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August 2013

OP ED:A Visionary Project For Potrero Hill

Rod Minott

Last month, Kaiser Permanente announced that they were abandoning their proposed medical complex at the foot of Potrero Hill in favor of Mission Bay. This welcome turn of events is a positive outcome for both the Hill and Kaiser.

Now that Kaiser has made their decision, what's next for the 3.5 acre site at 16th, 17th, and Mississippi streets? For Save The Hill the answer is simple: "adaptive reuse."

The practice of adaptive reuse – in which existing buildings are converted or rehabilitated for new uses – is well known in architectural and development circles. Fantastic examples exist in San Francisco, Seattle, New York, Los Angeles, and London. It's an elegant solution that simultaneously preserves the history of urban neighborhoods while inspiring innovative new architecture and accounting for the demands of development and growth.

The site where Kaiser and its co-developer were proposing a massive Mission Bay style medical and residential complex contains three industrial buildings with a storied history. Dating as far back as 1905, these buildings were once home to pioneering steel company Pacific Rolling Mill. Steel fabricated at the site helped rebuild San Francisco after the Great Earthquake and Fire, and also provided the structural bones of some of the City's most striking architectural monuments, including Grace Cathedral, The Flood Building, and parts of the Golden Gate Bridge.

An adaptive reuse project would rehabilitate this historically significant site while enhancing the neighborhood's character and economy. The site at 16th and Mississippi streets is a "gateway" location to the community that has the potential to become an iconic signature for Potrero Hill. The revitalized complex could contain a mix of uses that would truly serve our neighborhood: small offices, local retail shops, restaurants, light manufacturing, and possibly even a school. A similar and striking project is underway at Pier 70, where several industrial buildings along 20th Street are getting an exciting new life. Similar to Pier 70, financing can be accomplished through developer equity, tax credits, incentives for historic building rehabilitation, and City funding.

The yearlong Save The Hill campaign on which I and nearly 2,000 other petition signers worked diligently was fueled by a vision of what could be better, inspiring, and unique. We entreat the site's owner, Walden Development, to work with residents to make the "Potrero Hill Gateway" project a reality. This is do-able. It's a plan we believe both Hill residents and City officials can embrace, support and take pride in.

For examples of adaptive reuse projects visit www.savethehill.com/reuse.html.

This Month's Stories

Kaiser Abandons Plans for Medical Offices on Lower Potrero Hill

City's Zero Waste to Landfill by 2020 Goal Faces Challenges

Former State Senator Criticizes Proposed Green Benefit District

Short Cuts

Rapid Development Perceived as Good and Bad

Children's TV Show Films Story by Former Flynn Elementary Student

Friends of Jackson Park Launched

Supervisor Malia Cohen Assesses the First Half of Her Term

Potrero Hill Housing Bulking Up

A Potrero Hill Perspective on the Protests in Turkey

Technology Company Moves to Kansas Street

SFMTA Resists Calls to Reevaluate Mission Bay Transit Loop Project

India Basin Activists Push for City Purchase of Historic Shipwright's Cottage

Hand-Crafted Designs with Indian Roots Created Southside

Four Crimes, Three Arrests Near Mendell Plaza

William Paul Bogdanoff (1919 – 2013)

The Most Unusual 50th Birthday Party on the Hill

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