

# Pacific Heights News

Official Newsletter of the Pacific Heights Residents Association

Founded April 17, 1972

Vol. XVII No. 2

Summer 2009

## Neighborhood Associations Appeal Drew School's Plans

The Planning Commission has certified the Environmental Impact Report for Drew School's plan to replace a three-unit residence with an auditorium and other school functions, but the fight over the plan isn't over.

With the backing of PHRA and WANA (Western Addition Neighborhood Assn.), Attorney Steve Williams has filed an appeal of the EIR as well as the school's demolition permit. The Board of Supervisors will hold a consolidated hearing on August 4 covering both the EIR and the Appeal of the Conditional Use Authorization Under Planning Code Section 317—Demolition).

While the PHRA Board recognizes that our membership includes parents of Drew School students, it believes there are other alternatives. They note that University High School, needing additional space, opened a second campus on Sacramento Street in an abandoned garage. The Schools of the Sacred Heart similarly operate two campuses, with some of the schools on Broadway and Stuart Hall High School on Pine. There are properties available to Drew in the neighborhood. Drew wants to modify its Conditional Use Permit to raise enrollment from 250 to 280 students.

Continued expansion of Pacific Heights' numerous schools erodes the quality of life as traffic and parking continue to worsen and as institutions replace residences.

It has been an uphill battle for the neighborhood associations. For the Conditional Use/ Demolition the Drew School was not even required to fill out the mandatory application before getting the approval, according to Williams. When he pointed this out, the application was filled out and slipped into the file one day before the hearing at the Planning Commission. Further, The EIR does not include the mandatory alternative of moving the building rather than demolishing it. This option is so common that one of the Planning Commissioners actually brought it up at the hearing...not in the EIR

Drew has publicized the environmental qualities of its proposed new space, which would have plantings

on the wall and the roof, à la the Academy of Science. The neighborhood associations' stance is that the Broderick Street building is perfectly sound rent-controlled housing and should not be demolished for a private school. Drew has already struck a deal with the tenants, who have vacated.

The school has a symbiotic relationship with a church across Broderick Street, holding assemblies there at times when there are no church services. However, school leaders say they want to have a space on campus big enough for all the students – and they don't want the students crossing the street. PHRA's response is that these are high school students, who are perfectly capable of getting there and back.

The Planning Commission's ruling in favor of Drew was unanimous. Further, parents of many of the Drew students vote in the area and thus have their own political clout. Thus it is crucial that residents everyone who cares about preservation, housing and our neighborhood to attend the Supervisors' hearing and weigh in on this case.

### ***Popular Columnists to Speak At PHRA Annual Meeting***

**Phil Matier and Andy Ross, the ultimate insiders at the San Francisco *Chronicle*, who always seem to be the first to know on many local issues, will once again be the featured speakers at PHRA's annual meeting.**

**All members are urged to attend.**

**The meeting is scheduled Thursday, Oct. 22, 6-8 p.m. at Schools of the Sacred Heart, 2222 Broadway.**

**The session will also include an update for members on hot topics of the day, which may or may not be the same hot topics with which PHRA is contending now. The pre-meeting reception affords members an opportunity to meet and greet others in the neighborhood, compare notes and share interests.**

**Remember, our clout is in our numbers.**

## Proposed Tower Stirs Stiff Neighborhood Opposition

A high-powered public relations and lobbying firm, hired by Northern California Presbyterian Homes and Services, is leading the opposition to the construction of a 375-foot residential tower at 1481 Post St.

NCPHS operates the Sequoias, the life-care institution bounded by Post, Laguna, Geary and what was Laguna Street, prior to construction. The proposed tower would rise between the Sequoias and the Cathedral Hill Plaza apartment building at 1333 Gough Street, directly across Geary Boulevard from the Cathedral of San Francisco.

According to the PR firm, Barnes, Mosher, Whitehurst, Lauter & Partners, there are multiple objections to the concept:

- The proposed building is simply too tall – 375 feet in an area zoned for a maximum of 240 feet. The Sequoias, built before current zoning, rises 260 feet.
- It would be too close to other towers – 40 feet from the Sequoias, and 90 feet from Cathedral Hill Plaza. BMWL says that in Rincon Hill and Market/Octavia the city set a standard of 115 feet between tall buildings to prevent the appearance of a “wall.”
- Instead of being so close to the Sequoias the developer should allow for a pedestrian passageway where Laguna Street used to be, another standard that was set for Rincon Hill and Market/Octavia.
- The building will be dense – 11,600 square feet per floor, resulting in a bigger footprint than is allowed.



*The proposed tower would block views from Lafayette Park*

According to the BMWL and NCPHS personnel who presented their case to the PHRA Board in June, the developer’s response is that Geary is so wide it can handle a large, tall building, and in compliance with city policy it’s at the top of a hill, where towers belong.

BMWL responded with a composite photo showing that it would block views even from Lafayette Park.

The PHRA Board suggested the lobbying firm asks for a “scoping meeting,” a hearing by the Planning Commission to determine what must be covered in the developer’s Environmental Impact Report.

Last October, the site was included in the boundaries of the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan. Inclusion in the plan brings greater scrutiny to the project. It also means that a decision

on height could set a precedent for the entire Japantown planning area.

## CPMC Leads Effort to Inform Drivers Which Way to Go

CPMC and PHRA are jointly trying to solve a long-term problem: motorists driving up Clay Street from Buchanan toward Laguna, which is a one-way street in the opposite direction.

As CPMC noted in a letter to the Department of parking and Traffic, for years it has posted a security guard near the Clay/Buchanan intersection and he has witnessed the problem. The Clay Street residents, of course, are even more mindful of the problem, which creates unsafe conditions for pedestrians and drivers.

CPMC has proposed painting of one-way arrows on the pavement on Clay Street, at CPMC’s expense, in the interests of “the safety of our patients, staff, visitors and neighbors” around the hospital. PHRA endorsed CPMC’s effort and sent its own letter to DPT asking that the pavement painting be allowed.

*The Pacific Heights Residents Association (PHRA) is a non-profit, member-supported, volunteer group of residents interested in maintaining the quality of life and the residential character within the boundaries of Union to Bush streets, Presidio to Van Ness.*

## Construction Saga Continues but the End is in Sight

Department of Public Works projects that have disrupted Pacific Heights for months are heading toward a scheduled completion in September.

As part of the SFPUC's Water System Improvement Program (WSIP), a combined construction of new water mains, sewer repairs and replacement, and pavement renovation began in December 2008. The project will cover a total of 32 blocks. The entire Improvement Program won't be finished for another year.

This project will provide a backup water supply in case of an emergency, reduce water service interruptions for maintenance or repairs, provide a secure water supply to Lombard Reservoir, and prevent sewer backups and overflows.

On Pacific Avenue testing of the next eight-inch main was scheduled June 30 and July 1. Also in the first week of July the trench for the main was to be dug and the main installed on Scott between Jackson and Clay. The project had been slowed on Pacific by discovery and removal of abandoned rail tracks under the pavement. Earlier, work was delayed by accidental severing of a gas main that didn't show up on maps.



*Construction blocks traffic on Pacific between Pierce and Scott*

As if that wasn't enough annoyance, sewer replacement at Scott and Clay began in mid-June. A new manhole at the intersection will be one of the results.

Residents who would like to follow the progress of the work can read the Water Department's weekly blog at <http://sfwaterdistrict2.blogspot.com/>.

## City Considering Incentives for Seismic Upgrade of 'Soft' Homes

The San Francisco Department of Building Inspection estimates that 6,000 people in Pacific Heights live in a "soft story" building..

Soft-story buildings have a weak ground floor because perimeter walls have large openings for garage doors and windows, they lack interior partitions, and materials have deteriorated over time.

Particularly vulnerable are wood-frame buildings built before May 21, 1973 that contain three or more stories and five or more residential units. These would be seriously damaged in future earthquakes.

Instead of garages, some buildings have ground floor businesses, with large windows and, like garages, few interior walls. A significant number could collapse. The Western Addition, Mission, North Beach, and Pacific Heights contain the largest portion of businesses operating in this type of building.

The Department of Building Inspection undertook a Community Action Plan for Seismic Safety (CAPSS) Project. It determined the city should establish a

program that requires owners of wood-frame buildings built before May 21, 1973 with three or more stories and five or more residential units to evaluate the seismic safety of their buildings and to retrofit them if they are found to be seismically deficient.

The City should immediately offer incentives to encourage voluntary retrofits, according to the report. To get owners moving on making their buildings safer, the report says, the City should offer incentives to owners who retrofit, including expediting plan review, rebating permit fees, offering planning incentives, and seeking voter approval of a City-funded loan program. Buildings voluntarily retrofitted to an acceptable standard should be exempt from requirements created by the recommended program. Incentives need not be limited to the buildings addressed in the report.

The bottom line: If you own, or inhabit, a "soft story" building, you are in considerable danger in case of a major earthquake. It's your call whether you do a seismic upgrade now or wait to be ordered to do so.

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## **Residents Can Help Each Other in Fighting Crime**

If a crime happens to you or a neighbor, the Police Department wants to know about it. Mapping locations and trends is one of the department's tools in combating crime.

While we think of Pacific Heights as a relatively safe area, the general level of affluence is attractive to thieves. It pays to be attentive, always; a PHRA Director's purse was snatched while she was sitting at a sidewalk café.

Information about what is happening around your home is available from the city's web site,

### **#3 Jackson Bus Survives Again**

Muni's Transportation Effectiveness Project came up with the latest suggestion for dropping the #3 Jackson bus, but Muni's finances prevent it from implementing any of the recommendations now. One of the main arguments presented by PHRA is that it is the only east-west service between California and Union streets that connect Fillmore Street to Presidio Avenue. Considering the hills involved – and the age of many of the residents, the #3 is deemed essential. We're okay for now, but this issue is never over.

[www.SFGov.org](http://www.SFGov.org). Navigate to the Police Department. On the left side find "Crime Maps." You can specify the crime, the area and the time period you want to search. If you specify "Pacific Heights" the map will show California to Union Street, Gough to Presidio.

In the 60 days ending June 30, the map shows:

- 17 burglaries, widely scattered
- Two robberies on Fillmore Steet, one at Vallejo, one between Pacific and Broadway
- Nine aggravated assaults, all between California and Jackson, Gough and Steiner. Two of the nine were on the Sacramento Street side of Lafayette Park.

You may also consider implementing the SAFE (Safety Awareness for Everyone) system. SAFE's Security Specialists will walk through your individual home, apartment or condominium with you and discuss ways that you can make it safer and more secure. Specialists will also provide you with a free written report of the recommendations for improvement.

Pacific Heights Disaster & Emergency Response Planning, a group spawned by PHRA, is attempting to coordinate the efforts of SAFE, NERT (Neighborhood Emergency Response Team) and other organizations.