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Kaiser and Youth Wellness Center: Coming to Potrero Hill, Bayview

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Kaiser Permanente and Walden Development plan to develop a 200,000-square-foot medical office building just southwest of Mission Bay, along 16th and 17th streets. The site, now occupied by office moving and storage company Corovan, will be divided into two parcels, with the Kaiser facility fronting 16th Street and housing on 17th Street. The multi-use development will be located across the street from Daggett Place, another mixed-use development on 16th Street.

"San Francisco is growing, and we anticipate to continue to grow," said Randy Wittorp, director of public affairs at Kaiser Permanente San Francisco. "We selected the site on 16th and Mississippi to bring our services to the southeastern neighborhoods and to accommodate future growth we see coming along in the City on the east side." The project is still in the entitlement process, with completion planned for 2016.

The Kaiser facility will provide outpatient services, including primary care, women's health, and pediatrics, and may include additional specialty services. The ground floor will feature a laboratory, pharmacy, optical services, and health management classes. The pharmacy, which will offer over-the-counter medication, optical services, and classes, will be open to the public. Kaiser is considering including a coffee or food service on the building's ground level.

The residential building will consist of roughly 200 units, said Josh Smith, Walden's president, although it hasn't been determined yet whether the units will be condominiums or apartments. A portion of the housing will be affordable, with 40 percent two-bedroom units.

Both the medical and residential buildings will have underground garages. The three-level Kaiser garage will house roughly 550 spots, while the residential garage will have 150 to 160 spaces; the exact number will depend on each building's final square footage. According to Wittorp, Kaiser and Walden sought the maximum allowed number of spots to accommodate parking needs without displacing spaces on the street.

About a third of an acre of open space, the "Kaiser Green," will separate the medical offices from the residential building, and will be open to the public during daylight hours and maintained by Kaiser. A pedestrian- and bike-friendly midblock alley will connect 16th and 17th streets, as well as the Kaiser Green. "There will be a tremendous improvement in pedestrian, bike, and baby stroller circulation," said Smith.

"I don't think they're really going to add anything in particular to the neighborhood," said Potrero Hill resident Kepa Askenasy. "I've never heard a single person say, 'I wish there was a Kaiser hospital or clinic over here.' I have heard people say they wish there were more...two and three bedroom houses, more open space and green space and parking and places lit up...it's causing a big suburbanization of Potrero Hill." She worried that the project will allow Mission Bay to expand beyond the 280 Freeway, worsen parking congestion and contribute to the loss of blue collar industries.

According to Askenasy, who was involved in efforts to rezone Showplace Square to protect production, design, and repair (PDR) businesses, Walden has honored the rezoning only to the extent that the facility will generate a profit. "[The project] has nothing to do with enhancing the neighborhood or drawing in more blue collar industries," said Askenasy. Data provided by Joe Fragola, media relations specialist for Kaiser Permanente Northern California, indicates that roughly 24 percent of residents in the 94103, 94107 and 94124 zip codes receive health care coverage from Kaiser.

According to community relations consultant Joe Boss, Kaiser opening a facility closer to low-income Southside neighborhoods "is nothing but good...Obviously these hospitals...are competitive and keep the cost down, but when it comes to treating people, they don't check someone's tax return, so I don't think it forces out blue collar workers." Walden plans to engage Boss to assist with community outreach related to the project, and he "will be compensated accordingly," said Smith.

Wittorp said that Kaiser doesn't yet know how many jobs the facility will create, since the number of positions depends on final square footage and services offered. "What we can say is there will absolutely be a net gain in the number of jobs we have," he said. "I look forward to seeing the Kaiser outpatient care clinic, something again that I think should bring a lot more people and potential purchases of Potrero-Dogpatch merchant wares and services," said Keith Goldstein, president of the Potrero-Dogpatch Merchants Association (PDMA). "Kaiser... actually joined the merchant's association, so they'll probably be encouraging staff to patronize our local businesses."