly we are going to fight this, whether or not there are lawsuits or whether we continue to work with our delegation, I will continue to work with the governor until he shuts us out."

And Lee had some harsh words for lawmakers (mind you, harsh is relative -- as SF Port Director Monique Mayor said earlier at that event Saturday, Lee is the 'nicest' mayor you'll ever meet).

"I don't think they understand, they don't know how it works -- none of them have been mayors," he said. "We have all these responsibilities."

Posted By: Marisa Lagos (Email, Twitter, Facebook) | March 07 2011 at 06:00 AM

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JuniperoSerra 9:05 PM on March 7, 2011

Get rid of the development agencies. They divert property taxes from what they were intended for. A redevelopment project uses tax increment financing. That is like someone buying a house and the property tax they pay goes to pay for their house. Something is wrong with that concept.

Sort comments by: Newest to Oldest
Redevelopment fight takes some new twists as mayors suggest alternative to elimination

Even as Gov. Jerry Brown's budget proposal winds its way through the legislative process, some unanswered questions remain over key portions, including his plan to eliminate redevelopment.

Brown has proposed axing the nearly 60-year-old program, which allows cities to borrow against future property tax revenues and use the money to spur economic growth. The proposal has sparked a nasty fight between redevelopment supporters -- including big city mayors and building trade unions -- and other groups, such as firefighters and police officers. (And it's spurred many cities to rush to approve redevelopment projects).

The basic argument: Supporters say redevelopment is a key tool for local governments that otherwise have no ability to create jobs and encourage economic growth, while opponents contend the program takes money away from key government services such as education and public safety and has become a slush fund for connected developers.

The governor says cutting the program will result in a $1.7 billion influx into state coffers next fiscal year, and in future years, send a total of nearly $1.9 billion a year directly to schools, counties, cities and special districts around the state.

But there's been a lot of push back, and lawmakers -- many of whom worked at the local level before arriving in Sacramento -- aren't entirely sold on Brown's plan yet. Last week, the state Assembly budget committee approved the $1.7 billion cut to redevelopment included in Brown's plan -- but instead of voting to eliminate the economic development program, the committee wants to achieve the savings "through reforms in lieu of elimination." The Senate, meanwhile, voted to eliminate the program outright.

Those votes were slammed by the California Redevelopment Association and the League of California Cities, who have been the most vocal opponents of Brown's plan (and have warned that any move to cut or eliminate the program would violate state law). But other redevelopment boosters appear more willing to negotiate.

The group of big city mayors that met with Brown last month to express their concerns with his proposal are headed back to the Capitol this week, where they plan to present an 'alternative' plan. Among the group will be San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee. According to his office, these are the highlights of the alternative proposal:

**State Budget Funding:** Starting in July, redevelopment agencies will transfer 5 percent of their property tax funding to the State on an annual basis. This will generate over $200 million each year to support over $1.7 billion in special bonds, meeting the governor's plan to generate $1.7 billion in 2011-12 funding from agencies.

**Enhanced Local Revenue Sharing:** Redevelopment agencies will dramatically increase the share of property taxes which 'pass-through' counties, schools, and other taxing entities. Starting in 2018, 40 percent of agency property tax increment will return to counties and schools, 20 percent will be used for affordable housing development, and 40 percent will be used for economic development activities, including investment in infrastructure and public improvements which support critical job-generating development.

**Structural Reforms:** Cities will be limited in the amount of property that can be placed into redevelopment areas, and enhanced public information and hearing requirements will be put in place to ensure that all major investments are fully reviewed by the public. Restrictions will be tightened on the use of affordable housing funds, to ensure that these monies are used to meet pressing community needs.

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http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/nov05election/detail?entry_id=83494
Redevelopment fight takes some new twists as mayors suggest alternative to elimination...
Feb. 24 (Bloomberg) -- California should borrow from Wall Street to help ease its $25 billion deficit instead of following Governor Jerry Brown's budget-cutting proposal to eliminate redevelopment agencies, a group of mayors led by Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles proposed.

Under the plan proposed by Villaraigosa, the state would sell $1.7 billion of bonds maturing in 25 years. Redevelopment agencies would pay $200 million a year in debt service on the bonds and would hand over 5 percent of their revenue each year to the state. In exchange, the agencies wouldn't be abolished.

When the mayors met with Brown in a bid to save the programs last month, the governor asked for alternate proposals, according to Sarah Hamilton, a spokeswoman for Villaraigosa. "The conversation is ongoing," she said in an interview yesterday.

Brown, seeking to push spending back to 2005 levels, wants to abolish redevelopment authorities and shift their money to school districts and other local government bodies. He's said he wants a budget absent of one-time fixes and gimmicks used in years past to paper over deficits.

"The governor has made it clear that any plan involving smoke, mirrors or gimmicks will be dead on arrival," said Evan Westrup, a spokesman for Brown.

The mayors, such as Villaraigosa and Kevin Johnson of Sacramento, have said city redevelopment agencies are a critical economic development tool. California Treasurer Bill Lockyer opposes the bonding proposal.

'Not a Solution'

"It's not a solution," said Tom Dresslar, a spokesman for Lockyer, in a telephone interview yesterday. "It's another gimmick that doesn't fix the problem and just puts the state deeper into debt."

Under a 65-year-old California law, if a city or county designates a redevelopment area to address urban blight, the agency receives any increase in property-tax revenue that results, known as the tax increment. If there were no redevelopment districts, then schools and local governments would get those receipts.

Brown's proposal would use $2.2 billion in revenue freed up by the move to retire outstanding debt and devote the rest, almost $3 billion, to schools, health care and the courts. The state ordinarily sends $1.7 billion to schools to make up for property taxes now going to redevelopment agencies.
A conference committee made up of members from the Assembly and the Senate, both controlled by Democrats, began meeting yesterday to reconcile changes each chamber made in Brown's proposed budget to produce a unified spending plan. Both chambers included the $1.7 billion in savings from abolishing the redevelopment agencies in their versions, while saying alternatives would be considered.

--With assistance from Christopher Palmeri in Los Angeles. Editors: Pete Young, Ted Bunker