

Prop. V puts Fix on Candlestick

By Jim Castleberry

If you have something expensive that is broken, or maybe never worked right in the first place (like a cold, windy baseball stadium) why not try and fix it before spending millions on a new one?

So say those for Proposition V, a rival measure to Proposition P, the downtown ballpark initiative on the November ballot.

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On the other hand, why fix it at all if the fix-up costs will rival building a new one? That argument comes from boosters of Prop. P, the China Basin ballpark measure.

Prop. V would direct the Board of Supervisors to explore proposals to improve Candlestick Park, the current home of the San Francisco Giants, at private expense, rather than construct a new, \$95 million, 45,000 seat

downtown ballpark at China Basin.

Passage of Prop. V would not override Prop. P, because Prop. V is only a policy statement whereas Prop. P is classified as a city ordinance.

"Candlestick is a real asset," said Joel Ventresca, co-chair of Citizens to Improve Candlestick, the group that put Prop. V on the ballot. "Improving our current ballpark and making it a better place to play and watch baseball makes more sense than spending millions on an expensive, redundant and unnecessary downtown stadium."

To many neighborhood residents, Prop. V has become an attractive alternative, a way to avoid the traffic and congestion that many people fear a downtown ballpark will bring.

Others say that Candlestick Park's flaws have been exaggerated by the Giants as part of a plan to garner support for building a new ballpark.

After all, Candlestick boosters say, haven't the Giant played there since 1961, and the 49ers since 1971? If the facility was so bad,

why are the teams still here?

"First of all, I think Candlestick should never have been built in the first place, but now that we have it let's make the best of it," said Marina District resident Jeanette Barroca. "I think we've got our priorities in the wrong place. If we had a surplus of money I'd say go for it (new ballpark) but we have a really tight budget right now."

Red herring or alternative?

Unfortunately, Prop. V has one fatal flaw that the proponents have no control over, say downtown ballpark boosters.

The very people for whom the improvements would be made for, the Giants, have said over and over that they want nothing to do with Candlestick Park, in any way, shape or form, once the team's lease expires at the end of the 1994 season.

"Proposition V is a red herring that has been put on the ballot by people who are

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opposed to Proposition P, said Barbara Bagot, president of the Ballpark Alliance. "Its only purpose is to confuse voters into thinking Candlestick is a viable alternative, which it isn't."

Nevertheless, Prop. V has found support around the city.

Recent polling shows 55 percent of the public in support of Prop. V, compared to 46 percent support for Prop. P.

"Prop. V makes eminent good sense to me," said Marcia DeHart, president of the Glen Park Association. "I'm an environmentalist and conservationist. I think it's important to use the resources we already have."

Giants Vice-President Corey Busch said he can understand the temptation among residents to want to fix Candlestick, but he said it just isn't possible.

"Believe me, we've done plenty of studies and they all show that you cannot spend enough money to make Candlestick a first-class baseball facility. There are just too many problems."

As proof Busch cites access to the stadium, which backs up in both directions on highway 101 and down residential streets in Bayview/Hunters Point, causing friction with the local community.

"You can't minimize the impact on the neighborhoods," he said. "It's a stadium that relies 90 percent on car traffic."

The other major factors that have convinced the Giants that Candlestick is not the answer involve the facility itself.

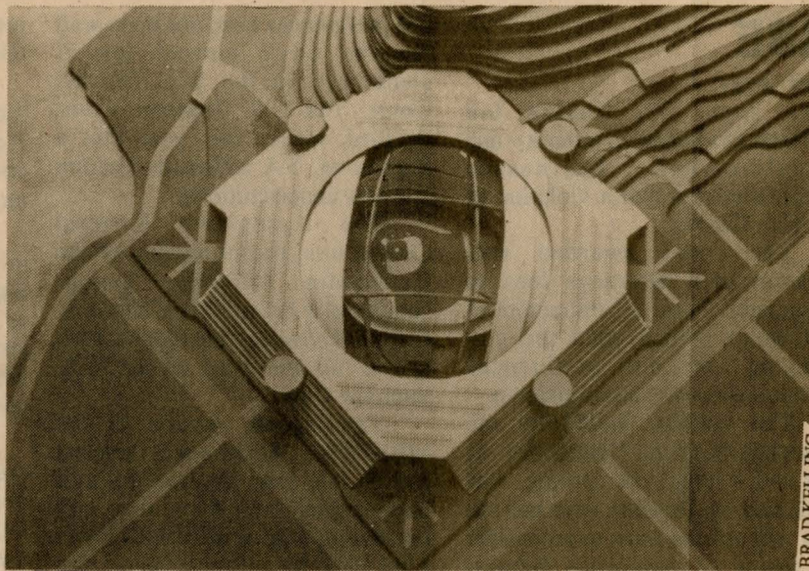
"It just isn't a good place to watch a baseball game," Busch said. "The concession stands are located too far away from fans. The aisles are too narrow. It's too difficult a place to service and operate."

Finally, the famous Arctic winds that sweep through the stadium, freezing the behinds of fans, combined with the difficult access to Candlestick has had a chilling affect on attendance as well.

Although the Giants drew 2 million fans this year (for the first time in franchise history), their counterparts across the Bay, the Oakland A's drew 2.7 million, even though both teams finished first in their divisions.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why," Busch said. "Sure we had a good year. It's a tribute to the Giants fans who turned out despite having to come to Candlestick Park."

Proponents of Prop. V charge that the Giants have exaggerated the



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An overhead view of "WorldPark," the retractable dome proposed for Candlestick Park by inventor George Reppas.

conditions at Candlestick and the climate at China Basin will be no different.

"The reason why there is a difference in attendance is that San Francisco has a much different climate than the East Bay," Ventresca said. "Granted, there is more wind at Candlestick. But it's a big facility. I'm sure things could be done to mitigate the wind."

Doming Candlestick would cost anywhere from \$100 million on up.

The only baseball facility with a retractable dome, the Toronto Skydome, cost \$225 million for the dome alone.

Candlestick to WorldPark

One man has stepped forward with what he said is a workable plan for improving Candlestick.

George Reppas, a local inventor and developer has put together a plan for a rebuilt stadium surrounded by a business park.

The project, titled "WorldPark," involves building a third tier of seating on top of the present stadium - expanding seating capacity to 85,000 - building a retractable dome and constructing a six-level parking garage for 20,000 cars.

In exchange, Reppas wants to develop much of the current parking area around Candlestick and other nearby properties.

The entire development could cost \$1.5 billion and transform the area around Candlestick into a mini-downtown San Francisco.

But Reppas said that his plan would be far easier to put together than China Basin.

"I have corporate partners

But the Giants say they aren't interested in playing in Candlestick, dome or no dome, WorldPark or no WorldPark.

"That's why it is so important that the Giants not be let out of their lease," Reppas said. "If Prop. P is defeated, and the Giants are still bound to Candlestick, it would give time for a cooling off period. Once Prop. P is defeated, the Giants might want to take a second look at Candlestick."

Veiled Threats or Real?

Reppas' plan, as well as that of the entire Prop. V campaign hinge on the hope that the Giants won't make good on their threats to leave Candlestick Park once the team's lease expires in 1994.

"Bob Lurie has a good, strong bargaining position," said Harold Hoogasian, president of the Marina Merchants Association and another leader of the Prop. V campaign. "I personally don't believe he will ever leave San Francisco. Maybe some people would call that a gamble or call it stupidity but that's how I feel."

Ventresca also says the Giants are here to stay.

"Bob Lurie has consistently threatened to pull the team out," he said. "These are nothing more than

strong-armed tactics designed to try and steamroller this new ballpark past the voters."

Proponents of the downtown ballpark say Lurie has dealt in good faith up to this point with the city and there is no reason to believe he won't make good on his threats.

"I take Bob Lurie at his word," said Ed McGovern, an Agnos aide on leave from the Mayor's Office, and head of the Yes on Prop. P campaign. "From his perspective, Candlestick just doesn't meet his needs. He could pick up the team and move it somewhere where he

would get free rent for 10 years but he's chosen to stay in San Francisco."

Busch said those who think Lurie is bluffing don't know the man.

"If people want to call his bluff then they are playing Russian Roulette with the future of the Giants," he said. "I know Bob better than any of these people and I know there is no bluff involved. The only reason he has not left already is because of his commitment to San Francisco."