



## Oak-to-Ninth development approved - something for everyone

by Paul T. Rosynsky, Oakland Tribune  
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OAKLAND - Almost everybody who fought for something in the polarizing Oak-to-Ninth development debate got it as the City Council approved the deal after demanding more than a dozen last-minute concessions from the developer.

Faced with a laundry list of requests from hundreds of residents who spoke, the council attempted to make everyone happy as it secured more open space, saved the Ninth Avenue Terminal and gave Signature Properties of Pleasanton the right to build 3,100 apartment units on the city's waterfront.

"We have arrived at a balance. There are good things for everyone," said Councilmember Patricia Kernighan (Grand Lake - Chinatown). "Today, this site is a contaminated industrial site with no public access. What this project offers is to create a true regional waterfront attraction."

Among the most surprising demands the Council placed on Signature Properties was a requirement to keep the Ninth Avenue Terminal standing for at least a year.

The developer had wanted to knock down all but 15,000 square feet of the 180,000-square-foot structure during its first phase of construction. Signature Properties argued the building would not be financially feasible to restore.

But a host of residents and groups, including the Oakland Heritage Alliance, pleaded with the council to seek other developers who might be interested in restoring the 76-year-old building.

"The developer is not the arbitrator of the market, the market is," said Ethan Silva, a business owner in the Fifth Avenue Community, a small eclectic neighborhood.

Kernighan, who is in the middle of a tight run-off election to keep her District 2 seat, suggested a compromise.

Instead of tearing down the building, Kernighan said the city should look for other developers that might be able to restore at least half of the structure without using city money.

Eventually, a majority of the council agreed but Councilmembers Larry Reid (Elmhurst - East Oakland), President Ignacio De La Fuente and Henry Chang (At-large) argued doing so might jeopardize the entire project.

"You cannot, in fact, make everyone happy," Reid said.

A majority of the council also attacked portions of an affordable housing deal the developer made with the city and several community organizations joined to form the Oak to Ninth Community Benefits Coalition.

Under the original deal, the city would have to buy six acres of land in the development for \$29 million. It would then use the land to build the 465 units of affordable housing Signature Properties agreed to put in the project.

While council members said they were willing to pay Signature Properties for the land, they did not want the developer to profit off the sale.

"I'm a little bit at a loss of why you say this is public benefits," said Councilmember Desley Brooks (Eastmont-Seminary), who abstained from voting on the project. "It is interesting to me that this was public land ... to now essentially throw it away is a disservice."

Councilmember Jean Quan (Montclair-Laurel) also abstained from voting saying she wanted Signature Properties to leave space for a new school.

Despite the arguments against the project, most council members agreed that it will be both an economic engine for the city and recreational attraction.

Of the 64 acres involved, about 30 will be park lands. Signature Properties agreed to spend \$1.6 million for job training and will guarantee that 6 percent of all construction jobs go to city residents.

"This project will be a project with the highest levels of benefits," De La Fuente said. "Without the project there would be no tax increments, without the project there would be no open space."