

Mixed-use development slated for Sloat Boulevard

Neighbors seek changes to high-density five-story project that would demolish three commercial buildings near Zoo

—by George McConnell

A large development proposed for Sloat Boulevard in comes under scrutiny in April when the SF Planning Commission considers an appeal to a negative environmental impact declaration issued in October.

At issue, says Marc Duffett, president of the Sunset Parkside Education and Action Committee (SPEAK), the appellants in the action, are the overall height and mass of the buildings and the potential increased traffic and parking problems it will bring to the area.

"We've been in a dialogue with the developer about this for over a year. The appeal is an attempt to get them to make some additional design improvements on behalf of the neighbors," Duffett said.

The proposal was submitted to the SF Planning Department in December 2006. The project will total 120,000 square feet, replacing the 11,411 square feet currently at the site, according to Kate Conner, the department's planner for the project.

"It represents a big change for the neighborhood. It's a very residential neighborhood," Conner said.

Sponsored by Sloat-Parkside Properties, the project will run along Sloat between 46th and 47th avenues and demolish three existing commercial buildings and a vacant small one-story building that last housed a barbecue restaurant. Three businesses would be displaced by the project: John's Ocean Beach Café, Aqua Surf Shop, and Robert's Motel.

Three new five-story, 60-foot-tall buildings would be constructed. They would contain 56 dwelling units with one, two, and three bedrooms on four levels, two large courtyard areas with connecting atriums, and a 93-space underground parking garage. In addition, there would be 23,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space.

"The residential units will be owner-occupied condos. Fifteen percent of the units are subject to the city's affordable residential housing program," stated Kieran O'Carroll, a partner at Sloat-Parkside Properties.

According to Rachel Hamilton, the project's architect, the buildings will incorporate design elements from the

area's natural landscape and have a rough naturalistic feel. SPEAK played an active role in shaping another development in the area recently.

According to Duffett, they fought with the developer and won significant design modifications to a residential project that replaced an old service station just down the street at 2900 Sloat, at 48th Avenue.

"Sloat-Parkside originally approached me about this project over a year ago, and we've been working toward a positive dialogue with them. They've been very responsive and adjusted the plan in response to our concerns. We had a general meeting in December and it was well attended. We're going to have another meeting with them in March," Duffett said.

According to Hamilton, setbacks were added to the upper stories to help reduce the building's mass and the basement-parking garage was incorporated to mitigate potential parking problems at neighbor's suggestions.

"From our standpoint, an underground parking garage is fairly difficult in this area because of the water table," she said.

The area's commercial strip runs along Sloat between 43rd and 48th avenues and the SF Zoo sits directly across the street. The Doggie Diner restaurant, which was a familiar sight at the corner of 45th Avenue for many years, has closed; however, the restaurant's trademark revolving doggie head was saved and now sits atop a pole in middle of Sloat Boulevard and serves as gateway to the neighborhood.

The area has experienced significant growth over the last few years. At the corner of 44th Avenue and Sloat there is a large new two-story Day's Inn hotel and a new delicatessen. The three businesses slated for demolition date back many years, according to Duffett.

"Robert's Motel was constructed in the 1950's and John's Ocean Beach Cafe has been here at least as long as I have. The Aqua Surf Shop has been here for 10 years and before that it was a shell shop. The small barbecue restaurant next to Robert's has been vacant since Leon, the owner, died five years ago," he said.

The project's commercial space will accommodate the existing shops, and the developer hopes to attract additional neighborhood-serving businesses, according to Duffett. Duffett is a long-time resident of the area. He's owned and operated the Ocean Park Motel, located at Wawona Street and 46th Avenue, for 30 years. The two-story blue and gray Art Deco motel was San Francisco's first and is considered a city landmark. It opened for business in 1936, just two months prior to the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge.

"We've worked hand-in-hand with the neighborhood since we closed escrow. It will take approximately 12 more months to get the site permit," O'Carroll said.