



817 Alfred Street: The community saves a troubled project



Councilmember Koretz with community activist Stefani Poretz and Mitchell Bradford, President of Sycamore Urban Properties

In addition to a deep recession and an over \$400 million budget deficit, Councilmember Koretz inherited a number of existing planning controversies on his first day of office July 1, 2009. One of these projects was at 817 Alfred Street in the Mid City neighborhood. This 18-unit condominium project began the development process back in February of 2004. Between stops and starts, construction delays and, ultimately, the economic downturn, the property did not open its doors to new owners until November of this year.

During this multi-year process, the property's tract map (permission to sell the units as condos) expired, the building rules for the neighborhood changed, the original developer lost the property to the lender, and a new owner came forward. The issue faced by the Council Office, community and Planning Department was what to do with an existing building not going anywhere or coming down, with an expired set of permits. Denying the new tract map would not have meant tearing down the building or guaranteeing the additional landscaping and architectural articulation that would be required of new buildings; rather, denying the permit simply would have required the units to be apartments not condominiums and may have left the property bankrupt and abandoned yet again.

Instead of simply granting the entitlements with a blank check or denying them and leaving an abandoned structure, Councilmember Koretz worked with community leaders and the developer, Sycamore Urban Properties, to fashion a win-win solution. Sycamore was able to obtain their condominium map approval and several units have already been sold. At the same time the residents of the 800 block of Alfred Street and surrounding neighbors now have a fully repaved alley across the entire block, repaired curbs, gutters and sidewalks for the block and dozens of new large streets trees, and will soon have traffic-calming speed bumps and stop-signs – all paid for by the developer.

Councilmember Koretz explained, "At a time when the City simply does not have the financial resources to provide these improvements but the community desperately needs them, Sycamore and the community worked together in a model fashion to bring about a beneficial solution for everyone." Community activist Stefani Poretz should particularly be honored for her tenacious efforts to gain improvements for her neighborhood and resolve the planning standoff with 817 Alfred Street.