



## **East Oakland redevelopment plans to be revealed at meeting**

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By Annalee Allen

Columnist

FOR the past two years the area surrounding the 23rd Avenue commercial corridor in East Oakland has been the subject of numerous community meetings to come up with an action plan for revitalization and community safety.

This Saturday, a blueprint for carrying out these plans will be unveiled at a town hall meeting at the Garfield Elementary School Auditorium, 22nd Avenue and Foothill Boulevard, starting at 10 a.m.

"One of the most exciting aspects of this action plan is the creation of a Community Cultural Center in a rehabilitated nearby commercial building," says Diana Williams, Executive Director of Urban Ecology, a planning organization based in Oakland that advises neighborhood revitalization group efforts throughout the country. "We see the building center serving as an anchor for this section of the San Antonio district in the years to come."

Other groups sponsoring the community meeting on Saturday include the San Antonio Community Development Corporation, the East Bay Asian Youth Center, the Urban Strategies Council and the Eastside Arts Alliance.

Over the past 15 years there have been a host of studies, reports and plans that have focused on Lower San Antonio, says Williams, that were led in part by the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, another of the community service organizations seeking to address the needs of this often stressed area. Their work came to the attention of the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation (established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, to focus on the needs of children growing up in disadvantaged communities) and in 1997 Lower San Antonio became one of 10 communities nationwide to which the foundation has made a multi-year financial commitment that will result in

specific tangible outcomes.

Another foundation sponsor working with Urban Ecology on the 23rd Avenue Action Plan is the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund (Walter Haas was the great-grand-nephew of Levi Strauss -- the famous Gold Rush era entrepreneur who came to San Francisco and launched the jeans apparel revolution). The Haas Fund's stated mission is to help create vibrant, safe neighborhoods.

"We are seeking to build on the work of the earlier studies by taking the next step with a comprehensive set of planning, development and design solutions," explains Williams.

The group offers pro bono architectural and technical assistance to design the cultural center's various spaces (expected to include a multi-use performance space and stage, a printmaking studio and a recording studio, said Williams.

"AHA, Affordable Housing Associates, is a nonprofit organization that will be working with us to create housing units upstairs on the two upper floors of the building." The plans call for eight one-bedroom apartments and eight studio apartments, as well as two live/work commercial units.

Formerly known as the Hamilton Building, the soon to be renovated property is a "very good example of a Classical Revival mid-20s store and apartment building designed by Oakland architect Lawrence Flagg Hyde," who files say was an active developer of houses, apartments and commercial buildings in the 1920s and 30s.

The building is considered by the Cultural Heritage Survey to be a primary contributor to the locally important 23rd Avenue commercial district. The neighborhood is characterized by a diversity of architectural styles, including Mission Revival, Spanish and Classic Revival. Although many of the buildings have been remodeled, particularly at the street level, their initial character is still visible. It is common to see businesses on the first floor, with residential apartments on the upper floors, where the historical detailing is often still intact.

Another unusual feature of the area, say the files, is the comprehensive network of alleys (leading out to International Boulevard), which add to increased circulation of delivery trucks and cars for the busy business district. Other parts of Oakland have historically not had alleyways.

"Demographic studies have shown us that Lower San Antonio is the most diverse district in all of Alameda County. There are at least 35 different

languages spoken here," Williams says.

The action plan calls for improvements to pedestrian safety and streetscape changes over the next four years, if City Council approves the recommendations. "Twenty-third Avenue happens to be situated on the boundary between two council districts (District 2 and District 3, Councilmember Danny Wan and Council President Ignacio de la Fuente) and in the past it was sometimes difficult to coordinate solutions." However, it is now a part of the recently designated Central City East Redevelopment Area, and this should bring improvements to the process.

There has been yet another outcome from the two-year effort, Williams says. The lessons learned from creating a safer street environment for San Antonio were compiled for a handbook called "Walkable Streets: A Toolkit for Oakland."

The handbook is currently available on Urban Ecology's Web site, and the organization hopes to have it in local bookstores after the first of the year. Funding for the handbook came in part from the Pedestrian Safety Project and the City of Oakland.

The handbook contains a brief yet fascinating history of Oakland's streets - - dating back to the days of horsecars and trolleys -- as well as a resource directory of helpful agencies and organizations. Also included is a section on funding opportunities and ways for the average citizen to seek changes to neighborhood streets to make them safer.

For more information on Saturday's town hall meeting, contact Jerry Henderson, at EBALDC, 251-2014, ext. 304. Urban Ecology's Web site is [www.urbanecology.org](http://www.urbanecology.org) The phone number is 251-6330. For information on the Walk Oakland Map, call the Pedestrian Project at 238-7049.

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