

Bold vision for more density in city's western edge

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The western corner of the city, foggy home to San Francisco State University and Stonestown Galleria, is heating up.

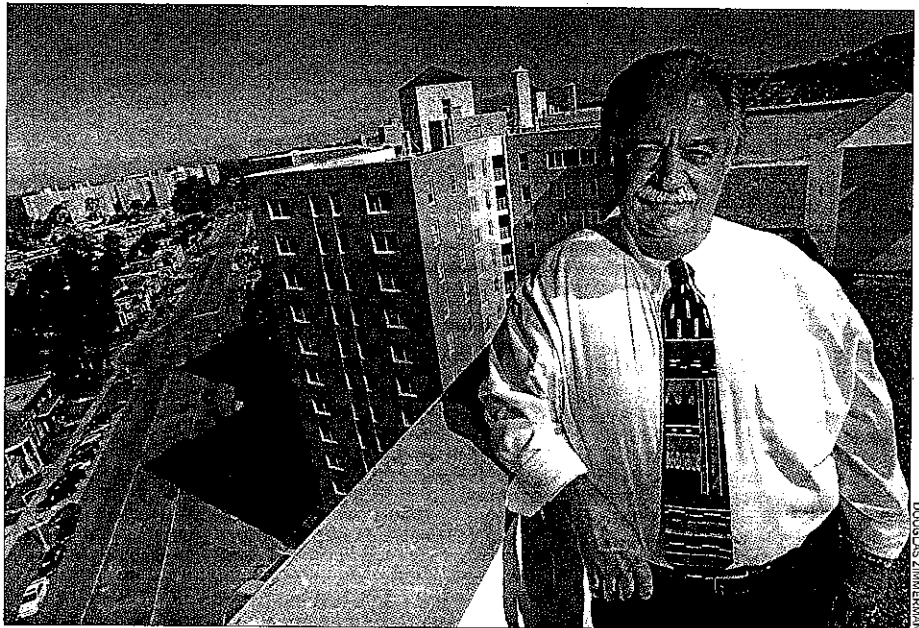
Developers are proposing a bold, long-term plan to remake this quiet, suburban corner into a dense, urban transit-friendly neighborhood. S.F. State, Stonestown and various residential developers plan to add more housing, parks, shopping and better transit over the next decade.

The owners of Parkmerced, the city's biggest apartment complex, want to add 5,700 housing units, tripling the community to 9,000 units. Stellar Management and Rockpoint Group plan to build between 200 and 300 units a year over the next 15 years. Parkmerced is now all rental units, but current tenants and the surrounding community have said they want a mix of rental and for-sale units and townhomes, said spokesman P.J. Johnston.

Regarding transit, the ambitious plan is to re-route the Muni M-line into Parkmerced. The line would come into the center of the park where it would be surrounded with retail. "One main goal is to make Parkmerced less reliant on automobiles," said Johnston. But "the one Muni stop nearby is congested, actually pretty far to walk to and doesn't connect to BART. We got a lot of feedback from residents that they would really use BART shuttle service, so we plan to incorporate a shuttle that would feed the Daly City stop at the very least."

Parkmerced owners also have green dreams of making the complex environmentally sustainable, adding bike and pedestrian paths as well as wind turbines and low-emission microturbines. They believe the green energy plans would reduce energy use by 60 percent and water use by 40 percent.

"We are considering a number of to a state-of-the-art measures to help reduce Parkmerced's carbon footprint, including solar and wind power as renewable sources, and cogeneration for heating," said Bert Polacci,



Parkmerced hopes to reduce its carbon footprint with better transit and renewable energy, says Polacci.

Parkmerced's director of government relations and community outreach. "We're working toward using energy more reliably and efficiently to reduce Parkmerced's strain on the city's power grid."

Retail vision

On the retail side, Stonestown Galleria is the biggest

game in the neighborhood, and owner General Growth Properties has plans to make it even bigger.

The first step is the opening of Trader Joe's this fall in the 18,000-square-foot space formerly occupied by Copeland's Sports. It also plans for a 150,000-square-foot

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expansion with a larger cinema complex, two or three new restaurants, two medical office buildings, and additional retail along 20th Avenue.

Jim Anderson, senior development director at the Galleria, expects everything to be open by Christmas 2011. Like Parkmerced, General Growth also polled the community on which amenities they wanted.

"They didn't want a megaplex, so we're ... only putting in six to eight screens," said Anderson. "They wanted walkability and a neighborhood feel so we're putting in fountains, benches and (landscaping)."

University plans

S.F. State also has development intentions, with a master plan that adds roughly 800,000 square feet of green, academic and support space by 2020. Initial projects for the first phase of construction through 2015 will start with an expansion of the library, and new academic buildings. For its creative arts complex at the corner of Lake Merced and Font boulevards, S.F. State has hired Michael Maltzan Architecture and Nagata Acoustics, famed for giving the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles its top-notch acoustics. The complex is a concert hall for music and lectures scheduled to break ground in 2010.

Because the university expects to have enrollment levels as high as 25,000 by 2014, it wants to boost its student housing. Now it has space for 2,200 undergraduates on campus, plus 950 apartment units along the borders. The master plan calls



"We've made extensive changes in the plan," based on neighbors' feedback, says Bloom.

for adding 750 units of student housing and replacing the apartment units with higher-density housing over time.

Regarding green space, S.F. State wants to turn its hidden valley, running east-west through campus and now holding its parking garage, into the central open space with a creek running into Lake Merced. New bike paths and pedestrian walkways will be scattered all over. The parking garage will be replaced by facilities gradually introduced around campus perimeters, but there will be no net gain in parking spaces, said S.F. State's campus planner Wendy Bloom.

"We conducted an intensive study of how people get to campus, and it's evident that most of our students arrive on public transit. We want to make sure that

number goes up." S.F. State has no say on the city's future transit plans, although Bloom said it is trying to collaborate with Parkmerced on Muni plans by attending their meetings.

Balancing the plans

Sean Elsbernd, Supervisor of District 7, which includes the area west of Twin Peaks, is concerned about the effects of the multiple proposed projects and how they'll change this low-rise residential area.

"I don't think the city's planning department is prepared to process how projects of this density fit into this family neighborhood. We need to make sure (the planning department) puts in place a responsible review of these projects, and absolutely consider the developments' impact on traf-

fic, transportation, sewer, water, streets and parks. I don't think we have a formula in place for understanding how those impacts can be mitigated."

All the projects center around 19th Avenue, one of the busiest roadways in San Francisco, and already one of the most dangerous, with multiple deaths from accidents every year. While Elsbernd gives Parkmerced and Stonestown thumbs up for the way they've included the community in their planning, he has concerns about S.F. State's master plan.

"Because it's state land, there's no requirement to go through the city's planning process. Approval goes through the university's board of trustees. That has created some lingering frustration that the community wasn't involved."

But Bloom said S.F. State did extensive community outreach before the master plan was approved. "We've made extensive changes in the plan based on what the neighborhood wanted. We had envisioned a hotel and conference center on 19th Avenue, but community concerns about transit problems changed that to a conference center with just a few rooms. We also wanted to have a great deal more student housing, but that was cut back."

She said the creative arts complex is an example of a school venue that will serve the entire city. "It's going to be on Parkmerced's footsteps. Plus the foot and bike paths will be accessible to everyone, making it easier for them to avoid 19th Avenue traffic. We're alongside Parkmerced and Stonestown in working to create a more accessible neighborhood."

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