

St Francis —A White Elephant?



CALIF. ST. ELEVATION

"This view shows differences in height between St. Francis and new condominiums from California St."

By Harlan Green

The definition of a white elephant is "A valuable possession whose upkeep is excessively expensive, and may be useless apart from its value to the gifter and giftee." The site of the former St. Francis Medical Center is certainly the white elephant in its neighborhood, and no one is quite sure what to do with it. It is valuable to Cottage Hospital, which has purchased the site and wants to convert it to condominiums for its workers. But until that happens, the vacant, 60-foot tall, 158,000 square feet of building space will sit silently, a monument to its past glory as a community medical center.

Architect Brian Cearnal was given the job of designing the conversion. He began with a months-long study of the alternatives, from using its existing structure to starting from scratch. After holding focus groups with employees and neighbors in the fall of 2003, Cottage Hospital chose to build new units. This is because only 90,000 square feet could be converted into livable residences and the units would be small, unattractive boxes because of the restrictions inherent in a structure built in 1927.

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CALIFORNIA ST. EXHISTING



CALIFORNIA ST. PROPOSED

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Secondly, the looming height of the 60-foot structure would still be an eyesore, as well as continue to block the views of those living behind it. Even the neighbors had little interest in retaining the original structure, according to Cottage. The large, asphalt parking lot would also have remained.

After analyzing it, Architect Cernal came up with the plan before city planners--115 units that will blend in with the bungalows, medical offices and apartments that surround it on Micheltorena, Arrellaga and California Sts. And

that is a big change for a neighborhood that has remained essentially unchanged since the 1940s.

Cernal acknowledged that the neighborhood's fear of change is understandable. "This usually happens with downtown projects," he said. "But in about the time it takes the landscaping to mature, there is usually little noticeable difference between the new and existing homes."

This is because each side of the triangular-shaped property will contain a mix of styles that blend in with the residences on that side. The upper California Street side will match the predominately Spanish style of its neighbors. The southwest side (Micheltorena) is made up of predominately composition-shingle bungalows, so homes on that side of the project will have a bungalow look. The southeast side is a mix of several styles, so they will be represented. The project will in fact be a blend of most historic architectural styles in the upper eastside of Santa Barbara.

Why build the housing? More than 25 percent of Cottage's workers must commute from other cities, at great cost to themselves and the environment. Though the units will have 2 parking spaces each, this will not have a greater impact than the former hospital. In fact, the revised ATE traffic study shows a more than one-third drop in daily trips and almost one-half drop in peak hour traffic from its hospital use.

More than half of the parking spaces (149) will be underground, eliminating the parking lot that adjoined the hospital. A total of 87 open spaces will be usable by visitors or owners, a

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COURTHOUSE EXHISTING

**COURTHOUSE
PROPOSED**
"This virtual
view shows how
condominiums
will blend
in with the
neighborhood."



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neighborhood park will replace 19 parking spaces on the southwest corner and a tot lot will face Arrellaga St. Realignment of intersections and a new entrance will “further improve operations at the intersection,” says the traffic study, thus making it safer for traffic and pedestrians. Traffic will be even further reduced by a proposed shuttle service for Cottage’s workers, eliminating the daily auto commute. The former hospital itself had a total of 85 beds and more than 200 employees. The new project should house between 115 to 230 inhabitants, the normal occupant ratio for Santa Barbara residences. Since 40 percent of Cottage Hospital’s employees do not own a home, 81 of the units will be sold to them at middle-income level affordable prices. All in all, this project should do much to improve the neighborhood, and remove what has become a very large, white elephant that is valuable to no one.

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MICHELTORENA--”This view shows existing hospital and proposed condominiums that would replace it from Micheltorena St.”

Photo Credit and Sidebar “Green” Credit: Architect Brian Cearnal



MICHELTORENA EXHISTING

MICHELTORENA PROPOSED

Proposed “Green” Building Features:

Site:

- Infill/Re-Use site
- Proximity (within 1/2 mile) to parks/open space
 - Alameda Park
 - Santa Barbara High School
 - Mission Park
- Land Use Density (19 dwelling units/acre) (compact)
- Storm Water Management
 - Permeable surfaces
 - Rainwater harvesting (cistern)
- Water Efficient Landscaping
- Alternative Transportation Components
 - Shuttle
 - Bike Storage
 - Electric vehicle recharging

Buildings:

- Waste Water Reduction
 - High efficiency fixtures
 - Grey water use
- Minimum Energy Performance
 - "Energy Star" compliance (30%)
 - Passive solar/natural ventilation (daylighting)
- Smaller units (smaller than national average)
- Sustainable Building Materials
 - Low VC products
 - Recycled content
 - Durability ("Durability Plan")
 - Efficient framing
 - Certified lumber
- Construction Waste Management
 - Demolition Divert (95%)
 - New Construction Waste (Divert 50%)