

PAR Planning Association for the Richmond

Construction at VAMC picks up despite lack of a Master Plan

The Veterans Affairs Medical Center failed to meet the extended March 31, 2011, deadline for submitting a final Institutional Master Plan for development on the 29-acre, Outer Richmond campus.

The Master Plan, which is to be based on an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), is required by a June 2008 settlement agreement following PAR's lawsuit against the VAMC for evading environmental requirements in the construction of new buildings. Originally due in December 2009, a draft of the Master Plan was published in October 2010. The EIS has not been done at all.

"While we were willing to extend the deadline for the final Master Plan once, we're not willing to wait indefinitely," said PAR President Ray Holland. "The VA cannot continue to build in a piece-meal fashion, overloading a campus already at the breaking point."

Julie Burns, a director of PAR and founder of Friends of Lands End, compares plans for the VAMC campus to the UCSF campus on Parnassus.

"As best we can understand the conceptual Master Plan," she said, "these massive construction plans aren't about our veterans. About 80 percent of the new space at the VAMC is slated for research and administration, much of it connected with UCSF. Only 20 percent is allocated to direct clinical care for our country's veterans."

Current construction projects underway on the VAMC campus include a 160-space parking lot, a retaining wall on the north side



Construction appears to be continuing behind a fenced-off area across the parking lot from the VAMC main building.

of campus and the administration building that prompted PAR's original lawsuit. Next up: an animal research unit and a five-story parking garage overlooking the Golden Gate.

At the July PAR general meeting, Holland will report on the next steps PAR and its attorney plan to take in this ongoing saga.

The Richmond is talking about . . .

Commercial vacancies: A recent stroll along Geary Boulevard from 34th Avenue to Arguello Boulevard revealed 30 commercial properties closed or with for-lease signs in the windows. A block away on Clement Street, there were 33 commercial spaces in the same sad state. For his part, David Heller, president of the Geary Boulevard Merchants Association, blames the Geary Bus Rapid Transit project.

"As soon as prospective renters find out about BRT, they change their minds about signing a lease." Uncertainty about street closures and construction, he said, are their main concerns.

Bike Lanes in Golden Gate Park: Plans to change the bike lanes along JFK Drive took a step forward at a June 10 meeting of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority. Several dozen members of the public and SFMTA staff discussed alternative designs. Variations include bike lanes on both sides of the street, protected by a buffer zone, or one two-way bike lane next to the curb, protected by rows of parked cars. The plans differ on the number of parking spaces to be

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Summer PAR Meeting

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On the Agenda:

- **La Playa Safeway Update**
- **PUC Water Department**

Wednesday, July 20, 2011

7 to 9 p.m.

Richmond Recreation Center
251 18th Avenue

(between Clement & California streets)

Paid parking is available one block away
in the lot behind the Alexandria Theatre
between Clement Street and Geary Boulevard.

Muni lines:

1 California and 38 Geary

Letter from the President

Dear PAR Members,
Two projects have occupied most of the time and efforts of your board of directors in recent months: development at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the question of whether AT&T should be allowed to install equipment boxes on public rights-of-way without environmental review. Both highlight PAR's willingness to go the last mile to protect the quality of life in the Richmond district.

PAR, Friends of Lands End (FOLE) and others continue to work with representatives of the VAMC to reach reasonable agreement on development on the 29-acre campus. (See story, page 1.)

By the end of March, the VAMC had issued several individual building plans, each with its own, internal environmental assessment. It appears that the VAMC plans to nearly double the square footage of buildings on campus in a piecemeal fashion—with neither a master plan nor an environmental analysis, and without seriously addressing environmental impacts.

Officers & Directors

Officers

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Brenda Altman	Robert Fries
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PAR Representatives on the:

Housing Action Council: Dan Baroni
Kaiser Permanente Citizens Task Force: Peter Winkelstein
Neighborhood Associations for Presidio Planning: Paul Epstein, Sharon Gadberry, Ray Holland,
Neighborhood Working Group for Presidio Master Plan: Ray Holland
Ocean Beach Master Planning Committee: Julie Burns
Presidio Restoration Advisory Board: Julie Cheever

PAR and FOLE steadfastly support the VAMC's mission to provide health care services to veterans who have served our country. However, that mission has expanded significantly to include research in conjunction with the University of California, San Francisco and the Northern California Institute for Research and Education. This expansion raises serious questions about how much more can be built on the campus, which abuts not only the Richmond district, but iconic national and local parks.

The second issue—the city's Planning Department's grant of a "categorical exemption from environmental review" to AT&T for proposed placement of its Lightspeed Network equipment boxes on sidewalks—has captured attention across the city. PAR and San Francisco Beautiful (SFB) are appealing the exemption.

Our appeal argues that AT&T's proposal is nearly identical to one it submitted and withdrew in 2008; that it will create unacceptable impacts on public rights-of-way; and that the cumulative effects of these boxes and other equipment (for example, the wireless telecommunications equipment surreptitiously installed on utility poles in late 2010) increase the need for a comprehensive, impartial review of all the environmental impacts on public rights-of-way.

This issue is particularly important for the Richmond because AT&T led many residents, notably in the Outer Richmond, to understand that delivery of its Lightspeed Network—which would deliver higher-speed Internet and TV connections—was imminent. That is why PAR and SFB have asked in our appeal that the environmental review include alternatives to increase the availability of competitive, high-speed TV and Internet services in all neighborhoods, without unacceptable environmental impacts.

Please note that PAR has a new street address: 5758 Geary Boulevard, Box 356, SF, CA 94121-2112. All other contact information, including my e-mail address, remains the same.

Please let me know if you have any comments, questions or suggestions.

Ray Holland
president@sfparr.org

The Richmond is talking about . . .

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removed and in the degree of difficulty navigating intersections. Opinions on the designs were fairly evenly divided. Go to www.sfmeta.com to see the designs.

More Bison for the Park: There have been bison in Golden Gate Park since the 1890s. This autumn, there will be several new residents in



the Buffalo Paddock (despite the name, the hairy beasts are actually American bison). Like any host getting ready for guests, the paddock is being renovated to bring it up to American Zoo Association standards.

Street Trees: PAR Board Member Cheryl Schultz was one of many at the June 13 Board of Supervisors' meeting who spoke up to oppose a proposal to turn responsibility for maintaining street trees over to homeowners. Speaking on PAR's behalf, she urged the Board to retain the current level of Department of Public Works funding for tree maintenance, thereby ensuring a green streetscape. The hearing was continued without a vote.

New Leader for Richmond Police Station: Captain Keith Sanford brings nearly 29 years of service in the San Francisco Police Department to his post at the Richmond Station. Previously, he served as captain of the Taraval Police Station and worked in the SFO Airport Traffic and Juvenile/Domestic Violence Bureaus. You can reach him at 415-666-8031 or Keith.Sanford@sfgov.org.

AT&T Sidewalk Boxes: The Board of Supervisors was set to vote June 28 on a categorical exemption from environmental review for 726 boxes AT&T wants to put on city sidewalks to house equipment for its Lightspeed Network. If the exemption is granted, San Francisco Beautiful and PAR stand ready to appeal it in court. (See President's Letter, left.)

PAR in the 1990s: A strong voice for the Richmond

PAR came into its own during the 1990s, reaching a high of 2,200 members. This made it a powerful and respected voice at City Hall, among federal agencies and with other neighborhood groups. Here is a look at some of the projects PAR led and contributed to during the decade.

Creating and Protecting Parks

The 1990s held the seeds of significant change in Golden Gate Park. PAR commented on plans for a new deYoung Museum in 1996 and supported efforts to build new underground parking to meet the needs of visitors and residents alike. PAR commented on the new Golden Gate Park Master Plan and joined efforts to save Mountain Lake Park—from possibly toxic sludge, not from the white alligator that briefly took up residence.

In 1991 respondents to a PAR survey listed their top concerns:

- Graffiti – 61%
- Presidio planning – 57%
- Richmond post office renovation – 50%
- Illegal rental units – 42%
- Zoning decisions – 31%

The Presidio made the transition “from post to park” in 1994. Two years later, the Presidio Trust was formed to oversee the park’s transformation into a self-sustaining entity. That same year, the Presidio Restoration Advisory Board began meeting, with Julie Cheever representing PAR, to ensure community oversight and input into environmental cleanup and other development issues.

Presidio planning was in the “visionary” phase in the 1990s and PAR’s participation in the Board of Supervisors’ Neighborhood Working Group for the Presidio Master Plan and the Neighborhood Associations for Presidio

Planning ensured that Richmond voices were heard.

Cleaner Streets and a Community Center

The mid-1990s saw a concerted effort to revitalize Clement Street. Spearheaded by PAR and the Department of Public Works, the initiative monitored merchandise displays on Clement to ensure compliance with health and safety codes, targeted litter and graffiti and addressed public transit and parking complaints. PAR’s Clean Up Clement Street Committee sponsored a forum attended by 350 people and encouraged people to send in complaint forms distributed in the PAR newsletter.

“It’s fair to say that the Richmond Recreation Center wouldn’t have happened if not for PAR,” said Ron Miguel, PAR’s president in 1993, when planning for the center began with a call for community input into the services and amenities needed to serve such a diverse and expansive neighborhood. The 1998 groundbreaking for the Richmond Recreation Center on 18th Avenue capped six years of tireless lobbying, planning and securing Open Space funds.

Everything Old is New Again

A look back at positions taken by PAR in the 1990s reveals the long life cycle of many issues facing the neighborhood.

• In a 1991 letter to the San Francisco Planning Commission, PAR’s then-president Stan Moy called the construction of a Safeway store at 32nd Avenue and Clement Street, which would have included underground parking and residential units, “a dreadful mistake and serious infringement on the quality of life.” In 1999, PAR supported the development of a Lucky supermarket

on the same site, without underground parking or residential units. Today, Fresh & Easy and CVS occupy the site.

• PAR joined the Fort Miley Homeowners Residential Association, the Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association and People for a Golden Gate Recreational Area in a 1996 suit against the Veterans Affairs Medical Center. The result was a signed agreement blocking development of a new Neurosciences Building on the campus. (See story, page 1.)

• The 1994 Geary Transit Study looked at options to make MUNI more reliable and efficient. PAR commented on proposals that ranged from enhanced curbside service to light rail—close relatives of the alternatives now being discussed in the Geary Bus Rapid Transit project.



The 12th (and last) Annual PAR picnic in Mountain Lake Park attracted 200 people for children’s games, relaxation in the shade and hot dogs—grilled here by PAR Board member Bill Shepard.

Perspectives on PAR



“Grassroots representation for the Richmond District is important and PAR does that well. I trust PAR to take positions that are in line with the needs of district residents and merchants. And, even when I don’t agree with PAR’s positions, I’m confident that they are the result of careful thinking, not just knee-jerk reactions.”
—Curt Cournale, president,
Cournale & Co.

“In thinking where we wanted to raise our children, we chose the Richmond District for its amazing access to nature, combined with good urban diversity. But probably my highest value in city living is the sense of community that all good neighborhoods have at their core, and I really appreciate PAR’s role in the Richmond community. Its volunteers do so much to maintain the character and quality of life in our neighborhood.”
—Holly Shepard

PAR Planning Association for the Richmond

Join PAR

Membership is open to all persons living, working, or owning property in the Richmond District of San Francisco. PAR is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. Your contribution is tax-deductible as provided by law.

Yes! I/we want to support the Richmond District.

First name(s)		Last name	
Name of business (for business members)			
Address			
City		State	Zip
Primary phone		Cell/other phone	
E-Mail <i>PAR respects your privacy and will not share your email.</i>			
Membership		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> Business
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting membership, \$15.00/year and above			
<input type="checkbox"/> Subscribing membership, \$25.00/year and above			
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor membership, \$50.00/year and above			
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron membership, \$100.00/year and above			

Please complete and cut out this form and mail it together with your check (payable to the *Planning Association of the Richmond*) to

PAR
5758 Geary Boulevard, Box 356
San Francisco, CA 94121-2112

THANKS for helping to support the quality of life in San Francisco's Richmond District.

There are candidates aplenty in San Francisco's 2011 Mayoral Race

Come listen and ask questions at a

SPECIAL PAR MAYORAL DEBATE

Monday, September 19
 6:30 p.m.

Richmond Recreation Center
 251 18th Avenue
 (Between Clement and California Streets)

Paid parking is available one block away in the lot behind the Alexandria Theatre between Clement Street and Geary Boulevard.

Muni lines: 1 California and 38 Geary

WWW.SFPAR.ORG

The date code above your name on the mailing label indicates when your membership expires.

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