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49ers need to stay true to San Francisco
Carmen Policy

The 49ers will always be synonymous with San Francisco.

From the gritty, die-hard plays at Kezar Stadium to the absolute football magic the team created at Candlestick Park, the San Francisco 49ers are inextricably linked to the city by the bay.

San Francisco was the stage where the rest of the world saw Bill Walsh introduce the West Coast offense to professional football. It's where Dwight Clark made the Catch, where Joe Montana routinely pulled rabbits out of the hat with seconds left on the clock and where Jerry Rice, Ronnie Lott and Steve Young helped keep our dreams alive for two decades.

It was on the streets of San Francisco where the team celebrated five Super Bowl victories along with hundreds of thousands of rabid fans. One must ask: If the team wins another championship, where would they wish to celebrate their next victory parade? Anywhere other than San Francisco just seems unthinkable - which is why the 49ers should do everything in their power to stay in the city of their birth.

San Francisco is the team's center in the minds of millions of fans, not only those who live in the city but those around the Bay Area and across the country. Yes, the Niners have a strong fan base in the South Bay. However, that is equally true to the north and the east. A stadium accommodates the 49er Faithful to a much greater degree if it is located in San Francisco - the geographic and spiritual center of the Bay Area - than anywhere else.

The team desperately needs a new stadium, but it must also consider the long-term ramifications of the decisions made during these trying times. Moving forward because the path is simpler and less challenging should not be the deciding factor in this process. The ultimate conclusion will determine the location, style, identity and image of the team and its ownership for generations to come.

A peek into the near future would give us two distinct choices. We could have an iconic structure, positioned to provide stunning views in the center of a landmark development that is designed to renew and energize a portion of our community that needs and deserves enrichment. Compare this scenario with a stand-alone building on a parking lot next to an amusement park with a distended and fractured connection to the world-class city that gave the team its identity as it became a dynasty during the '80s and '90s. It should be very clear that it is in the best interest of the 49ers to exhaust all possibilities before ignoring the San Francisco alternative.

The city of San Francisco is on the verge of finally fulfilling promises to the residents of the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood through a voter-authorized, mixed-use redevelopment project. This project will create the largest amount of affordable housing in the city's history, as well as the largest amount of parkland since the opening of Golden Gate Park. The Niners, who have always acted as a force for good in this community, should be a part of making these promises a reality. Doing so would not only be a proper "thank you" for the years of support the team has received, but it would give gravitas to the importance and dignity of an NFL presence in our community. Goodwill and the awarding of several Super Bowls would be the natural consequence of this combination.

The Hunters Point project will move forward regardless of whether the Niners are focused on playing in another city and regardless of what happens week to week or headline to headline. The good news is that it remains possible to keep promises to a neglected community in San Francisco and at the same time find a new home for the team. It's up

to all of us - fans, Bay Area residents and civic leaders - to make that case directly to the team and keep the San Francisco 49ers playing in San Francisco.

Carmen Policy, a former president of the 49ers, is a consultant to the city of San Francisco and Lennar Corp. To comment, e-mail forum@sfchronicle.com.

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