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Prop. G offers viable vision for Hunters Point
In recent decades, development plans have come and gone for the neglected southeast corner of San Francisco. The excuses are entrenched: too much toxic contamination at the abandoned Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, too little infrastructure and services in the area, too much crime, too little political will.
The last grand scheme to revitalize the area was the plan, narrowly approved by voters in June 1997, to build a shopping mall alongside a new 49ers football stadium at Candlestick Point. That plan never left the drawing board, the casualty of a change in team ownership and a lack of investor enthusiasm for the idea that a regional shopping mall could prosper at the site.
Now comes Proposition G, which contains elements that were missing from the previous proposals to enhance the neighborhood. This is far and away the most complete vision that has been offered for redevelopment of the old shipyard and the area that now houses Monster Park and its vast expanse of parking lots.
Proposition G would offer a nonbinding but nevertheless critical public expression of support for a proposal by Miami's Lennar Corp. to develop up to 10,000 homes, about 700,000 square feet of retail space as well as artist studios, green-tech-research facilities and more than 300 acres of parks and open space in and around the old shipyard. As part of the project, Lennar also would rebuild the Alice Griffith public housing project.
Kofi Bonner, a Lennar vice president, said the goal of the project is to "reconnect these areas to the rest of the city." It's a noble goal, and it's also a plausible one, given the attention to detail and community participation that Lennar has invested.
Cheryl Smith, Lennar's director of community relations, remembers growing up in the neighborhood and peering into the shipyard behind barbed wire. She noted that the Bayview always lacked "a natural amenity" such as Crissey Field, Golden Gate Park or the zoo.
One of the things she likes about the Lennar plan is its commitment to recreational space for the community. She also likes the economic diversity of the housing (about 25 percent would be dedicated as affordable for lower-income residents) and the job opportunities from the retail outlets and green-tech businesses.
"If you segment all of the challenging incomes in one sector of the city, history just shows that's the portion of the city that tends to get neglected," Smith said.
Of course, the project has drawn wide regional interest because of its inclusion of a possible new stadium site for the San Francisco 49ers. Lennar has enlisted Carmen Policy, the 49ers' president during their glory years, to help push Proposition G. Policy, who maintains close connections within the NFL, has said there is no doubt that the league would prefer to have a team in San Francisco instead of suburban Santa Clara.
"Reality is setting in with the NFL and they're seeing that maybe - just maybe - Santa Clara is not as easy as it first looked," Policy said.
The beauty of the Lennar plan is that it does not necessarily depend on a football stadium. In fact, the land set aside for the stadium could just as easily - and perhaps more productively - be dedicated to tech purposes if the 49ers decide to move south. But the football stadium remains an option, and perhaps the last, best chance to keep the 49ers in the city.
The one potential deal killer to these intriguing possibilities is Proposition F, which would impose highly prescriptive formulas to require that at least half of the new homes would need to be affordable. This measure, pushed by Supervisor Chris Daly, is reckless and unrealistic. It is not backed by any studies showing its feasibility. Lennar has argued that passage of Prop. F would force it to forego the project. And the measure would almost certainly deter other potential developers.
The choice is clear. Go with the vision. We strongly recommend a yes vote on Proposition G and a no vote on Proposition F.

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