INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

TO:         Agency Commissioners
FROM:      Fred Blackwell, Executive Director
SUBJECT:  Media Clippings from 12/22/09 to 1/28/10

Enclosed is a collection of newspaper and 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

YERBA BUENA:

Attachment 2: SF Gate: “Chiu’s measure casts shadow on building plans”, January 28, 2010

TRANSBAY:


BAYVIEW HUNTERS POINT & SHIPYARD:

Attachment 4: SF Gate: “EPA report: Shipyard project minimizing dust,” January 5, 2010
Attachment 5: SF Gate: “Contentious plant closure gets final approval,” January 28, 2010
Attachment 6: City Insider: “NFL hasn’t given up on Hunters Point Shipyard,” January 28, 2010
SOMA:

Attachment 7: SF Gate: “How condo developments helped spur a renaissance in SoMa,” January 24, 2010

MISSION BAY:


REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY:

Attachment 9: SF Gate: “Housing agent accused of bilking the poor”, January 28, 2010

Attachment 10: SF Gate: “Newsom sees hope for mid-Market,” January 15, 2010
Infrastructure at Mission Bay: a Conversation

Amy Eliot, AIA, Amy Neches, and Tim Beedle

Mission Bay, San Francisco's newest neighborhood and the largest development in the city's history, was once 303 acres of former rail yards along the Bay. In the late 1990s, owner Catellus Development Corporation (now held by FCITL-MB LLC) partnered with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency to create a flexible plan for a mixed-use, transit-oriented development. Master-planned by Johnson Fain of Los Angeles, the project incorporates up to 6,000 housing units—28 percent of which are affordable—as well as 4.4 million square feet of office/life science/biotechnology commercial space; a new campus for the University of California, San Francisco; 500,000 square feet of retail; a hotel; community facilities such as a new public school, public library, and fire and police stations; and 41 acres of new public open space. About half of the housing had been constructed as of September 2009, as well as more than 11 acres of new parks and open space and significant elements of the other components.

A number of landscape and architecture firms have worked on Mission Bay's infrastructure, including EDAW (now AECOM), The Office of Cheryl Barton, Cliff Lowe Associates, Hargreaves Associates, Marta Fry Landscape Associates, WRT, MKThink, and Tom Eliot Fisch. Tom Eliot Fisch designed a number of the park structures and pump buildings. We asked principal Amy Eliot, AIA to talk about her firm's approach to infrastructure in the new neighborhood, in conversation with Tim Beedle and Amy Neches. Beedle is Vice President, Planning and Development, for Mission Bay Development Group LLC, which is responsible for building the neighborhood's infrastructure. Neches is Manager of Project Area Planning and Redevelopment for the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency.

Amy Eliot: How did you approach integrating the early elements, such as the urban design, park planning, and infrastructure?
Amy Neches: It is important to understand that the "Design for Development" document was not prescriptive. We didn’t try to prescribe style, because we knew things would happen over time.

Eliot: But was there a significant milestone in setting the tone?

Neches: Doing the streetscape master plan was important, because we did feel that the public realm needed to have some consistency, or it wouldn’t be a true public realm. The risk was that every developer was going to put in his or her own street trees and sidewalks, and the result would be chaos. The work on the streetscape took a long time to get right.

With an open space system, even though it is being built incrementally, you can’t design each piece independently as you go—it’s not like the buildings. So we came up with an agreement that the concept plan for each major park had to be done at once. Ultimately, even though a major public space may be built over time, the pieces will feel like one large park, and will make sense together.

Tim Beedle: The concept plan provides a good framework and general sense of continuity to the public spaces. Also, given both the scale and duration of this project, we had the opportunity to learn from experience through the construction and maintenance of completed parks and infrastructure projects. Those lessons are now applied as we move from the concept plan to construction documents.

Eliot: Let’s talk about the philosophy of infrastructure.

Neches: It’s important to step back from the implementation and understand infrastructure as a manifestation of place. The public realm is the armature that we have created in these 303 acres, and it is expressed in all kinds of ways. The various infrastructure buildings are vertical elements of the public realm.

You can see that public realm expressed in the street grid, which is meant to be as urban as possible. It’s divided into small, walkable blocks laid out in a linear fashion that reflects the grid and urbanity of San Francisco’s street plan.

Infrastructure buildings are an expression of the way cities really work, and of course they are part of that larger comprehensive design.

Eliot: Can you talk about the context for the architecture at Mission Bay?

Neches: There wasn’t anything here. If you look at what’s been built, everything relates to a certain warm, modernist vocabulary. All of these pieces are designed individually, but they are part of an overall design palette that was meant to make Mission Bay feel like a part of San Francisco, while still reflecting the time in which it is built.

Beedle: Early on, we realized that the infrastructure and related buildings can’t be separated from these design principles. Take, for example, storm drainage management and its supporting infrastructure: there are five stormwater pump station buildings required throughout the project. They’re a major part of the urban environment, and, instead of trying to hide them, we made a decision to place these pump stations within the public parks. Their prominent locations in the public realm and the building architecture make them not remote from the public but rather architectural.
elements within the park design.

Eliot: We were all pushed by the city’s Arts Commission, which has jurisdiction over the design of these structures, to design pump stations that celebrated a 21st-century vocabulary and were not hidden.

Neches: They really helped push us to reach a higher level of design. It took a few cycles of review.

Eliot: While most of our infrastructure buildings share a common architectural language of channel glass, exposed structural steel, and Heath tile, and are designed to have a lantern-like quality at night, you didn’t prescribe how other infrastructure buildings should look?

Neches: As with the development buildings, we want each one to be as good as it can be. There are the two buildings that MKThink did, the kayak hut and the maintenance building. We didn’t ask them to design a building like yours. We want the best of each architect involved.

Beedle: And yet they are compatible, because their design expresses the function of the buildings as they relate to the public needs.

Eliot: What about earlier efforts?

Neches: We did have a MUNI power station that was built a number of years ago, and we have struggled a bit with that. The first one had a very “designed” look, but we didn’t like it. We didn’t have enough of a sense of what the place was going to feel like. We asked the architect at the city to give us a basic cinderblock building, and we would set aside resources to clad the building later. We didn’t even have the streetscape plan at that point.

Beedle: That raises an interesting point—how should the architect design the building without any context for the future?

Neches: In the beginning, they wanted to do something that referred to the industrial surroundings. We would tell them that those buildings were going to go away and wouldn’t make sense once everything around them was built up.

Eliot: There is a way to extend an industrial aesthetic that doesn’t seem falsely referential.

Beedle: We’re trying to maintain a consistent architectural language with the design of the public building in the plans for the future linear parks along Mission Bay Boulevard. In this park, the restroom, kiosks, and pergola shade structure incorporate similar architectural elements used in the pump station buildings at other locations. Other future parks, such as a children’s park and an active recreation park, have been designed to incorporate features which borrow—literally—from prior architectural elements found at Mission Bay; for example, using large steel I-beams recycled from the warehouses structures.

Eliot: What has the public response been?

Neches: Most people really love the infrastructure buildings, but some people really don’t. It’s the same with the other buildings in Mission Bay. But that happens in any city.
Chiu’s measure casts shadow on building plans

John Coté, Chronicle Staff Writer
Thursday, January 28, 2010

If San Franciscans vote in June to strengthen provisions against new buildings shadowing city parks, they could imperil major development projects. Everything from a new wing at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art to the expansion of the Moscone Center and creation of a new downtown core around a rebuilt Transbay Terminal could be affected.

At least that's the initial assessment from land use attorneys and members of Mayor Gavin Newsom’s administration of a ballot measure recently introduced by Board of Supervisors President David Chiu. Chiu said the outcry from developers and others who had downplayed the shadow effects of their projects just proves the importance of bolstering the rules.

"If everyone was protecting sunlight and not creating shadows, this wouldn't be an issue," Chiu said. "But ... they are."

Planning Director John Rahaim, though, said the ballot measure would gut the city’s plan for a new transit-centered downtown with seven skyscrapers, including the signature tower, clustered around a modern Transbay Terminal at First and Mission streets.

"What it effectively does ... is pretty much prevent most new high-rises," Rahaim said.

Affected projects

A draft list from developers and land use experts that The Chronicle obtained shows 16 projects that would be "killed/harmed" and 10 others that might be affected, including the development of Candlestick Point and the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard.

A separate memo from the Planning Department, also obtained by The Chronicle, lists more than 10 projects that could be affected, including "many small projects." The memo also notes three completed projects that would not have been allowed under the proposed rules: the Asian Art Museum, a senior housing project in Chinatown and an affordable housing project in the Tenderloin.

Fred Blackwell, head of the city's Redevelopment Agency, said he was "very concerned" about the ballot measure's effect on a planned condominium tower at 706 Mission St. that would fund and house the new Mexican Museum.

Saving sunlight

Chiu's ballot measure, co-sponsored by four other supervisors, would strengthen an ordinance voters passed in 1984 that largely barred new buildings over 40 feet tall from shadowing Recreation and Park Department property and set strict shadow limits on 14 downtown parks.
The June ballot measure would expand those protected parks to include other properties - United Nations Plaza, Hallidie Plaza and any open space in a three-block area around Yerba Buena Gardens.

It also changes how building height is calculated, placing more buildings under scrutiny.

The measure would give the Board of Supervisors, rather than the Planning or Recreation and Park commissions, control over any changes.

It also would bar any increase in the allowable shadow limits already set for parks, including 11 parks whose so-called "shadow budgets" were set at zero. Those budgets have been modified in select cases to allow for projects with significant public benefit, like affordable housing that shadows Boedekker Park in the Tenderloin.

The proposed high-rises that are part of the Transbay Terminal plan would shade at least two protected downtown plazas and could also shadow Justin Herman Plaza along the Embarcadero and parts of Union Square.

Planning officials had hoped to weigh the benefits of the project against the impact on parks, but the ballot measure would eliminate that option.

Chiu said that's a necessary step because "some individuals within the Planning Department and the mayor's office ... have unfortunately abused their discretion."

**Mayoral rebuke**

Newsom slammed Chiu and the co-sponsors, Supervisors David Campos, Eric Mar, Sophie Maxwell, Ross Mirkarimi, for not doing their homework. "I am rather mesmerized that this analysis wasn't done before they attached their signatures to the ballot initiative," Newsom said.

He said the shadows from large buildings are important and worthy of study and concern, but Chiu seemed to have "another objective" - quashing the controversial condominium tower project in his district at 555 Washington St. next to the Transamerica Pyramid.

Chiu dismissed that notion, saying residents, community leaders and others have urged him to "protect our sunlight."

"The so-called homework that the mayor is talking about refers to his Planning Department and the mayor's staff hiding the shadow impacts of the projects they are quietly trying to green-light," Chiu said.

Staff writer Heather Knight contributed to this report. E-mail John Coté at jcote@sfchronicle.com.

http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/28/MNAH1BOEOH.DTL

This article appeared on page A - 1 of the San Francisco Chronicle
(01-26) 11:33 PST San Francisco -- A $171 million federal loan to help build a cutting-edge replacement for San Francisco's Transbay Terminal will keep construction plans on track, officials said, even as they wait to hear if they will receive $400 million in federal stimulus funds for a project expected to create 48,000 jobs.

"This loan allows us to maintain our schedule and deliver this project," said Adam Alberti, a spokesman for the Transbay Joint Powers Authority, the Bay Area agency in charge of building a new terminal in downtown San Francisco. "It's a very crucial element."

The Department of Transportation loan announced Tuesday will cover about 14 percent of the $1.2 billion construction cost for the first phase of a multistory terminal envisioned to link high-speed rail, commuter trains and regional bus service at First and Mission streets.

Construction on the terminal, dubbed the Transbay Transit Center, is scheduled to begin this spring and be completed by 2015. Extending the Caltrain tracks to the new terminal is to be finished a year later, with high-speed rail connecting San Francisco to Southern California by 2020.

The main piece of funding is still not secured - $400 million in federal stimulus dollars the agency has applied for to help build the underground high-speed rail station. Building that station during the first construction phase will shave $100 million off the $4 billion overall cost, Alberti said.

The Federal Railroad Administration is expected to make a decision soon on which states will receive the highly competitive high-speed rail grants.

Site disagreements

Potentially complicating that bid is a disagreement between the Transbay Joint Powers Authority and the state agency that will build the high-speed rail lines over whether that agency can consider alternatives to the Transbay Transit Center.

Ballot measures, years of planning and millions of dollars in prep work have all put the transit center at the current Transbay Terminal site, a bus station.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority maintains the Transbay Terminal site has always been its preferred location for the new station, but officials there say state environmental laws require that they consider alternatives.
Federal loan to help start Transbay center work

Those alternatives are: ending the high-speed line at a revamped terminal at the Caltrain station at Fourth and King streets, splitting high-speed rail traffic between the Transbay Terminal and the Fourth and King station, and building a station on Beale Street perpendicular to the proposed Transbay Transit Center and a block and a half from its planned 1,000-foot tower.

Deputy Attorney General Christine Sproul, in a Dec. 28 letter to the High-Speed Rail Authority, said "the Transbay Terminal must be part of the high speed rail system" after voters approved a statewide $10 billion bond measure that names it as the northern terminus.

But that measure leaves wiggle room because it "does not define the Transbay Terminal," Sproul wrote.

The terminal could include "alternative configurations," but those "cannot supplant the Transbay Terminal as a San Francisco terminus," she wrote.

'Economic boost'

The loan announced Tuesday will finance ramps to the Bay Bridge, a bus storage facility and design of an underground transit facility, federal officials said. It allows the Transbay Joint Powers Authority to access funds at a 4.57 percent interest rate and pay it back from money the project generates later, such as revenue from leases and passenger surcharges, Alberti said.

The plan for the area envisions a new downtown - a dense, walkable district with seven skyscrapers, parks and retail clustered near the terminal.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who has pushed for more use of such federal loans, said the $171 million will prove "a significant economic boost." The project is expected to generate 8,000 jobs immediately, Feinstein's office said.

"In addition to creating jobs, high-speed rail will spur commerce while reducing greenhouse gases and reliance on foreign oil," Feinstein said in a statement. "The Transbay Transit Center is exactly the kind of public works project California needs."

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http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/27/MNAK1BNOJD.DTL

This article appeared on page A - 1 of the San Francisco Chronicle
For years, critics of the plan to redevelop the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard have said the project is kicking up toxic dust and causing residents to have nosebleeds, headaches and other health problems. But a draft of a federal report obtained by The Chronicle found the project has effective safeguards in place to minimize asbestos exposure.

The report by the Environmental Protection Agency is the latest in a string that have found the project to be safe, despite lawsuits, a record fine and more than three years of heated public hearings as activists seek to halt the work.

The draft report found that monitoring procedures are effectively minimizing "dust generation and limiting asbestos exposure." The EPA also saw "no reason to suspend or stop the construction project," which calls for 10,500 homes to be built over two decades in an ambitious effort to transform the city's southeastern waterfront.

The EPA's analysis is a vindication of sorts for Mayor Gavin Newsom, who has pushed the project. Newsom was hounded on the campaign trail during his failed gubernatorial bid by followers of Nation of Islam minister Christopher Muhammad who contend the project is sickening residents. The local Nation of Islam chapter has a school nearby.

"After more than three years, Minister Christopher Muhammad has still failed to generate a single shred of reputable scientific evidence that the construction on phase one of Hunters Point shipyard was harmful to the surrounding community," said Michael Cohen, head of the mayor's economic development office. "The fact that Barack Obama's EPA has joined the long list of federal, state and local agencies that agree there is no reason to stop this project is important because of the Obama administration's strong commitment to environmental justice."

Still skeptical

Not everyone is convinced of the latest findings, saying that the project is spreading naturally occurring asbestos that is causing health problems among nearby residents. Asbestos, a fibrous mineral, is sent airborne when earth is broken and graded for construction. Long-term exposure can cause cancer.

Marie Harrison, a Bayview-Hunters Point resident and organizer with Greenaction, questioned the EPA's testing methods, especially since individual residents were not screened.

"I would love to believe that they did this, I really truly would. But if I'm going to believe anything, I've got to see..."
EPA report: Shipyard project minimizing dust

"It," Harrison said.

Leon Muhammad, dean at the local Nation of Islam school, refused to comment on the EPA report. Christopher Muhammad could not be reached.

The EPA's study looked at existing data from 10 monitors around the 75-acre first-phase site. The monitors work like vacuums, sucking air into a small canister, which contains a filter that is analyzed at a lab. The agency also reanalyzed 34 filters from "some of the worst-case situations" using a more detailed method.

It found that the "oversight of the project is appropriate" and that the standard local officials use actually resulted in a more conservative approach than the EPA method, the draft report said.

The city's public health chief, Mitch Katz, has repeatedly testified that the construction is safe, and the city's efforts have been backed by the state Department of Health Services and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Fine and lawsuits**

However, readying the site for construction hasn't come without problems.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District fined Lennar Urban, the developer partnering with the city, $515,000 in September 2008 - the largest fine in the district's history for a dust violation - for failing to properly monitor the air, maintain stations for washing dust off vehicles and contain dust from roadways out of the worksite.

According to air district officials, there was missing data from May through July 2006 after one of Lennar's consultants failed to properly calibrate monitoring equipment.

But the air district maintains that there was no evidence "of any kind of definitive health hazard," said spokeswoman Lisa Fasano.

Two former Lennar employees also sued the company in March 2007, alleging the company violated state law by retaliating against them for raising questions about the dust problems at the construction site. They also claim that they were victims of racial discrimination.

The lawsuit was settled out of court in January 2008 after Lennar failed to get it dismissed, records show. Representatives on both sides declined to comment on the amount.

A second lawsuit, filed in June on behalf of more than a dozen children who live or go to school in the neighborhood, contends Lennar "on many occasions" failed to stop work despite asbestos levels far exceeding the cut-off threshold. A trial is set for July.

Sam Singer, a Lennar spokesman, called the lawsuit "without merit."

http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/05/MNS91BDFIJ.DTL&type=printable 1/28/2010
Contentious plant closure gets final approval

Heather Knight, John Coté, Chronicle Staff Writers

Wednesday, January 13, 2010

(O1-12) 20:15 PST SAN FRANCISCO -- San Francisco's last polluting power plant will be shuttered by the end of this year - ending a decade of debate over what to do with the Mirant Corp.'s Potrero Hill plant, one of the dirtiest in California.

City officials and the plant's owners reached an agreement last summer to shutter the 40-year-old fossil fuel plant on the southeastern waterfront. But the California Independent System Operator - charged with ensuring enough energy would be produced without the Mirant plant - didn't sign off on the closure until Tuesday.

"Five years ago, San Francisco had two of the most polluting power plants in California," Mayor Gavin Newsom said, referring to Mirant and the Hunters Point plant that closed in 2006. "At the end of this year, we will have no polluting power plants in this city."

Yakout Mansour, president and CEO of Cal-ISO, which oversees the reliability of California's electric grid, sent a letter to Newsom on Tuesday stating the organization is convinced the city will have enough energy without Mirant once transmission projects, including a new transbay cable undergoing testing and transmission improvements being made by Pacific Gas and Electric Co., come online.

Newsom said he expects Mirant to be closed by November.

Still, Mansour cautioned in his letter that eliminating a plant always poses concerns over blackouts, especially in the case of "natural emergencies." Newsom said the city will be no worse off following an earthquake or other natural disaster with the new transmission projects coming online.

Higher disease rates

The mayor added that the plant closure brings environmental justice to the city's southeast neighborhoods, which have suffered far higher rates of diseases including asthma and breast cancer than other, less polluted neighborhoods.

Newsom said he will announce in his State of the City address today that he envisions the land occupied by the plant becoming part of an "innovation corridor" including Mission Bay, the central waterfront, Potrero Hill and Bayview-Hunters Point. He said he wants the area to become a hub of businesses specializing in green technology, digital media, digital arts, online gaming, biotechnology and nanotechnology.

Parts of that are already under way, including a biotechnology hub at Mission Bay and the mayor's previously
Contentious plant closure gets final approval

announced idea for a green technology center at the Hunters Point shipyard.

"It's very much symbolic of old San Francisco being transformed into new San Francisco," Newsom said.

First, the cleanup

Before any such transformation can happen, the land around the Mirant plant must be cleaned. PG&E, which owned the site before Mirant Corp., began removing debris in the area Tuesday as part of a plan to reinforce the shoreline to prevent coal tar contamination from seeping into the bay.

Some chemical experts believe that tar-related toxins have been migrating into the bay mud for decades. A Chronicle report in February showed that PG&E has known about the coal tar contamination for more than a decade but didn't conduct a full study on whether the toxins were moving into the bay until last year. The utility is to present its preliminary results to the Port Commission on March 9, said PG&E spokesman Matt Nauman.

In the interim, the company is constructing a barrier designed to prevent toxic byproducts from getting into the bay and stop erosion along 155 feet of shoreline that extends from the southern part of Pier 70 to the northern portion of the power plant.

PG&E's tentative deadline for completing its investigation of the toxins and conducting necessary cleanup is 2012.

"We know the city has plans to redevelop this area of San Francisco, and we want to support that by addressing our historic operations now," Nauman said.

City Hall officials were pleased by Tuesday's announcement. Supervisor Sophie Maxwell, who has advocated with others to close the plant for the 10 years she's been in office, called the announcement "a great victory."

"It was a lot of pushing and pulling and really being a pain in the butt, but it took that kind of persistence to make this happen," she said.

City Attorney Dennis Herrera, whose office negotiated the closure with Mirant Corp. said, "After years of contention ... we are today united in our appreciation that it was achieved."

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http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/13/MN1L1BH8VK.DTL

This article appeared on page A - 1 of the San Francisco Chronicle
NFL hasn't given up on Hunters Point shipyard

The 49ers are certainly charging ahead with plans to build a 68,500-seat stadium in Santa Clara, but at least one major player in this whole thing isn't putting all its eggs in the Silicon Valley basket.

That would be the National Football League.

NFL hasn't written this off just yet.

The league, which the 49ers are counting on to help fund a new stadium, has weighed in on San Francisco's plans to redevelop Candlestick Point and the shuttered Hunters Point naval shipyard, where Mayor Gavin Newsom hopes to convince the team to build a new waterfront stadium.

In a Jan. 12 letter commenting on the environmental review for San Francisco's project, NFL Senior Vice President Neil Glat stressed the importance of including planned parking and traffic infrastructure improvements.

http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/cityinsider/detail?entry_id=55785
Glat pointed to four items the league deems "critical to providing access to the Hunters Point shipyard site" for football fans: a bridge over Yosemite Slough, a new interchange at Highway 101 and Harney Way, adequate parking near the stadium and public transit infrastructure improvements.

"We hope that all of the improvements in the current plan, including these specific infrastructure improvements, meet with the city's approval and remain an integral part of the overall stadium project plan," Glat wrote.

That doesn't exactly sound like the league has given up on San Francisco just yet, even though 49ers President Jed York told the Chronicle in December that Oakland was the team's plan B if Santa Clara voters reject a $937 million stadium deal.

One complicating factor: Environmental groups, including Arc Ecology, are threatening to sue to stop the Yosemite Slough bridge, saying it's expensive, unnecessary and will hurt wildlife.

Arc Ecology also contends there are much better stadium sites than the former shipyard, and says the draft environmental report "fails to present reasonable justification and/or mitigations for the impacts of locating the proposed stadium on the shipyard."

All this comes as Santa Clara County elections officials certified that a team-funded citizens group gathered enough signatures to put a stadium measure before Santa Clara voters in a make-or-break vote in June.

Buckle up. It's going to be an interesting ride.
Since its first condominium projects emerged in the late 1980s, perhaps no neighborhood in San Francisco has seen such a dramatic transformation as the South of Market (SoMa) district. In a span of roughly two decades, it went from being the part of town where you'd fear being alone after dark to being one of the most in-demand locales in the Bay Area.

"I knew a lady who grew up in San Francisco, and as a child her mother would threaten her that if she didn't behave, she was going to drop her off at the corner of Second and Howard" streets, said Pacific Marketing Association president and CEO Paul Zeger, laughing.

Zeger has had a front-row seat for the transformation of SoMa, selling and marketing properties there with developers since the late 1980s.

That intersection may have been a nightmare back in the 1970s and early 1980s, but it's roughly a block from one of the first condo buildings built in the area - Museum Parc at 300 Third St., completed in 1989. Zeger says Museum Parc is one of the buildings that "started it all" for residential development in SoMa. Other transformative developments: Portside I (38 Bryant St., completed in 1994), Portside II (403 Main St., completed in 1997), and the Four Seasons at 765 Market St. (completed in September 2001).

"Those three buildings kind of give you a residential triangle of the history of residential in South of Market," Zeger said. "It sort of frames a beginning, a middle, which was a jump over the waterfront (with Portside), and the crowning jewel, which I think was in 2001 with the Four Seasons."

He said it was Museum Parc and the Clock Tower lofts that really got things started for the neighborhood in the late 1980s.

"The Clock Tower and Museum Parc were selling at right at the same time, and that was sort of the moment where it was like, 'boom,' for-sale residential development really took off," he said.

Museum Parc is also historically significant because it opened just after the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989. Joe Mendenhall moved into the building just after the earthquake because he wanted to be in a building "that had the latest seismic technology and engineering," he said. "And every year since, the neighborhood just keeps getting better and better."

Other turning points in SoMa? Garrett Frakes, a principal with Polaris Group, which has marketed many SoMa developments over the years, believes three were key - the dot-com explosion, the construction of AT&T Park,
How condo developments helped spur a renaissance in SoMa and the emergence of the Mission Bay area in the late 1990s are most responsible for the neighborhood's residential and commercial progress.

"Those three developments really stabilized the neighborhood and transformed it from what was traditionally a commercial district that rolled up its sidewalks at 5 o'clock at night, to where residents who started buying there returned to the neighborhood after work and gave it life in the evening hours," he said. "In the beginning of the 2000s, suddenly you've got literally thousands of people in a neighborhood where six, seven years before, you had hardly anybody."

It went from a neighborhood that you never went to after dark "to a neighborhood where you'd see people out walking their dogs at 8 o'clock at night," Frakes said.

Zeger also pointed to the rebuilding of the Embarcadero, after the freeway was torn down in 1991 after the earthquake, as having a major impact on the success of the nearby Portside developments.

"The day before Portside opened up for sale, the city put in all the palm trees along the waterfront there, and it was a kind of turning point in the sense that this waterfront that had always been this wall of freeway and was a pile of rubble and a construction site for so long - finally the area had this headdress for the neighborhood," he said. "Those buildings stretched SoMa from the Yerba Buena area over to the waterfront."

Frakes, who works in SoMa and lived in a loft there from 1996 to 2008, had to leave its now-trendy environs after having his second child. And while he's only roughly 20 minutes away in Burlingame these days, he misses being around all the action.

"My wife and I were ... dragged out of the neighborhood kicking and screaming," he said. "But one of the main reasons we chose Burlingame was because we could easily take Caltrain up here if we wanted to get dinner."

Jennifer Liss contributed to this story.

http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/24/RET01BKTDL.DTL

This article appeared on page H - 4 of the San Francisco Chronicle

http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/24/RET01BKTDL.DTL&type=printable
Mission Bay Roundup - Considering Warehouses

Mission Loc@l
By Anrica Deb

The region's citizens advisory committee considered a variety of Mission Bay news Thursday, most notably the future of a warehouse on land slated to become public park.

Mission Bay's master plan calls for a public park on the corner of Illinois Street and Terry Francois Boulevard, across the street from The Ramp restaurant. That means demolishing the now empty Bluepeter warehouse on site.

Some Mission Bay and Dogpatch residents feel it's worth keeping, and they have been working to save it since 1998. They argue that the building, which used to house a ship supply company, has historical value in both its function and shape. If saved, the building will be one of the few in the region to reflect the area's watery shipping past.

"Nobody has funds to contribute to this," said Amy Neches from the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency at the meeting.

Neches said that if the building is retained, it will be up to those saving it to pay for the work and pay for any additional costs incurred for maintenance.

Neches said that for now, the park's plans will be carried forth in parallel. One design with the warehouse, and one design without. The agency gave Bluepeter proponents until March 1, 2011 to come up with the money for initial stabilization. Read more here.
SAN FRANCISCO -- A San Francisco real estate agent hired to help low-income Asian American residents apply for city-sponsored affordable housing was charged Wednesday with swindling them out of payments he allegedly claimed would guarantee them the coveted units.

Kan Yin Chow, 51, was accused of stealing $1,000 to $4,000 apiece from 19 Chinese-speaking applicants who were trying to get into housing in the city. He was arrested Wednesday and is expected to be arraigned today on grand theft, burglary and credit fraud charges. Bail was set at $615,000.

Until October, Chow had a contract with HomeBricks, a nonprofit subsidiary of the affordable-housing developer Bridge Housing Corp., to help sell below-market-rate units.

Bridge is in partnership with the city's Redevelopment Agency to build low-income housing. Chow was supposed to help Chinese-speaking senior citizens make their way through the paperwork to buy the units.

Prosecutors say Chow took illegal payments from 19 people seeking housing at a development called Mission Walk on Berry Street in the Mission Bay area and at the Armstrong Townhomes on Third Street in the Bayview neighborhood.

Bridge spokeswoman Lyn Hikida said the townhomes and condominiums in both projects are new and are still being sold. Hundreds of people have applied to buy the homes, she said.

The units range in price from $124,000 to $303,000. No up-front cash is required to purchase the units, and there is no application fee, Hikida said.

Chow, however, allegedly told his clients that the payments would help them get priority status. All told, he stole $70,000, prosecutors say.

Prosecutors learned about the alleged scam late last year when an applicant reported to redevelopment officials that Chow had asked her for $5,000, telling her that if she didn't put up the money she had little chance of getting a spot at Armstrong.

She refused, and redevelopment officials contacted prosecutors.

Chow allegedly led some applicants to believe he had the authority to decide who got a home. Some believed Chow was an influential public official, prosecutors said.

"It's really sad," Hikida said. "Our priority is making sure the application process is fair for all applicants."

She emphasized that Chow was an independent contractor and said his clients have been reassigned to another agent.
"Chow exploited vulnerable victims by trickery and parlayed their desire for the American dream to his own selfish benefit," District Attorney Kamala Harris said in a statement.

In addition to the illegal-payment charges, Chow is accused of swindling his ex-wife and adult daughter out of $70,000 through fraudulent purchases on their credit accounts.

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http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/28/BAJN1BOJ3A.DTL

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Mayors dating back to at least Dianne Feinstein have pledged to turn the beleaguered stretch of Market Street between Fifth Street and Van Ness Avenue into a world-class thoroughfare, but anybody who's walked through the seedy area lately knows the dream has never materialized.

But this time is different, Mayor Gavin Newsom promised Thursday. Standing in a packed Show Dogs, a new upscale hot dog joint at Golden Gate Avenue and Market, Newsom ticked off a host of initiatives he says will at long last improve the blighted area.

"This is not the Champs-Élysées," Newsom said, referring to the upscale, beautiful boulevard in Paris and also making perhaps the biggest political understatement of the new year.

Most of the initiatives have been discussed before by Newsom including using $11.5 million in federal money to give area businesses loans, beautifying the street, renovating the old Hibernia Bank building, working with local arts groups to create an arts district, continuing to ban cars traveling east on Market, and installing a large retail center in the area.

"I've got two years left, and I don't want to be just another mayor who didn't deliver on Market Street," Newsom said.

Perhaps most notable was the mayor's pledge to dust off the redevelopment plan for the area that was scuttled by the Board of Supervisors in 2005 because of disagreements over the appropriate levels of affordable housing.

Asked how the same plan can this time be approved by a similarly left-leaning board, Newsom said, "Well, I don't know, term limits?" The quip was taken by many in attendance as a jab at Supervisor Chris Daly - the Newsom nemesis, mid-Market representative and affordable housing champion who is termed out of office in a year.

Daly said his successor will probably be a strong proponent of affordable housing, too, and said of Newsom's take-two, "It's likely not to go anywhere."

- Heather Knight

New leaders: The school board gavel changed hands this week as the seven commissioners elected Jane Kim to the presidency and Hydra Mendoza as the vice president at their meeting Tuesday.

Kim, who served as vice president last year, noted that with the tenure of outgoing President Kim-Shree Maufas, the board will see a trifecta of women of color leading the board.