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Our City Update

Volume 1, Issue 2 SPRING 2005

Successes In 2004

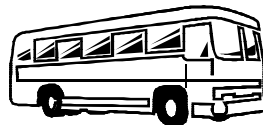
Our First Year!

January 2005 has just marked Our City's first year in existence as a local force for progressive activism in San Francisco. Since January of 2004, we have gained over 1400 active members city wide.

With help from supporters like you, over that first year, we helped move forward many grassroots victories. These include the successful initiative that will now phase out San Francisco's use of diesel buses over the next decade, and also the defeat of a bogus ballot initiative that was simply a disguised cash cow for real estate speculators, which would have produced deceptively named 'Workforce Housing'. This alleged worker housing would have been primarily available to those making a yearly income of over

\$77,000 per year. That didn't sound like workforce housing to us. Furthermore, if it had passed, the measure would have then allowed high rise developers to evade asking local neighborhoods for their approval of such projects, and so we helped stop it.

On the subject of neighborhood choice last spring Our City also helped pass an important measure through the Board of Supervisors which now mandates that all chain stores, such as Walmart and Walgreen's, must openly seek approval from any neighborhood where they want to site a retail location. This gives all city neighborhoods the power to say 'No' to chains.



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November Election Victories

At the end of 2004, Our City also lent a hand to victories in the November election. The most crucial of these was the re-election of progressive Supervisor Jake McGoldrick.

Jake's race for re-election was a very tight one, with uptown corporations heavily funding his much more conservative, and traditional political machine opponent, Lilian Sing.

Had Supervisor McGoldrick lost his bid for re-election, the balance of power on the Board of Supervisors would have shifted from a majority of progressives to a majority of big business supported legislators.

This likely would have put a halt to the wave of progressive change that has been bringing vital life and vibrance back to San Francisco and its local politics since 1999.

We also promoted and saw the successful return of fellow progressives Aaron Peskin, Tom Ammiano, and Gerardo Sandoval to the Board of Supervisors, and one of our top election picks, Green Party candidate Ross Mirkarimi, was successfully elected to take over Matt Gonzalez's vacated District 5 Board seat.

In that same election, we supported and saw passed; a measure to promote comprehensive health care for all city residents, the defeat of a measure that would have increased the local sales tax, (which would have levied an unbalanced burden on the city's poorest residents), and passage of the measure calling for the U.S. government to end the occupation of Iraq and bring our troops home.



Recent Battles

Hotel Worker Struggle

Toward the end of 2004, workers in 14 San Francisco hotels were locked out of their jobs by trans-national hotel corporations seeking to weaken the workers' negotiations for a strong union contract. Our City joined with many other groups and unions loudly calling for the Supervisors and the Mayor to demand that the workers be returned to their jobs. The workers are now back, but their contract negotiations are still very difficult, and Our City is going to continue following this issue.

Police and Planning Commission Blackout

Early in 2005, citing a need to balance the budget, the Mayor's office removed both the Police and Planning

Commissions from being openly televised on local city government channel 26 (SFGTV).

This would have dealt a serious blow to open government in San Francisco and kept the proceedings of two of the most critical and controversial city commissions hidden from the eyes and ears of the public.

Our City joined with other organizations in working for an immediate reversal of this decision, and in February, Supervisors Chris Daly and Tom Ammiano co-wrote a successful resolution calling both for the return of the hearings to television, and for barring future balancing of budgets through cutting open government broadcasts. In the same week, the Mayor reversed his decision and the hearings have returned to SFGTV.



Current Campaigns

Health Care

Health Care For All Coalition has launched a big push to win universal comprehensive health care for all Californians. Local State Senator Jackie Speier has yet to co-author and take the lead on this bill. Our City has been campaigning and gathering letters to get Senator Speier to champion it.

Action: If you have not yet contacted her about this vital legislation, please take a quick moment to write to:

**Senator Jackie Speier, State Capitol - Room 2032
Sacramento, CA 95814**

and urge her to: *Co-author and champion SB 840 - The California Health Insurance Reliability Act.*

Harding Theater

Last year the Board of Supervisors passed a measure meant to keep any more of San Francisco's beautiful historic movie theaters from being closed and demolished. The Planning Commission recently ignored this mandate and approved the demolition of one of these historic buildings, the Harding Theater at Divisadero and Hayes, in order to make way for a high priced condo development. Our City has joined in the fight to save this architectural and cultural gem. To learn more about the Harding and efforts to save it, call David Tornheim of Central City Progressives at 415-668-2353.

Housing Protections

Last year a conservative judge used a legal technicality to kill a San Francisco measure, the Housing Preservation Initiative, which the Our City field team helped to qualify for the ballot.

The initiative would have banned the mass eviction and demolition of older rent controlled apartment buildings in order to make way for newer buildings exempt from rent control; a regime which currently allows developers to rake in windfall profits at the expense of San Francisco's lowest income tenants.

Our City stands ready to aid proposed new efforts to pass this legislation. We also support State Assemblymember Mark Leno's new legislative push to limit such evictions by cutting back California's punitive anti-tenant law called the Ellis Act.

Action: Our local Assemblymember Leland Yee has yet to take a stand in favor of Mark Leno's bill. Write:

Assemblymember Leland Yee

State Capitol

P.O. Box 942849

Sacramento, CA 94249

and urge him to: *Co-sponsor and champion AB 781 - Mark Leno's Ellis Act Reform Legislation.*



Core Report: Solar & Renewable Energy

Near the beginning of 2005, climate change experts reported that global warming appears to be happening twice as rapidly as they had previously thought. Meanwhile the recently enacted Kyoto Protocol, while a tiny step in the right direction, reduces global CO2 emissions by less than 5%, when it will take a 60-70% reduction over the next half century to bring a halt to this crisis. Making the situation even worse, the United States has not even joined in the Kyoto treaty.

All of this means that San Francisco must stop waiting for sanity from national governments as they dangerously drag their feet on this issue, and start taking massive action ourselves to lead the world toward solving this problem immediately.

San Francisco voters did just that in November 2001, voting overwhelmingly to pass two measures meant to make us the most solar and renewable energy powered city in the world by this year. But due to delays from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), this goal has not even come close to being achieved. Our City has now made Solar and Renewable Energy for San Francisco its core campaign. In the past several months, with your help, we have gotten over 750 constituent letters to Mayor Newsom calling on him to take action and to demand that the programs move forward.

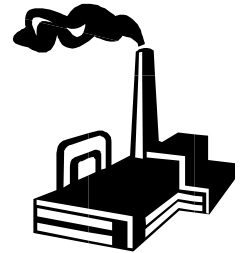
Some Limited New Projects

In response, the SFPUC has initiated two new, but unfortunately very small, solar projects. The city's Southeast Waste Water Treatment Plant will be solar equipped, and more solar panels will be erected on Mosconi Center.

While it is good that San Francisco's renewable initiatives are finally in forward motion, we also need to step back and get some serious perspective. These two new projects, combined, will provide less than half of a megawatt of electricity. But to reach our renewable energy goals in San Francisco, and also take a big bite out of global warming, we need to put in place *hundreds* of megawatts of alternative energy generation.

New Polluting Power Plants Threaten To Move Us Backward

The SFPUC has also recently made plans to erect new polluting natural gas power turbines on the East side of the city. The East side is largely made up of lower income and minority communities, and is already up to its ears in pollution from various facilities which have been cynically located in its neighborhoods due to a serious lack of environmental justice in San Francisco. The last thing those areas need is more pollution. And with global warming increasing far more rapidly than previously believed, it is not acceptable for even one more fossil fuel turbine to be put in operation anywhere in the world, let alone in a city like San Francisco, which seeks to become the leader of the planet on renewable energy.



The Good News!

There has, however, been a very promising development for renewable energy in San Francisco. Last May 11th, the Board of Supervisors passed a measure called the San Francisco Energy Independence Ordinance. This ordinance makes use of a new California state law to bring a program called Community Choice Aggregation to the city. The 'Community Choice' aspect of this process leaves PG&E corporation in charge of only power lines and distribution, and empowers the City of San Francisco to decide for itself where our energy comes from. The 'Aggregation' aspect of the plan allows us to collect (or aggregate) our energy from as many and as diverse sources as we wish; including through the bringing online of large amounts of our own municipal renewable energy generation by building solar, wind, tidal, and wave power facilities. The Energy Independence Ordinance as passed includes a big boost to such renewable energy projects.

Further Delays From The SFPUC!

Unfortunately, the SFPUC has also delayed implementation of this *new* renewables policy. SFPUC staff who were supposed to have given us a plan for the implementation of this ordinance by January 2005, failed to meet that deadline. Instead they asked for an extension until the end of this month. And if the project is further delayed past April, its viability could be seriously threatened. Furthermore, in their recent hearing presentations to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), SFPUC staff indicated that they were preparing a report that would allow the Board of Supervisors to decide whether or not the Energy Independence Ordinance was realistic, and stated that they thought the project should be delayed. *(continued on next page)*

But as renewable energy activist Paul Fenn aptly stated at those hearings, the Board of Supervisors did not ask for a report on whether or not Community Choice was a good idea, the Board directed the SFPUC to give us a *plan* for how we are going to *make Community Choice and renewable energy happen* in San Francisco. San Franciscans and the Board of Supervisors already know, and have established in *law* that Community Choice and renewable energy are a good idea. All we need from the SFPUC is that they give us the logistical and financial plan to implement these new laws immediately.

Urgent Action Needed From The Mayor

The SFPUC's deadline to complete the Community Choice Aggregation Plan is imminent. So it is crucial over the next few weeks for Mayor Newsom to *insist* that the SFPUC end its delays, that it stop giving us token solar projects which amount to little more than window dressing, and that it instead move aggressively and rapidly to build renewable energy projects all over the city, as the voters and the Board of Supervisors intended.

Our City's Next Year

Over the coming year, Our City's task is to turn up the heat and pressure for green energy, and help make sure that city renewable projects and the Energy Independence Ordinance both move forward in full swing.

Many other key issues are on the move in San Francisco including:

- Muni's fare hikes, service cuts, and ploy to skirt the diesel ban by buying used diesel buses from Oakland,
- The city's upcoming negotiations with Comcast for our new cable/broadband contract, and,
- SFPUC's costly, environmentally alarming mismanagement of the overhaul of our municipal Hetch Hetchy water system, which has risen in cost by hundreds of millions of dollars since voters adopted the upgrade.

Our City is following these and other important developments, will take action on each when necessary, and will continue to make sure that our great San Francisco community becomes even better as a challenging new century rolls forward...



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