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HISTORIC TRAIN STATION IS CENTERPIECE FOR MAJOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN WEST OAKLAND. K8

COVER STORY



Developer Rick Holliday stands inside the 1906 cannery building that will become the Pacific Cannery Lofts, a crucial piece of the 29-acre development in West Oakland.

LIZ MANGELSDORF / *The Chronicle*

Central Station finally on track in West Oakland

Often-neglected area's residents hope that housing plan thrives

By Dana Perrigan

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The people were ready.

They assembled quietly at the March 16, 2005, meeting of the Oakland Planning Commission. They waited calmly until, finally, the time arrived for public discussion on a developer's proposal to build more than a thousand units of largely market-rate housing on 29 acres in the city's poorest neighborhood. Several organizations — Just Cause and the Sierra Club among them — had already taken a stand against the plan because it did not guarantee a certain percentage of affordable housing or that the work would be done exclusively by union labor.

Then, one by one, a succession of West Oakland residents strode to the microphone to have their say.

"Most of the people against this project don't live in West Oakland," said Marilyn Harris, who, for 27 years, has done just that. "But they're here. Know why? — just 'cause. I refuse to buy a house in Tracy when West Oakland is coming up. This is an opportunity for West Oakland to change."

"It's not displacing anyone, so don't stop the people who want change," implored Janet Patterson, who was born in the neighborhood.

A mother got up and, standing beside her two elementary school-age children, explained how the project would improve West Oakland schools by raising more taxes for the city.

Marcus Johnson, a 40-year West Oakland resident who bought a home there in 1992, presented a petition to the commission signed by 60 residents who supported the project. Johnson also gave them a map indicating that the residences of all those who had signed the petition were

in West Oakland.

"In an attempt to turn my frustration around, I walked around and talked to people," said Johnson. "I was curious to what my neighbors thought."

"It is sad," said Bruce Beasley, a sculptor who moved into the neighborhood in 1962, "that we have to be here tonight to support a project that is so obviously good for West Oakland."

Sad, but perhaps necessary. Many longtime West Oakland residents, who say their neighborhood has largely been forgotten and ignored by the city over the years, have gotten used to fighting for what they believe is good for it.

"We've had to get a bit feisty with the city, because we've been regarded sometimes as a dumping ground."

BRUCE BEASLEY
West Oakland resident

They've won skirmishes over streetlamps and sidewalks, amenities that other neighborhoods have taken for granted. They have battled over zoning. And they prevailed against "redlining" — a discriminatory practice, now illegal, in which lending institutions refuse to make home loans in certain neighborhoods.

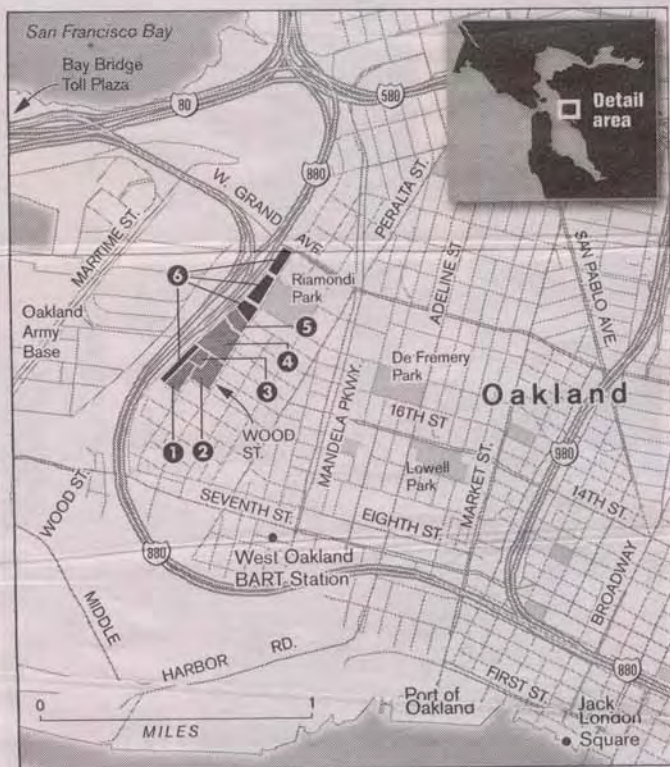
In the process, they have, despite living in what outsiders perceive to be a crime-ridden, poverty-stricken neighborhood, forged a strong sense of identity and community.

"Part of it is that we've had to get a bit feisty with the city," said Beasley, "because we've been re-

► WEST OAKLAND: Next page

Central Station

More than 1,000 homes, community space, gardens and retail space is planned for this 29-acre West Oakland site, anchored by the historic 16th Street train station.



- ❶ **Pacific Cannery Lofts:** 163 townhomes and live-work lofts are being built in the site of Pacific Caning Co., built in 1904.
- ❷ **Zephyr Gate Townhomes:** Construction has begun on 130 condominiums.
- ❸ **14th Street Apartments:** 99 below-market-rate apartments; construction scheduled to begin in April.
- ❹ **HFH Apartments:** Undetermined number of apartments. Construction scheduled to begin in September.
- ❺ **16th Street Station:** Revitalization undertaken by the developers in partnership with the City of Oakland. Scheduled to begin in April 2008.
- ❻ **Phase Two:** Construction of more housing units, parks and community space scheduled to begin in January 2009.

Source: Central Station developers

The Chronicle

► WEST OAKLAND

From previous page

garded sometimes as a dumping ground.”

For Beasley and many other longtime residents, the Central Station project — which the Planning Commission and City Council unanimously approved — was a no-brainer. Four respected developers, led by Holliday Development LLC, will build a combination of condos, townhomes and loft apartments with pocket parks, parking, some retail and public gathering spaces on land that has remained fallow for years. Absolutely no one will be displaced. The project will plow \$100 million of development, none of it public funds, into West Oakland.

It also includes the renovation of the historic 16th Street train station into a public performance space.

Some of the 163 lofts Holliday Development plans for its warehouse renovation of the 102-year-old Pacific Cannery will be offered at below market rate prices — from around \$300,000. And 99 of Bridge Housing’s apartments on 14th Street will be rented below the market rate.

Holliday Development recently broke ground on its loft construction. Pulte Homes will soon follow with its Zephyr Gate Townhomes, 130 townhome-style condominiums and parking. Bridge Housing expects to begin construction on apartments early next

► WEST OAKLAND: Page K10



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West Oakland's Janet Patterson looks around the historic train station that will be part of the 29-acre development.

First-time buyers will get help with new housing

► WEST OAKLAND

From Page K9

year. HFH Ltd. will follow with its apartments. Within 18 months, Holliday expects, there will be about 700 units completed of the two-phase, Central Station project, located between Central Station Parkway and Wood Street, 11th Street and West Grand Avenue.

In addition, the developers have pooled together to set up the West Oakland Home Ownership Assistance Center, across from the West Oakland BART Station at Mandela Gateway, to help first-time homeowners purchase one of the new homes.

"This area has been so overlooked and so disrespected," said Rick Holliday of Holliday Development. "We felt that it would have a better effect here to have some middle-class housing rather than affordable housing. That's

why we set up the home ownership assistance center."

Holliday, whose offices are in Emeryville, has been in the business for nearly 30 years. He was one of the founders of Bridge Housing, the nation's largest non-profit builder of affordable housing. As founder of Holliday Development, he has focused almost exclusively on urban infill projects. He pioneered loft construction in San Francisco's South of Market, and has also completed projects in Richmond and Emeryville.

Holliday's interest in affordable housing construction was sparked while studying planning and design at UC Berkeley. He still has a copy of his thesis, "A Study of Citizen Participation in the Model Cities Program."

The title, as befits a thesis statement, may have a dry, academic ring to it, but Holliday appears to have taken its message to heart.

► **WEST OAKLAND:** Next page

COVER STORY

► WEST OAKLAND

From previous page

“Before he even bought the land he went into the community,” said Kevin Brown, Holliday’s marketing and sales manager. “He would go into barbershops and talk to people. He wanted to see what was important to them and what they wanted.”

What they initially wanted, said Brown, was just about anything other than what was there: 29 acres of urban blight — abandoned truck parking lots, dilapidated industrial sheds and buildings and a train station that has been turning into a dumping site since its closure after the 1989

► **WEST OAKLAND:** *Page K12*



LIZ MANGELSDORF / *The Chronicle*

Andre Farris, one of the developers, walks with Ann Pringle under the raised train tracks behind the historic train station at 16th Street.



LIZ MANGELSDORF / The Chronicle

Marcel Diallo of West Oakland walks through the train station.

A historic train station to be crucial element

► WEST OAKLAND

From Page K11

Loma Prieta earthquake.

Since 1870, when it was first built as the last stop on the transcontinental railway, the station — which was rebuilt in 1912 in its present Beaux Arts-style — has been an enduring symbol of one of Oakland's oldest and most colorful communities.

At the turn of the century, West Oakland was home to Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, Irish and Mexican immigrants. In 1929, C.L. Dellums, who lived in the neighborhood and whose nephew is current Oakland Mayor-elect Ron Dellums, was elected vice president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters — the first union organized by African Americans to win a collective bargaining agreement.

Many African Americans moved into West Oakland during the '30s and early '40s to work in the Oakland shipyards, which, in 1943 produced 35 percent of the Pacific Coast's output of cargo ships. The neighborhood boasted dozens of jazz joints, restaurants and nightclubs.

During the turbulent '60s, when the Black Panthers and the civil rights movement were in full swing, the neighborhood was battling for its life. There was a lot of

infighting over the dispersal of federal funds in the city. More often than not, West Oakland didn't receive its share.

"Oakland, I think, didn't do a very good job in moderating those forces," says Holliday. "There were times when, during my more frustrating days, it seemed like the same thing was going on."

Initially, he said, the city was interested in moving a number of car dealerships to the 29 acres he purchased from Union Pacific. A strong argument was made for the plan's potential of generating tax revenue.

"The neighbors were interesting," said Holliday. "They didn't say 'no way.' They said, 'Can't you find something better than that?'"

A plan to build commercial space for the tech industry fell flat when the dot-com bubble burst. And a plan to put in some revenue-generating big-box space for Costco and other large retailers failed to gain ground.

After three years, there was still no plan.

"Finally," Holliday said, "we sat down one day and said, 'Why don't we make it housing? We're a housing company.' That really resonated with a lot of the neighbors."

Holliday thought market-rate housing would be better for the

► WEST OAKLAND: Next page

► WEST OAKLAND

From previous page

community because, with only 5 percent of the population, West Oakland already had 45 percent of the city's government-assisted housing.

"Development always involves a certain amount of apprehension because it represents change," Holliday said. "But we're building the best building we've ever built as a company in the poorest neighborhood we've ever built in."

Holliday sees West Oakland as a neighborhood in transition, full of contradictions and potential.

The old Cypress Freeway, which collapsed during the 1989 earthquake, has been replaced by the wide green swath of Mandela Parkway. There are fine examples of Victorian architecture sprinkled among the houses in the neighborhood, more and more of which are being fixed up and painted. It seems to have more than its share of churches and liquor stores, but the neighborhood still lacks a bank, drugstore and other much-needed retail outlets.

The tree-lined 300 block of Lewis Street, where artist Beasley has lived and worked for 44 years, is a study in contradiction. Across the street from Beasley's gated home and studio, which was once a grist mill, sits a 15-year-old Cadillac, its rear driver's side window perforated by a shotgun blast. Three doors down, a large house appears on the verge of collapse. But the house next door is a newly painted modern structure with bougainvillea cascading from the

wooden slats of its carport.

When Beasley moved into the neighborhood, the area was zoned M-40, allowing for the heaviest manufacturing, including lead smelters and slaughterhouses.

"The city fathers wanted to make West Oakland the Pittsburgh of the West," says Beasley. "It just didn't happen."

Because banks employed the now-illegal "redlining," the only people who could buy homes were those who could afford to pay cash. So landlords bought the homes and rented them out, which partly accounts for the present-day 20 percent home ownership rate in West Oakland. Because the homes were in what was called a non-conforming zone, they could not be demolished and rebuilt. Additions couldn't be made, either.

Beasley and other members of the South Prescott Neighborhood Association fought to have the neighborhood rezoned.

"We finally prevailed," says Beasley. "That made a big difference."

Beasley's coalition also fought to have streetlights installed during the '60s.

When Beasley heard about Holliday's proposed development, he was interested and hopeful.

"They did it right," he says. "They came to the neighborhood. They met with people. They have acted like enlightened, progressive developers."

Harris feels the same.

"I was for doing anything that would help the neighborhood," says Harris. "West Oakland has

► WEST OAKLAND: Page K14



LIZ MANGELSDORF / The Chronicle

West Oakland resident Ann Pringle walks in front of the historic train station at 16th Street in Oakland, where her father worked.



LIZ MANGELSDORF / The Chronicle

The Pacific Cannery Lofts are being built in the background of the 29-acre site that is being developed in West Oakland.

A housing boost for often-neglected area

► WEST OAKLAND

From Page K13

been the forgotten part of the city for so long. This project will help the community.”

Janet Patterson, who was born a couple of blocks from where Beasley lives, is hopeful as well.

“I’ve been here and seen it all and I intend to see much more,” says Patterson. “I’m for the new development because I know what my community needs. For years, we’ve just been a doormat. I would love to see some market-rate housing.”

“There’s a desperate need for commerce,” says Monica Flores, who along with husband Genesis Lodise bought a home in West Oakland two years ago. “I think

more people, plus more commerce equals better tax base and better schools — just what anyone would want for their children.”

Councilwoman Nancy Nadel says that when she and her husband bought a home in West Oakland 26 years ago, there weren’t even any sidewalks. Nadel, who has represented the neighborhood for 10 years, was also initially impressed by Holliday’s plan.

“He was the only developer who committed to making the train station a public space, which was the deciding factor for me,” she said. “It’s certainly going to bring a lot more people to the neighborhood. It’ll bring a range of incomes we haven’t had. Integrating income in every neighborhood is important to me.”