

Kaiser should build in the Bayview

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Adrawn-out development fight between health-care giant Kaiser Permanente and the Potrero Hill neighborhood has morphed into a high-stakes battle for health equity in southeastern San Francisco.

Kaiser, anchored at its Geary Boulevard location near the Richmond neighborhood, now wants to expand its operations with a large new facility to better serve the city's southeastern communities. Kaiser has homed in on a 2-acre parcel at the northern base of Potrero Hill as the site for the new medical office building.

Potrero Hill residents (including nearly 1,000 petition signers) have resisted development at this location, citing an absence of public infrastructure, significant increases in traffic congestion and harm to small businesses, neighborhood character and the public views for which the hill is famous.

That was not enough for me to join my neighbors' petition. (It sounded too much like Not in My Backyard.)

And then, in an effort to be constructive, the same neighborhood opponents reached out to join with Bayview-Hunters Point ministers and community leaders to provide the health care provider with an extraordinary opportunity and plan to make a major community contribution by relocating the proposed project to the geographic heart of the southeastern community they want to serve.

Land is available. One parcel, suggested to Kaiser executives in January, equals the size of the Potrero Hill site and improves upon it by being directly adjacent to the Third Street light-rail route that runs the length of the city's southeastern corridor. The site is also within an area designated for health center activity in the Bayview-Hunters Point Redevelopment Plan.

Potrero Hill residents already have watched magnificent new medical facilities go up immediately to the east of the neighborhood at UCSF's Mission Bay. The new hospital and helipad are scheduled to open in 2015.

The Bayview, by contrast, is a medical desert. A simple online search of the term "medical offices" throughout the city reveals a gaping chasm not only between the greater Bayview and Potrero neighborhoods, but between the Bayview and the entire city.

The effects of this disparity are well documented: Actual and projected health outcomes for Bayview residents are the worst in our city. As summarized by a 2006 report issued by the director of the San Francisco Department of Public Health, "Bayview Hunters Point experiences higher rates of infant mortality than any other neighborhood in San Francisco - twice the rate of California and nearly three times that of San Francisco as a whole."

Further, "adult residents of the neighborhood are hospitalized more than residents of other neighborhood for almost every disease, including asthma, congestive heart failure, diabetes, and urinary tract infections."

Kaiser does not need an elite location next to the new UCSF hospital.

Kaiser has a noble history in our community, and it should live up to its stated goal of serving the underserved southeast area of San Francisco by locating its medical offices where its services can have the greatest impact - bringing better health, new jobs, new development and new life to a community that's been neglected far too long.

I respectfully urge them to do so now. I've seen plenty of political and policy fights, but real win-win solutions like this are rare. It's now up to Kaiser to be bold and do the right thing.

Potrero Hill proposal

The Kaiser Permanente Medical Office Building is part of a planned 700,000-square-foot mixed-use development that would include:

- 150,600-square-foot, five-story Kaiser medical office building with clinics and doctors' offices
- 39,000 square feet of retail space, and a three-level, 579-parking space underground garage
- 189-unit residential project with a 143-space underground garage developed by Walden Development

Source: San Francisco Planning Department

Art Agnos is a former mayor of San Francisco. He lives on Potrero Hill.

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