

TODAY'S NEWSMAKERS



DeNunzio

MIKE DENUNZIO

The three-term chairman of the San Francisco Republican Party will challenge U.S. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, up for re-election this year. DeNunzio said he would help give San Franciscans "a clear voice on national issues," such as terrorism, the global economy, immigration and border control.

DEBORAH ORTIZ

The state Senator, D-Sacramento, succeeded in convincing the state Legislature's Joint Legislative Audit Committee to conduct a performance audit of California's new, publicly funded stem cell institute this week. Ortiz asked the committee to review the agency's administrative expenditures, policies and procedures.



Ortiz

TODAY'S TOP STORY » EDUCATION

Newsom: I want a say in future school closures

Move comes on heels of proposal for district elections for Board of Education members

By Bonnie Eslinger
Staff Writer

Joining other city leaders who want a say in how San Francisco's schools are managed, Mayor Gavin Newsom sent a letter to the Board of Education on Tuesday asking to be involved in future school closure decisions.



Newsom

The letter was submitted to the board during a special meeting called in response to community concerns over previous school closure decisions.

During Tuesday's meeting, district staff presented the board with a proposed timeline for community input and a plan to create a community advisory council made up of individuals with expertise in such areas as educational reform, demographic analysis, facilities and education finance.

The mayor's letter asked for the creation of a similar committee with one significant difference: While the district proposal asks that the school board and superintendent collaborate to identify the committee members, Newsom suggested that he also be given a vote of approval on who gets selected for the committee.

It comes on the heels of a proposal by Supervisor Michela Alioto-Pier for a city charter amendment that would call for district elections of school board members. It also called for an annual five-year plan that the school district would be required to submit to the mayor and the Board of Supervisors. Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi — whose district suffered several school closures and mergers in the last year — has also called for more accountability from the school district to The City.

Board of Education President Norman Yee said that while he appreciated the interest of city leaders in the school district, he felt strongly that governance of the schools should remain solely in the hands of the Board of Education.

"We have passion and backgrounds for education issues, while they have to focus on a million other things," Yee said. "What they're trying to sell will make the board more political, because you're adding another layer of politics."

Deal inked for Japantown inns

By Justin Jouvenal
Staff Writer

The deal has been sealed on the sale of two prominent Japantown hotels to a non-Japanese developer.

Three other properties are also currently up for sale — a movie theater and two malls — putting almost three-quarters of Japantown on the market and raising fears about the cultural characteristics of one of the nation's last remaining Japanese enclaves.

3D Investments LLC, a Beverly Hills-based developer, purchased the Radisson Miyako Hotel and the Best Western Miyako Inn from Kintetsu Enterprises on Feb. 28 for an undisclosed purchase price, said Don Tamaki, an attorney representing the seller.

Tamaki said 3D Investments, which is owned by the Daneshgar family of Los Angeles, made concessions to the concerns of the community, including holding the properties for at least 15 years, preserving the Japanese character of the ho-

tels and allowing the community to use space for events. Tamaki has agreed to allow Mayor Gavin Newsom's office to enforce the terms of the sale.

"The potential buyer is making extraordinary concessions. This is highly unusual," Tamaki said.

Some employees at the hotels were alarmed to receive notices that they had been terminated by Kintetsu Enterprises on Wednesday, but Tamaki described the move as a mandatory procedural step and said most of the employees would keep their jobs under the new management.

Tamaki said 3D has a 30-day due diligence period in which it can pull out of the offer. He said negotiations are ongoing between 3D and Kintetsu to sell the company's two other properties, the Kintetsu and Miyako malls, which are home to a host of Japanese-themed stores. The Kabuki Theater, which is also for sale, is owned by the AMC movie chain and is not part of the current deal.

The sales, which constituted two-thirds of the heart of Japantown, had worried residents who felt the new owners might not keep the Jap-



Japantown property is moving fast, with the sale of two hotels. — Cindy Chew/ The Examiner

anese character of the properties. The feelings were especially poignant because Japantown is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

"It's expected and we can only hope for the best where the buyer, The City, and the community are on the same page and doing everything they can to preserve Japantown and make it the cultural destination it was always meant to be," said Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, who represents Japantown.

KEN GARCIA *The voice of the city*

Why even a free gift becomes complicated in San Francisco

Anyone who plays outdoor sports in San Francisco this time of year knows that the official refrain of the city parks department changes from "play ball" to "field closed." This isn't just the seasonal reward from Mother Nature. This is also the result of The City's long-dysfunctional system of maintaining its grass fields — or what once were known as grass fields.

Last fall, when The City hosted one of its largest state soccer showcases at the Polo Fields, the players discovered what the term "dust bowl" really meant. A Recreation and Park Department official explained to me that the field's startling lunarlike surface stemmed from inadequate staffing levels needed for "sophisticated turf management."

You know — tricky things like water.

It is true that there are simply not enough fields in San Francisco to meet the demands of all the people who want to use them. A 2004 survey found that there were nearly 20,000 soccer players using The City's 41 multiuse fields and that the overuse doesn't allow time for the fields to recover. And with cuts to the gardening staff, well, you can see why the grass is always greener in just about every other city in the Bay Area.

For years I have been advocating for The City to put in synthetic turf fields to offset such elementary and technical difficulties, and a few years back it added two, with remarkable results. Yet now the turf fairy has finally landed, and The City would do well not to accidentally kick it away.

A few weeks ago Mayor Gavin Newsom announced a partnership with a nonprofit group that has agreed to give The City \$4.5 million to replace two gopher-hole-ridden outposts with synthetic turf fields. The gift from the City Fields Foundation means that people and teams near Garfield Square in the Mission and Silver Terrace Playground near Visitacion Valley may soon be the envy of every other ball-striking outfit in San Francisco, and more parks are on a future wish list.

As with everything here in Oz, however, there is more behind the curtain. And as long as city officials plant their cleats on terra firma rather than some slippery ideology, there just might be a whole series of new turf fields rolling our way.

The City Fields Foundation is the creation of brothers Bill, John and Bob Fisher, whose father, Don, founded San Francisco's own Gap Inc. Bill said they wanted to do something that was "really meaningful" for The City. And, inspired by what the Haas family did in restoring Crissy Field, they decided to focus on the parks and playing fields that were a big part of their experience growing up in The City. So they enlisted the help of foundation con-

sultant Susan Hirsch and Dana Ketchum, the longtime head of the San Francisco Viking soccer league, and they surveyed parks around The City to see where they could get the best boot for the buck.

"It's something that we saw that could really make a difference," Bill Fisher told me. "These fields are like real community centers that draw all types of people. And if we can get positive community reaction to the new fields, then the goal is to do more of them. We see this as a broad outreach program that will go beyond the Fisher family."

But the deal still has to be approved by the Board of Supervisors. And as everybody knows, you can't go traipsing around San Francisco politics without getting a bit dirty.

For even though the Fishers appear to be model citizens just trying to do a good deed for a city that they love, they are still related to the man who has been the progressive wing's poster boy for the evil, shadowy "downtown business interests." That gap in reality would be hard to explain, but you can all but see the Bay Guardian leading the "privatization" charge.

The only thing private about this deal is the company that will do the maintenance on the first two fields in the program. The nonprofit has reached agreement with The City's gardener's union to help their members get training to work on the turf fields in the future.

"All they've asked is for the opportunity to take on this project at an appropriate time in the future," Bill Fisher said.

And perhaps the best part of the new fields program? They are hoping to include lights on the fields for night use — if the neighborhoods involved approve — and two of The City's biggest soccer venues, Beach Chalet and Crocker Amazon, are on the future wish list.

Let's hope city officials can follow the bouncing ball. It moves so much more easily when it doesn't hit a mud pit.



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