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Potrero Terrace-Annex Redevelopment Planning Process Continues

By Michael Condiff

Last month nearly 100 people packed the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House for a glimpse into what the Potrero Annex and Terrace complex might look like in the future. Nonprofit developer Bridge Housing, which is leading the 18-month planning process, unveiled a small-scale model and a half-dozen artistic renderings of possible changes to the landscape, street design and architecture of the 606-unit complex. The Annex-Terrace is one of four public housing projects to be redesigned and rebuilt through HOPE-San Francisco, a collaboration between the Mayor's Office of Housing and the San Francisco Housing Authority. "It's really monumental...an opportunity to design a new community," said District 10 Supervisor Sophie Maxwell.

The proposed site plan includes 1,400 to 1,700 homes, with the final number depending on unit size. Of those, 606 will be dedicated to low-income families. The remaining units will consist of a mix of affordable and market-rate homes, according to Lydia Tan, Bridge Housing's president and Chief Executive Officer. "There are a lot of decisions we still have to make on this project, but we want people to know that our decision making will not affect affordability [for the residents already living at the complex]," Tan said.

According to Fred Pollack, of Van Meter Williams Pollack, the architectural design firm hired for the project, off-street parking has been designated at one-half space per unit, with an additional 600 on-street spaces in the plan. The renderings also include locations – but not detailed designs – for streets, buildings and nearly 150,000 square feet of open spaces. Pollack fielded questions from residents about parking, building massing and height, and open space. "We got a lot of great comments from people, good questions," Pollack said. "These are things we need to know. This is going to be their community, so it's important for us to really listen to what they have to say."

"It's exciting to actually see how things could be," said Uzuri Pease-Greene, one of several current Annex-Terrace residents who attended the meeting. "I'm really happy with what I'm seeing so far."

However, some attendees were seeking answers to old questions. "How are they going to do it?" asked Tony Kelly, president of the Potrero Boosters Neighborhood Association, which hosted the event. "That's always been the big question. What's going to happen to the residents? Where are they going to go during all this? It hasn't been answered. That's been frustrating for a lot of people. [The site plan update] is great and wonderful and they're doing a great job of keeping us informed, but we need someone to tell us how they're going to pull this thing off."

According to Craig Adelman, deputy director for the Mayor's Office of Housing, Kelly's concerns are justified. "In the present situation, we can't give an answer," Adelman said. "So much can and will change throughout this process, we need more answers ourselves. Our priority is minimal displacement [of current residents], and we'll be testing our concept in the Hunters View complex starting this year. Through that, we'll learn more about what is and is not feasible. We'll be learning, modifying, and hopefully improving as we go."

Hunters View, where more than 800 new homes are to be built, will be the first of the City's reconstruction projects. Potrero Annex and Terrace, Sunnysdale and Westside Courts will follow, although no priority order has been established.

According to development consultant Charmain Curtis, the Rebuild Potrero project will likely complete its planning stage early in 2010, with a goal of being presented to the San Francisco Planning Commission in 2011. Construction is unlikely to begin before 2013.

Kelly believes that timetable is too slow. "With all the resources the City has, we should be able to get this thing moving sooner," he said. "And the thing is, 2013 is their best-case scenario. In actuality, if they decide to do the Sunnysdale project next [after Hunter's View], we could be waiting until 2018. I don't want to see us in the position of having to elbow Sunnysdale out so that we can be next and I'm sure they feel the same way. It seems like we should be able to do both."



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