

# Locals: City withholding info on youth center

Independent 10/29/1996

## EXCELSIOR DISTRICT

### Mayor's Office denies any wrongdoing

BY KAREN POJMANN

Neighborhood Correspondent

In the latest chapter of the Excelsior Youth Center saga, some neighbors in the Excelsior District and in the Sunset District, where a plot of open space will change hands in youth center dealings, say city officials have not kept them apprised of new developments.

When neighbors asked the school board clerk and other Mayor's Office and school district officials for documents pertaining to the project, the requests, they say, were ignored or met with old documents, excluding a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the city and the school district that outlines plans for the center and the exchanges to be made between the parties.

Rebecca Silverberg of the Friends of Excelsior School Yard, which opposes the site of the youth center, said it wasn't until a board member referred to an MOU between the city and school district at a September 30 school board meeting that city officials began to acknowledge it, though Silverberg had been requesting all such documents since September 25. Silverberg says she then faxed the mayor's office and several city officials, finally procuring the MOU from Supervisor Barbara Kaufman's office on October 3, just hours before a budget meeting where it was expected to be introduced. The MOU was dated September 16 and signed by the mayor and school district superintendent Waldemar Rojas.

#### Mayor's Office responds

But John Barber, the project's director at the Mayor's Office of Community Development, said the document was available to the public from its inception.

"If they want documents, all they have to do is ask," Barber said.

No attempt has been made to hide information from the public, Bill Maher, assistant to the mayor, said. If neighbors had trouble getting the documents, it was only because of a turnaround time of "a few days," he said, referring to the two weeks that elapsed between the signing of the MOU and a community member's receipt of it.

Barber said too much is made of the MOU, which is not legally binding and merely delineates plans that have already been verbalized between the parties.

#### Land "swap"

One of these plans includes what Barber termed a "land swap" between the school dis-

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PHOTO: RORY MCNAMARA

**VOICING CONCERNS:** Tim Tronson, director of management operations, facilities planning and conservation for the San Francisco Unified School District, listens to concerned residents at a meeting at 1738 Ninth Avenue last Wednesday evening.

## Few turn out for Bayview candidates

### Youth issues are major concern

Last week's Bayview-Hunters Point candidates night met with a thin audience turnout and

#### NEIGHBORHOOD ROUNDUP

BY KAREN POJMANN

pearances by Board of Sur dates.

Among the b  
bers who  
Facil

pertained to crime, education, and jobs, and how these issues related to youths. mostly in in c

All the candidates acknowledged that youths in the southeast part of the face huge obstacles in the road hood.

"I think there are who feel hopeless said. "You live



# YOUTH CENTER: Some residents upset

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trict and the city, in which the district takes possession of property at Seventh Avenue and Lawton Street, currently a Sunset neighborhood pumpkin patch and community garden, in exchange for the district allowing the city to build the center on the site in the Excelsior school yard. Though termed a "swap," the school district, after a sale this month, actually owns both properties and will lease the Excelsior property back to the city for the youth center.

Several Sunset residents and the Sunset Heights Association of Responsible People oppose the plan, fearing that unwanted construction will take place on the traffic-heavy site. Moreover, they said they think city officials, with the exception of Board of Education member Leland Yee, have kept them ill-informed about plans for the property, initially denying a link between the Seventh and Lawton property and the youth center—despite Board

of Education meeting agendas mentioning the deal.

"We're not against kids, and we're not against youth clubs," said SHARP member Denis Quin at a recent Coalition of Neighborhoods meeting, where neighborhood organization representatives voted to oppose the land

keep it as open space. Barber and other school district and city officials attended a SHARP meeting last week, where they fielded an onslaught of questions and criticisms from the community and agreed to meet with neighbors in the future to discuss plans.

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**'Somebody did something behind our backs without public notice.'**

—Dennis Quin

swap. "We're against this process. Somebody did something behind our backs without public notice."

The property at Seventh and Lawton, recently under control of the Water Department, was sold to the school district at a cost of \$10,000. SHARP is currently circulating petitions to

## **Youth center promise**

Mayor Willie Brown promised in his inauguration speech to build a youth center in the Excelsior District to meet the educational and recreational needs of at-risk young people in the area. The project received resounding support from the the Board of

Education, the Board of Supervisors, and several youth groups.

Neighborhood opponents to the site of the youth center say it will conflict with the existing school there, which serves elementary school children.

The MOU will go before the city's budget committee on November 13.

Silverberg plans to file a complaint against the Mayor's Office for alleged violation of the Sunshine Ordinance, which grants members of the public access to documents discussed in city public meetings.

Meanwhile, youth center proponents are eager to construct the facility.

"We're very, very excited," Barber said. "It's going to help a lot of young people. We feel it will literally save lives in that district."

Maher said he hopes to break ground next spring and plans for a completed youth center to start serving the Excelsior by summer of 1998.

"We're here to actively serve the public," Maher said, "not to talk about it."