

# Forget the neighbors — build away!

OPINION Having considered San Francisco something of a utopian American city (certainly compared with others), I assumed the only reason city officials were on the verge of allowing perfect little Valencia Street to be turned into Emeryville West was that they were simply unaware of what a handful of developers and a few folks in the Planning Department were cooking up.

All they needed was to hear from the neighbors, some responsible concerned adults, to call their attention to this under-the-radar remaking of our beloved Mission. Giant, five-story luxury condo blocks would be so obviously wrong for Valencia, so against the will of the vast majority of the citizens who live here, and so clearly in violation of the intent of the law we passed to protect our neighborhoods that they would simply say, "Holy cow, thank you!" and stop it.

No. See, it doesn't work that way. Proposition M (the law passed by San Franciscans in the 1980s to protect the way our city looks and feels from just such neighborhood-crushing development) is not treating up.

ed as law or as a defining statement by San Franciscans about how they want their city developed. Rather, it is ignored.

After months of work and research, countless meetings, and coordinating the support of hundreds of concerned neighbors into one large group, we waited more than 20 hours to speak for three minutes in front of the Planning Commission about just one of these giant condo projects, at 700 Valencia.

When we finally got our three minutes (at 11:45 p.m.), two commissioners were literally asleep. The gavel swung. Approved.

It was like the people of San Francisco never showed up. Like Prop. M never passed. Like the Mission didn't exist as a real neighborhood.

The feeling was like "OK, I've finally done something more than vote to actually make this city I've lived in and loved for so many years a better place. I've joined up with other idealistic San Franciscans, mostly wonderful neighbors I'd never even met before, who worked far more valiantly than I on this

process. And it doesn't matter." The law, and the people of San Francisco and the Mission, are all simply impediments, nuisances, to developers making their money, the planning commissioners getting home to bed, and the people with degrees at the Planning Department who believe, incredibly, that they should personally get to change and remake ("plan") this historic, world-famously beautiful city.

It's happening as you read this. The middle-finger building going up obscenely in front of the Bay Bridge is just the beginning. The destruction of Valencia Street may soon be an afterthought.

I'm suddenly very skeptical about the future livability of the neighborhood I've proudly been part of for more than 20 years. But it may not be too late to save yours.

Call, write, and visit your supervisors! Remind them that Prop. M is still the voice of the people. [sfb36](http://sfb36.com)

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