

PANIL Notes

Volume 30 Issue 7—Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League—PO Box 20375—Oakland CA 94620—June 2005

ZONING UPDATES

By Valerie Winemiller

Mixed-use development approved for Pleasant Valley Road and Piedmont Avenue

The mixed-use development proposed for the "Christmas tree lot" at Piedmont and Pleasant Valley was approved by the City Planning Commission at a public hearing May 4. The development will have two commercial spaces on the ground floor and 26 residential condominiums above (21 one-bedroom and five two-bedroom units).

The project was granted three variances for elements of the design which do not meet zoning code:

- The building height may exceed 35 feet; 40 feet was granted, allowing a sloped roof.
- The courtyard separating the two blocks of residences was approved even though it is more narrow than code would require.
- One third of required open space can be on a rooftop deck, even though code limits rooftop decks to twenty per cent of required open space. Case Planner Peterson Vollmann noted that staff routinely approves rooftop open space for infill developments.

Neighbors were concerned primarily with the building size, the number of units and the expected parking and traffic impacts. The number of units in the project are within zoning limits,

and parking exceeds requirements. Zoning requires 26 parking spaces, 36 are to be provided, though many neighbors are concerned that this is still not enough parking for today's driving patterns.

PANIL's testimony at the public hearing included a list of reasons why these variances should not serve as precedent for granting similar variances elsewhere on Piedmont Avenue in the future.

After comments by several speakers from the neighborhood, the commission directed staff to look at sidewalk improvements for pedestrian safety.

Developer John Protopappas, after the hearing, assured neighbors that he intends to work closely with them to minimize construction impacts. He is already negotiating the rental of nearby property for construction parking and materials storage.

Kaiser expansion continues

PANIL and the as-yet-nameless coalition of impacted neighborhoods have submitted comments on issues that should be studied for the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to be prepared for Kaiser's massive expansion project. The public comment period closed on May 2. The EIR must also consider alternatives to the proposed project. The city is currently hiring consultants with experience in both community outreach and hospital design to assist neighbors in defining alternative designs to be studied. Meetings with the consultants will be announced.

Continued on page 2

Summer reading fun starts June 18th

If you are a young person, summer is a great time to enjoy free entertainment at the library and, while you are there, pick up a new book and sign up to read your way to great prizes.

Wolfen' Down Books is the theme for this year's Oakland Public Library Summer Reading Program, open to all children up to the age of 13. From June 18th through August 13th, our library will be buzzing with magicians, zoo animals, and much more.

For more information, come into the branch or call 597.5011.

Piedmont Avenue Library Branch Calendar

Saturday, 6/18, 10:30 am
Magic with Timothy James

Wednesday, 6/29, 3:30 pm
Zoomobile (meet zoo animals)
Note: reservations required

Monday, 7/11, 7 pm
Just Kidding (traditional music)

Monday, 7/18, 3:30 pm
MOCHA (Make magical wands)

Monday, 7/25, 7 pm
Village Rhythm (African drumming)

Saturday, 8/6, 10:30 pm
Bukli the clown (and magic too!)

Thursday, 8/11, 3:30 pm
Mask Magic (masks and story telling)

Saturday, 8/20, 10:30 am
Puppet Art Theater
(The boy who cried Wolff??)

PANIL MEETING

Piedmont Gardens
110 41st Street
11th Floor

Wednesday, June 8, 7:30 pm

Agenda: Community Policing, How to start a Home Alert group on your block, CORE training

Panel: Lt. Lawrence Green, Don Link and Claudia Albano

To place an item on the agenda, contact Ronile Lahti at 655.1723 or e-mail rklahti@aol.com

**Piedmont Avenue
Neighborhood
Improvement League
PO Box 20375
Oakland CA 94620
www.panil.org**

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Zoning Updates *continued from page 1*

Neighbors, many of whom are also Kaiser members, support the upgrading of facilities but believe that the health care giant's needs can be met with different configurations of facilities that would have fewer impacts on the community. The block-long parking garage and medical offices proposed for Broadway between MacArthur and 38th St. are particularly objectionable. The 70-75 foot tall structures would back up to a charming block of Craftsman homes on Manila; current plans include intrusion into the residential block by driveway and portions of the buildings.

Other comments from PANIL and the coalition include:

- The plans are not pedestrian-friendly.
- Blank walls are unacceptable; there should be lively retail on the street frontage.
- The auxiliary power plant does not belong on Piedmont Avenue and would be detrimental to the street-scapes.
- The four proposed pedestrian "sky bridges" crossing MacArthur and Broadway will make the street level a dead zone.
- A regional transportation plan should be required to take into account the planned MacArthur BART transit village and Summit Medical Center.
- Kaiser visitors, staff and deliveries should be directed off residential streets by methods such as improved signage, designated delivery routes, and various traffic calming measures.
- Impacts of changing the use of the current hospital tower to out-patient clinics should be studied.
- Data was requested on the expected impact of noise, air pollution, vibrations, toxic emissions, and light on neighboring properties, as well as impacts from the use and incineration of toxic and radioactive medical materials and waste.
- Data was requested on the impact of demolition and construction such as noise, traffic, asbestos and dust. See www.panil.org for the full list.

PANIL and the coalition will continue to meet to discuss the project and participate in the public process. E-mail Valerie Winemiller at vwinemiller@hotmail.com or call 653.4552 for meeting information.

New redevelopment area on PANIL border proposed/Controversial idea temporarily "on hold"

By Valerie Winemiller

Over 225 effected residents and business owners attended a May 9 public meeting at the North Oakland Senior Center, originally announced as a one-hour "informational town hall meeting" regarding proposed expansion of the Broadway/MacArthur/San Pablo Redevelopment Area. When invited to ask questions, attendees lined up at the microphone with questions and statements of opposition. The meeting lasted nearly two hours, and Redevelopment Agency staff seemed taken aback by the turnout and the strength of opposition to the proposal.

Expanded once already from its original Auto Row boundaries, in the PANIL neighborhood the new Redevelopment Area was proposed to include commercial properties along Broadway up to the intersection of Pleasant Valley Road and 51st Street, backing up to numerous residential properties. The bulk of the 600 acres proposed to be added were residential (with some commercial) properties between Telegraph and the Emeryville border, and from 40th Street north all the way to the Berkeley border.

Redevelopment called shell game

To be declared a Redevelopment Area, the area must be deemed "blighted," and it must be documented that the Redevelopment mechanism is the only way to cure the blight. Blight is described as crime, vacancies, poorly maintained and "outdated" structures, lack of parking, presence of lead paint, and other criteria that attendees criticized as overly flexible and vague.

A Redevelopment Area creates a funding source for "curing" the blight through street and public infrastructure improvements, rehab of existing buildings (often through facade improvement loans) and subsidizing certain private development within the area.

The value of property taxes which would normally go to the city's General Fund to pay for police, fire, library and other essential services and expenses is frozen at the date the redevelopment area is created. Any increases in property taxes, either through increases allowed under Proposition 13 or due to reassessment upon the sale of properties in the area (including what would normally go to the county), would be given to the Redevelopment Agency, with a greatly reduced share to be returned to the county.

The City Council is also the Redevelopment Agency and makes decisions regarding projects, advised by a committee of business, landlord and resident representatives.

Because the process involves diversion of current funds without creation of extra taxes or funding, critics call it a financial shell game.

"It's not free money," explained one PANIL neighbor and city planner; "it's coming from somewhere. Anyone who gets a piece of property taxes loses: schools, AC Transit, the county hospital, etc."

Areas in redevelopment zones can use the funds to do streetscape and other improvements, while areas outside the zone wanting similar projects are competing with the police and fire budgets for scarce public funds. And the funds involved can be substantial. An eight per-cent annual increase in property taxes collected from an area is a reasonable projection, according to the city planner quoted above. Under that scenario, total taxes collected would more than double over ten years. But with redevelopment, the General Fund's share would remain frozen at original value, while inflation increases the city's costs. The Redevelopment Area portion would steadily rise, however, with the ten-year total exceeding the total of the General Fund share. Critics point out that in recent years the city has repeatedly created bond measures and special assessments to make up the difference, as much of Oakland's flatlands are already redevelopment districts. Other downsides include:

Owning property or living in a redevelopment area has many downsides. Property sellers must disclose that the property is in a redevelopment zone and, if it's near an arterial street, that there is a strong possibility it may be taken by eminent domain. Uncertainty created by the possibility of eminent domain can discourage the natural redevelopment created by a rising market (the probable cure for vacancies in our area along Broadway).

The definition of blight has been abused by many cities in order to build auto malls and take private property that can be sold to large developers and big box retail. It is easy to say that a neighborhood meets some of the definitions for "blighted" such as crime or vacancies. Most neighborhoods—even Rockridge—have some vacancies or crime.

Funding created by the sale of bonds (against the expected income) creates bonded debt without voter approval.

Redevelopment districts are supposed to sunset after 45 years, but rarely do. The Downtown redevelopment zone was recently renewed — 30 years wasn't enough.

Who would benefit from redevelopment?

Often it is well-connected developers, lawyers, bond brokers, corporations and the politicians they fund. Though the money siphoned off is supposed to be reinvested in the project area, it rarely goes to small local businesses or to homeowners to help them. Frequently, it goes to politically connected developers. Forest City is being given a \$63 million subsidy for its "Uptown Project," further emptying the redevelopment pot.

Where would the money go?

Pedestrian and streetscape improvements to Telegraph Avenue (from 20th to 51st) is one named project. Some of the funding must be

spent on affordable housing, the one category of project not required to remain within the redevelopment zone.

Public records show that Redevelopment staff feels that bond funding will be easier to obtain with the larger redevelopment zone. **Now what?**

After the May 9 town hall meeting, city staff announced, "In response to concerns raised by the community..., the Redevelopment Agency staff has suspended all action items related to moving forward with the redevelopment plan amendment. The adoption of the survey area has already been removed from the City Council agenda and the Request for Proposals for the consultant contracts have been suspended. Staff will only move forward with the proposed redevelopment plan amendment if there is clear community support for redevelopment in this area."

A multi-neighborhood group will continue to meet to gather information and organize a response to the proposal. To remain informed, contact the Ad Hoc Committee for Neighborhood Preservation: call Al Crofts/Bob Brokl 655.3841, or E-mail broklcrofts@earthlink.net.

(For more information, go to:

www.berkeleydailyplanet.com/article.cfm?

issue=05-13-05&storyID=21374, or

www.redevelopment.com/norby/index.html, or

read Jane Jacob's "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" for an analysis of how redevelopment has been used as a bludgeon for solving urban ills, when a scalpel was called for.)

Neighborhood events

- Saturday Knitting Club, every Saturday from 3 to 4 pm. Piedmont Avenue Branch Library, 160 41st Street, FREE
- John Street Jumble Sale, Saturday, 7/9. Neighbors are encouraged to organize a sale on their block for that day or plan to bring their "treasures" to John Street. Call Lesley Mandros Bell at 654.1386 for more information
- Get to know your city. It's time to take a tour. For Oakland Heritage Alliance's tour schedule go to www.oaklandheritage.org or call 763.9218. For Oakland city tours call Annalee Allen at 238.3234 or E-mail aallen@oaklandnet.com.

Public safety alert: Up-to-date crime information for this area is available on Lt. Green's web site:
www.northoaklandpolice.com.

Calendar

PANIL Meeting

2nd Wednesday of the month,
(See page 1 for information)

Steering Committee

1st Friday of the month, 7 pm
655.1723

Glen Echo Creek Workday

2nd Saturday of the month
9:30 am, Monte Vista Avenue
654.1930

PANSA Meeting

2nd Monday of the month, 7 pm
Piedmont Avenue
School Library
654.6591

Piedmont Avenue Branch Library

160 41st Street, 597.5011

Summer Reading Program

"Wolfen' Down Books"
(See page 1 for information)

Storytimes

Preschool
Wednesdays, 11 am
Toddlers
Wednesdays, 10:30 am

Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender Book Club

2nd Monday of each month
6:30 to 8 pm
This month's selection:
Before Night Falls
by Reynaldo Reinas

From Councilmember Jane Brunner's office

- Wednesday, 6/22, 5:30 pm — celebrating the planting of 1,000 trees.
- Sunday, 7/17, 12 to 5 pm — annual North Oakland Picnic at Lake Temescal.

To place an item on PANIL's newsletter or web site calendars, E-mail Minnie Sage at mamsage@earthlink.net.

Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League
P.O. Box 20375
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Are you an early riser, love your neighborhood and appreciate seeing it clean?

Here's an opportunity for you to contribute toward a clean neighborhood and earn some extra spending money to boot. PAMA has an immediate opening for a reliable, motivated individual to clean the Piedmont Avenue Business District on Saturday & Sunday mornings. You must be available between 6 and 9 am, rain or shine. The routine takes about 2 hours and covers the area from Pleasant Valley Road to MacArthur Boulevard. Interested individuals should contact Mike Lydon @ 655.7592. Further details on request

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