Success! EVNA’s Community Awareness Committee Along with Other Neighborhood Groups and the City Work Together
By Rob Cox, Hartford Street

In mid-October SFMTA installed a permanent gate at the entrance to the parking lot in the 500 block of Castro Street. The parking lot has been a late night nuisance for neighbors and particularly for the Hartford Street residents. At night the lot is very secluded from the street and after hours partygoers have used the lot to continue loud music and parties after the clubs and bars closed. There have also been some gang incidents after dark.

Last year Supervisor Elect Scott Wiener and members of the community gathered to find a solution to the parking lot problem. A gate was the simplest and clearest solution. Hurdles had to be overcome by several City agencies including MTA and SFPD. But everyone wanted the gate to happen.

In the Spring of this year SFPD provided temporary barriers and MTA posted signs announcing that the lot would be closed from 1:00 am-7:00 am and SFPD began ticketing cars left in the lot after 1:00 am. The action lessened the problems but the temporary barriers were easily moved and didn’t prevent people from going back into the lot.

Ten months after the first meeting the new gate was installed. The signs posting the hours of operation were put up on October 21st and now the gate can be closed and locked. Patrol Special is responsible for closing and locking the gate and CBD will unlock and open the gates in the morning.

A big “thank you” to all involved: SFPD, CBD, SFMTA, Hartford Street Neighborhood Association, the office of Supervisor Wiener, and Castro After Dark.

Help, Not Headaches, For Home Improvements Projects
By Melanie Nutter
Director of San Francisco’s Department of the Environment

If you’re anything like me, home improvement projects build up and hang over your head, sometimes for months or even years. The list grows and it can feel too expensive, too overwhelming, or too confusing to know where to start. Well, now there’s a reason to find that list: the city has a new program that pays up to $11,000 for home energy improvement projects.

SF Environment has partnered with Energy Upgrade California to help homeowners make energy efficiency upgrades to their homes. The program is called San Francisco Home Improvement & Performance (SFHIP). One San Francisco homeowner took advantage of the program and has already reaped the benefits: he saves 40 percent on his energy use, received the maximum in program rebates, and only paid $1,200 out-of-pocket. Now his house is warm and comfortable, and his energy bills are lower. An energy upgrade can increase a home’s efficiency by 15 to 40 percent through improvements like added insulation, duct & air sealing, water heater or furnace replacement, and hot water pipe insulation.

There are many measures that you can take to improve your home and make it more comfortable. When your house is drafty, or cold in one section and hot in another, it means there are holes in your house and you are throwing heat (and money) right out of those holes. Contractors trained for our program can use insulation to fix holes easily, and they do all the paperwork to get the projects paid for. All contractors participating in the program undergo specialized training before performing home energy upgrades and are part of an ongoing quality assurance program.

Another benefit of energy efficiency improvements that people don’t always think about is indoor air quality, which can be a safety issue, especially if you have young children. Leaks in your house can cause air to flow from attics, basements, or other potentially unclean places, you can wind up with dust, toxins, or even mold in your air. By sealing up leaks and getting your house working smoothly as a whole system, you’ll find that indoor air quality can be drastically improved.

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To achieve the greatest efficiency gains and help you qualify for the largest incentive available, SF Environment and its contractors emphasize a “whole house” approach, rather than piecemeal improvements. Each participating contractor will create a customized plan for your home, based on the results of your individual home energy assessment. Homes must achieve 15 percent reduction in energy usage in order to qualify, but the average SF home saved 35%. The SF Home Improvement & Performance program combines all available rebates to offer homeowners up to $11,000 to pay for their improvement projects.

SF Environment wants to help you live more comfortably, reduce your energy footprint and upgrade your home for less. To find out more, and to see a list of participating contractors, please visit SFEnvironment/SFHIP.org, or call (415) 355-3769.

Come to the EVNA membership meeting on November 9 to meet Melanie Nutter and learn more about SFHIP.

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The Café is committed to ensuring that the Castro has a vibrant and active nightlife and a peaceful neighborhood.

All who live, work and play in our neighborhood deserve a positive and healthy community.

We are proud to help set the tone for working in partnership with fellow businesses, neighborhood leaders and residents.

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What’s Up with Historic Preservation?
By Judith Hoyem, Planning and Land Use Chair, 17th Street

Attempts to revise the rules for historic preservation planning in San Francisco -- pro’s and con’s -- will be a topic at the EVNA membership meeting on November 9, 2011.

In November 2008, Proposition J that created an Historic Preservation Commission was approved by over 55% of the voters. It established a seven-member Historic Preservation Commission, to be appointed by the Mayor, with authority to send recommendations directly to the Board of Supervisors on the designation of landmark buildings, historic districts and significant resources. The implementation of Prop J necessitated the revision of the SF Planning Code’s Articles 10 and 11, governing preservation planning.

During the past three years a detailed, collaborative process of revision of Articles 10 and 11 has taken place with consultation and negotiation among all of the stakeholders; e.g., the Planning Department, members of the HPC, members of the Planning Commission, SF Architectural Heritage, SPUR, and key representatives of both the development community and the historic preservation community. In the meantime, Supervisor Scott Wiener has put forth a different set of 16 amendments to Articles 10 and 11 some of which are intended to address problems in the Code but which as a set contravene the collaborative progress of the past three years and undermine the intent of Prop J.

Most seriously, the Supervisor’s amendments create new procedural barriers to the initiation of historic resource surveys and the designation of historic districts. Historic resource surveys provide information on the history of the surveyed area, create an inventory of what the current land use is, and identify what historical or cultural significance may exist in the land or buildings of the area according to established “Secretary of the Interior’s Standards.” Surveys do not create landmarks. They do not prevent development or modernization. They simply provide basic, crucial information for a city’s land use planning. It is astonishing that San Francisco, a city that attracts new residents and tourists from all over the world because of its unique architecture and natural setting, does not have a full-scale inventory of its built environment. Castro/ Eureka Valley, for example, has not yet had a survey of its architecturally, culturally, and historically significant resources. According to the SF Planning Department, “Only a small fraction of San Francisco’s historic and cultural resources have been identified.” (http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=1826)

If we don’t know what we have, how will we know what we want to protect as we move forward into the future? Supervisor Wiener’s amendments seem to take aim particularly at the creation of historic districts, which afford recognition and protection of historically significant areas. Over the past 45 years, only eleven local historic districts have been designated in San Francisco, - surely not an excessive number - the most recent being the Dogpatch neighborhood in 2003. (Another pending district in Duboce Triangle enjoys broad community support.)

Before an historic district can be created, if a survey has not yet been done, it must be undertaken and completed to ensure that the area rises to the level of an historic district.

Currently surveys are undertaken by the Planning Department or by community groups under the direction of the HPC and do not require the consent of property owners or the Board of Supervisors to do this important research and documentation work. Supervisor Wiener proposed in Amendment #1 “that no such survey or inventory shall proceed unless one of the following two occur: (1) a majority of property owners in the proposed survey area agree to the survey’s commencement and the Board of Supervisors, by majority vote of all members, approves the survey’s commencement; or (2) the Board of Supervisors, by a 2/3 vote of all members, approves the survey’s commencement.”

By imposing these unprecedented procedural barriers and prohibitive costs on the initiation of surveys not only would the designation of future historic districts be affected but the basic

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work of simply documenting the resources that exist in the City would effectively come to an end.

Since submitting the 16 amendments, Supervisor Wiener has received feedback from the Planning Department, the HPC, SF Architectural Heritage and others. Accordingly, he has now abandoned the requirement of majority owner support for the initiation of a survey and has modified or abandoned some features of the other amendments. The requirement of a 2/3 vote of the Board of Supervisors to initiate a survey apparently remains.

He has recently submitted other Amendments or proposals in addition to the original 16, which need careful vetting to make sure they are not contrary to best practices or do not single out preservation initiatives for disparate treatment that other planning and zoning changes do not require. An “economic hardship opt-out” for low-income property owners in historic districts seems good in concept, as long as it is applied narrowly to prevent abuse. A proposal to develop “San Francisco Standards” for historic districts in lieu of Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, seems to create an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. The corollary that contributing buildings to historic districts will be exempt from the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards during the development of “San Francisco Standards” seems a wide-open unregulated invitation to some owners to alter or even demolish those buildings.

Come to the EVNA membership meeting on November 9 for updates and to ask questions. The Executive Director of SF Architectural Heritage, Mike Buhler, is scheduled to speak on the topic at the meeting. For a list of Supervisor Wiener’s amendments and the responses of SF Architectural Heritage go to http://www.sfheritage.org/advocac/positions-testimony/articles-10-11.
MEMO

to: President Christina Oulage and Members of the Planning Commission
from: Supervisor Scott Wiener
date: October 27, 2011
re: Amendments to Articles 10 and 11 of the Planning Code

Dear President Olague and Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on the revisions to Articles 10 and 11 that you are considering. This legislation provides us with an important opportunity to update our historic preservation rules and to ensure that they fit our urban and changing city. Our goals should be to embrace what is best about our past while also embracing the future, and to have a historic preservation process that is inclusive and flexible.

In that spirit, I am proposing a number of amendments to the version of Articles 10 and 11 that the Historic Preservation Commission forwarded to you. I have discussed these amendments with Planning Department staff--and have modified them in response to valuable feedback from staff--and I also proposed the amendments to the HPC. I now ask you to consider them and, I hope, recommend them. A more detailed memo will follow, one which tracks the precise language of the Articles.

Following are brief summaries of the most significant of my proposals:

1. Economic hardship opt-out in historic districts: Owning property in a historic district can significantly increase costs and administrative hurdles to make changes to one’s property. Moreover, being a property owner doesn’t mean one is wealthy. There are many property owners who are on fixed incomes, who are unemployed, or who for whatever reason, don’t have significant resources. Owning property in a historic district shouldn’t be limited to those with resources; and we need to ensure that historic districts aren’t gentrified and that creating affordable housing in historic districts is possible. I am proposing a limited economic hardship opt-out so that affordable housing projects, people of modest means, and smaller businesses can make changes to their property without incurring the significant costs of making the changes consistent with historic preservation standards. In response to my proposing this idea, Planning Department staff proposed a form of economic hardship opt-out that I believe is on the right path.

2. Ensuring strong outreach to and support from property owners before a historic district is created: Because of the significant restrictions on one’s property when it is in a historic district, it’s important that property owners have buy-in before a district is created. I am proposing that property owners engage in balloting to measure support for a district, with a goal of a majority of property owners voting. The vote will be advisory -- the Board of Supervisors ultimately will decide whether to legislate the district -- but obviously, any Supervisor will pay close attention to the vote. This mechanism will ensure effective outreach to and engagement of property owners and will provide a good measure of the level of support for the proposed district. Some have expressed concern that balloting is not required for planning changes, for example, to zoning. However, creating a historic district is very different from a zoning change, given that placing one’s home into a historic district leads to immediate and significant restrictions on what the property owner can do to his or her own property. Historic districts have a much more direct impact on the details of a person’s home than most other planning code changes, and balloting makes sense here. I initially proposed that the balloting be more binding, but in conversations with staff, I modified my proposal to make it non-binding.

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3. Requirement that a certain percentage of property owners in the proposed district sign a verified application for initiation.

The HPC’s current draft of Article 10 states that “the Department, property owner(s) or member of the public may request the HPC to initiate designation…” (See proposed section 1004.1) Currently, the Planning Code requires that when property owners apply for initiation, “the application must be subscribed by or on behalf of at least 66 percent of the property owners in the proposed district.” (See current section 1004.1) I would like to maintain this requirement that when property owners or members of the public nominate a district for initiation, they do so with an application that has been subscribed by at least 66% of the property owners in the proposed district.

4. Better outreach for historic surveys:

The first step toward creating a historic district is to survey the area. Surveys are important, but they also have impacts on people’s properties. The Planning Department at times treats surveyed areas as quasi-historic districts. People need to know when their neighborhoods are being surveyed and what the survey’s significance is. I initially proposed requiring balloting or Board approval to commence a survey, but I have since accepted a counter-proposal from preservation planning staff, which would greatly increase outreach when surveys are occurring.

5. San Francisco-specific preservation standards:

The Planning Department relies on the Secretary of the Interior Standards in assessing changes to historic buildings. It also relies on the Secretary of the Interior Standards as an important tool to determine effects on resources for CEQA purposes (i.e. projects that comply with the Standards are typically exempt from CEQA review). These standards are generic and apply across the country to all kinds of projects, irrespective of where the project is located or the type or size of project. However, an urban setting like San Francisco, with its own unique history, topography, and needs, should not be using a “one size fits all” set of standards. As a result, I’m proposing that the Planning Department prepare San Francisco Standards, following a public planning process, determination of conformance with the General Plan and Planning Code by the Planning Commission, and consideration by the HPC. The Planning Department has expressed strong support for this proposal, and it makes a lot of sense.

6. Limiting the highest preservation standards to portions of the building visible from the public right-of-way:

Buildings, of course, have portions visible from the streets and other public areas and portions that aren’t visible. I believe that property owners should have more flexibility for - and have less administrative review of - alterations to the parts of their homes that aren’t visible from the public right of way or public space. There are already multiple levels of review and oversight provided through the Planning and Building Departments.

7. Preserving the compromise reached in the Downtown Plan:

When the Downtown Plan was approved in 1987, stringent demolition prohibitions were imposed on Significant (Cat. I and II) buildings, but not on Contributory (Cat. III and IV) buildings unless the owners of those Contributory buildings sold TDRs. No case has been made that we need to abandon this compromise, which has worked well since the 1980’s.

As noted, I will provide you with a more detailed and exact memo shortly. Thank you for considering my proposals.
Ad Hoc Committee Forms to Work With Trigger

At the September meeting membership heard from Deckel Israeli, Trigger’s new Community Liaison. In partnership with DTNA, EVNA has formed a neighborhood work group to address on-going noise and nuisance issues with Trigger. Our goal is clear: ensure that residents preserve their right to the peaceful enjoyment of their homes while ensuring that Trigger is a thriving business that contributes to the fabric of the neighborhood. This approach worked when there were issues with The Café in 2007, and it is our hope that we can replicate that partnership. If you would like to become a member of this committee, please email Alan.Beach@EVNA.org.

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published six times a year by Castro/Eureka Valley Neighborhood Association
2011 Membership Meetings
7:00-8:30pm, 501 Castro (above B of A)
January 26, March 23, May 25, July 27, September 28, November 9

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GETTING INVOLVED
BEING INFORMED

President’s Column
November 9 Membership Meeting—Join us at EVNA’s bimonthly meeting featuring presentations from Melanie Nutter, Director of San Francisco’s Department of the Environment, on how to participate in a home energy program, and Mike Buhler, Executive Director of SF Architectural Heritage, who will discuss impacts of Supervisor Wiener’s proposed amendments to Historic Preservation.

HOT TOPICS:
• MUMC Annual Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony, Monday Night November 28 at 6:00pm in front of Bank of America at 18th & Castro. Donna Sachet will emcee, along with Santa and his Elf, City dignitaries, music, and holiday treats.

• World AIDS Day, Thursday December 1. This year is the 30th anniversary of the epidemic. Many commemorative events will take place in our neighborhood and across the City. Sixteen San Francisco HIV/AIDS service organizations are coming together under the banner “30AIDS” to remember those who went before us, those who still need help, and those who need to be educated on the subject.

• EVNA Officer and Board Elections at November 9 Meeting
Nominating Committee’s slate of officers (two-year term):
Alan Beach-Nelson, President
Rob Cox, Secretary
Gary Weiss, Treasurer

Nominating Committee’s slate of Directors (two-year term):
Laura Castellanos, Dan Risman Jones, 22nd Street
Patrick Crogan, Market Street Dennis Richards, Beaver Street
Tim Eicher, Q Bar Aaron Seivertson, Hartford Street
Mary Edna Harrell, Castro Street Josh Bleecher Snyder, Hancock Street
Judith Hoyem, 17th Street Diane Termini, Hartford Street

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