



# CEQA: A GOOD LAW IN NEED OF REFORM.

## Neighbors Use CEQA in Attempt to Block Expansion of Community Center for Underserved Youth

In 2006, the Booker T. Washington Community Service Center worked with the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing to replace its 1952, 12,600 square foot building with a new, larger community center and affordable housing. The Center has been providing job training, after school programs and other services to underserved communities in San Francisco, particularly the African-American community, since 1919. The Center is on Presidio Avenue just north of Geary Boulevard, one of the City's best-served transit corridors. Center supporters have raised over \$30 million for the project.

The Center's immediately adjacent uses are single- and multi-family homes, although the neighborhood includes a Muni yard for bus storage and maintenance, retail (Target and Trader Joe's), and storage.

The project's original configuration was 8-stories, and included 42,000 square feet of affordable housing (half of which would be dedicated for transitioning foster youth) and 20,000 square feet of community center space. During the community outreach and City review process, the project was reduced to 5 stories and only 50 residential homes.

As the project's Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) came up for approval in June of 2010, neighborhood groups such as the Presidio Heights Association of Neighbors and Neighbors for Fair Planning opposed the project based on the size and aesthetics of the building, and parking. The neighborhood associations insisted that there was no opposition to affordable housing or foster youths, though in press reports some neighbors discussed concerns with increased "loitering".

The most frequent neighborhood complaint was that the project did not fit in with the residential buildings and character of their neighborhood, and that the 22-space underground parking garage was inadequate.

The City responded that residents and recreational users typically did not have cars, and that the Center was in a highly urbanized area with excellent existing transit services less than two blocks away. The City also disagreed that the neighborhood character was exclusively residential, based on neighborhood uses such as Target and Trader Joe's. After an appeal, the Board of Supervisors approved the project on a 9-2 vote, finding the project was consistent with the General Plan and supportive of the city's stated goal of creating 500 units of transitional youth housing by 2016.

### COST OF CEQA MISUSE:

- NIMBY CEQA lawsuit delays vital youth services for over 6 years
- Delay in creation of transit-oriented affordable homes for foster youth
- Considerable attorneys' fees and costs associated with lawsuit and litigation

### About this series:

*The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is an important environmental law. However, today's CEQA is too often misused to stop or delay projects that comply with all applicable environmental laws and standards. "CEQA: A Good Law In Need of Reform" will call attention to the many examples of CEQA misuses, and the consequences on vital projects, our environment and our economy. Visit [www.CEQAWorkingGroup.com](http://www.CEQAWorkingGroup.com) for more case studies or information about efforts to modernize CEQA.*



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The neighborhood groups sued, and the suit was dismissed by the Superior Court in mid 2011. Neighborhood groups promptly filed an appeal and in May 2013, two years later, the Court of Appeal ruled in favor of the Center, upholding the project EIR. Although a full EIR was done, because of frivolous CEQA lawsuits, the project has dragged on for over 6 years, denying vital services for youth in need and drastically driving up costs for this critical project.

To read the complete caste study, visit [www.CEQAWorkingGroup.com/btwsc](http://www.CEQAWorkingGroup.com/btwsc)

