

10 Projects Reshape Oakland

Making Sense of the Changing Landscape

LAURA COUNTS



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Over the past decade, it's become an old saw: Oakland is making a comeback, emerging from San Francisco's shadow and shedding its industrial past. Then news about failing schools or senseless bloodshed or City Hall cronyism makes headlines, and it seems like the same old Oakland—beloved by residents but saddled with an image problem it can't seem to shake.

But activity abounds around the city, even set against the backdrop of a deflated housing market, a shrinking job market and ever elusive major retail projects: Large swaths of land—abandoned by the military and the port—are on the verge of dramatic makeovers; new high-rises are changing the skyline; the bar has been raised on grocery shopping; and former Mayor Jerry Brown's 10K housing plan is close to reality.

To help make sense of the changing landscape, here's a look at 10 projects that have special significance because of sheer size, impact on particular neighborhoods or cultural importance.

IMAGE

Project :

Fox Oakland Theater

Developer: Phil Tagami of California Capital Group

Description: Forty-two years after it went dark, the eclectic 1928 movie palace reopens as a 3,000-capacity live music venue. The Oakland School for the Arts, a charter performing arts school, occupies the renovated commercial buildings that wrap around the theater, and a restaurant and bar will anchor the corner.

Cost: \$73.4 million

Timeline: The grand opening is expected by year's end, with full operations to begin in 2009.

Significance: The theater dodged the wrecking ball when the city bought it for \$3 million in 1996, and then poured another \$3.5 million into replacing the roof and restoring the marquee. A partial rehab grew into a full-scale restoration when Tagami, a veteran at engineering the restoration of historic buildings through

pubic and private funds (previous projects include the ornate Rotunda building), assembled 28 sources of financing—including \$49 million from the city. Berkeley's Another Planet Entertainment will handle booking, and the downstairs will have an open floor with cocktail tables in the back (theater seating in the balcony), which means the music will generally be louder and the crowds younger than at the sit-down Paramount. The club-like atmosphere will further enliven the nascent Uptown Entertainment District.

IMAGE

Project:

Jack London Square Redevelopment

Developers: Ellis Partners LLC and Transbay Holdings Co.

Description: Developers Jim Ellis (of Ellis Partners) and James Falaschi (of Transbay) aim to undo the blunders of the original lackluster Jack London Square, resting their hopes on a new public market, modeled on Seattle's Pike Place and the San Francisco's Ferry Building. They've set aside two stories for 70 organic produce and meat vendors, plus local food artisans and restaurants around a large atrium, topped by four stories of office space and a commercial kitchen.

The million-square-foot expansion also adds a glass-walled building by the ferry terminal, expected to house a microbrew beer garden and cafe and a parking garage. Rehabs include peeling the 1960s aluminum siding off the 66 Franklin Street warehouse to reveal inviting arches, and signing boutique hotelier Joie de Vivre Hospitality to spruce up the Waterfront Plaza Hotel, where celebrity chef Joey Altman is opening a sequel to the Tenderloin's defunct Miss Pearl's Jam House. The next phase calls for a 250-room luxury hotel, a cabaret-style movie theater, public plazas and more retail and office space.

Cost: \$350 million

Timeline: Jack London Market (formerly Harvest Hall) opens in spring 2009; Phase II is planned for 2012.

Significance: The politically connected developers took heat when they snapped up the port-owned square for a song and they've labored to win over the finicky foodie community. Ellis believes that Oakland's history as a food-transport and processing center, the bustling wholesale produce district nearby and the East Bay's foodie culture will give the place authenticity. They gained credibility but took a risk by turning up their noses at chain restaurants and hiring Italian slow-food pioneer Renato Sardo to find tenants. If their gamble pays off, Jack London Square might finally become the destination it's touted to be in tourist brochures.

IMAGE

Project:

Cathedral of Christ the Light and Cathedral Center

Developer: The Roman Catholic Diocese of Oakland

Description: The 12-story glass dome, with its Douglas fir ribs, designed by San Francisco architect Craig Hartman, will be a Lake Merritt landmark for the next few centuries. It replaces the quake-damaged St. Francis de Sales. Built as a central gathering place for the diocese's 500,000 or so Catholics in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, the complex includes a conference center, offices, a library, a public plaza and parking. Underneath the church is a mausoleum for 2,000 crypts and urns.

Cost: \$190 million

Timeline: Ground was broken in 2005; the dedication ceremony is Sept. 25.

Significance: The distinctive modernist building is sure to attract its share of snarky nicknames—it has already been likened to a nuclear reactor and a beehive. The dome's geometry is based on the vesica pisces,

the ancient Christian fish-shaped symbol made by the intersection of two circles, and its 1,000 panes of glass provide an ever-shifting light show inside. The diocese sees the showy building as a symbol for the faithful and for the city. “The bishop was very clear as he sat down years ago: This space must be open and welcoming to anyone and everyone,” says diocese spokesman Mike Brown. “The decision to stay in Oakland, the center of the East Bay, is a throwback in a sense, a reminder of what cathedral centers were in medieval times—mini-cities in the heart of the city.”

NEIGHBORHOODS

Project:

Central Station

Developer: Rick Holliday of Holliday Development spearheaded the project; Pulte Homes, HFH Ltd. and BRIDGE Housing are also building portions.

Description: More than 1,000 homes are planned on 26 acres where West Oakland abuts the Interstate 880 freeway. They’ll be clustered around the abandoned Beaux Arts–style 16th Street Train Station, the terminus of the Transcontinental Railroad and jumping-off point for dreamers and speculators seeking their fortunes in California. So far, 163 live-work lofts in the former Pacific Cannery building and the 130-unit townhouse project Zephyr Gate are ready for move-in; 99 below-market-rate apartments are in the works. Next up: 300 more apartments, while 400 more homes, plus retail and office space, are planned. Part of the \$20 million in new taxes expected from the project will go toward renovating the graffitied and quake-damaged train station. A culinary school? A museum honoring the Pullman Porters? A space-age rapid transit hub? Those are a few of the ideas floating around.

Cost: About \$280 million for the first phase

Timeline: The first 400 units will be completed this year, with the next phase built by 2013.

Significance: The pioneers attracted by the prospect of a six-minute BART ride to San Francisco will be moving into a tight-knit neighborhood that proudly calls itself “the Lower Bottoms.” It’s one of the Bay area’s oldest and richest—in terms of history and cultural identity—but it suffered economically after the Cypress Freeway cut it off from the rest of the city. The Central Station project is the biggest investment the neighborhood has seen since the shipyard and railroad industries went bust, and Holliday has been working since 1999 to gain community trust. Marcel Diallo, resident artist and activist who has worked with Holliday to create the Lower Bottoms Cultural District, says, “We don’t mind having new neighbors as long as they are evolved and ready to ground themselves in their new community, ... and as long as the dollars get spread around.”



NEIGHBORHOODS

Project:

MacArthur Transit Village

Developer: MacArthur Transit Community Partners LLC, a partnership of BRIDGE Housing Corporation and McGrath Properties Inc.

Description: About 624 units of high-density housing will be built between 40th Street and West

MacArthur Boulevard along Telegraph Avenue, the geographical center of the Bay Area. The project includes 34,000 square feet of retail space and a new street. BART's daily patrons will find slightly fewer parking spaces—510, down from 600—while a bike-parking station and shuttles will encourage people to ditch their cars.

Cost: About \$400 million

Timeline: Construction of a new parking garage is expected to begin in 2009, with the first housing to start in 2010. Full build-out will happen over 10 to 15 years.

Significance: Transit villages are the hot trend in urban planning. Even though the trailblazing Fruitvale Village has struggled, the city has three more in the pipeline, with MacArthur the farthest along. Since 1993, the city has wanted to revamp the bleak BART station, and meanwhile the Temescal neighborhood has gentrified, with the nearby blocks of Telegraph Avenue blooming into a mini gourmet ghetto. The hope is that the project will also benefit the side of the station along Martin Luther King Jr. Way, which missed the boom.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Project:

Uptown

Developers: Uptown Housing Partners LP, a joint venture between Forest City Residential West and MacFarlane Partners; Resources for Community Development.

Description: As the centerpiece of former Mayor Jerry Brown's 10K initiative, these 665 new apartments make up a new neighborhood north of City Hall. A quarter of the

Uptown units are affordable, and Resources for Community Development is building another 80 below-market apartments and a childcare center behind the Fox Theater. A new 25,000-square-foot public park is under construction, and 9,000 square feet of retail space fronts Telegraph Avenue. Forest City also has dibs on a parcel at 19th Street and Telegraph but has put on hold a high-rise with 370 condos. The city is also drumming up developer interest in another potential tower behind the Fox.

Cost: \$190 million

Timeline: The first three buildings are complete; the affordable project is under construction.

Significance: Jerry Brown fought long and hard for this project, providing a \$60 million public subsidy and forsaking any chance of a downtown ballpark for the soon-to-be Fremont A's. This mixed-income development is at the heart of hopes for enlivening the area briefly known as Oaksterdam.

SCOPE

Project:

Encinal Tower

Developer: Peter Wang of Encinal Terminals

Description: Wang wants to build a tower that would dwarf the 404-foot Ordway building—the city's tallest building. He has scaled back his plan for a 63-story skyscraper to 56 floors. The 715-foot tower, with luxury housing above 942,000 square feet of office space and six floors of parking, would curve through a full block of Broadway, replacing businesses like Gold Teeth Master, a parking lot and the historic Tapscott Building.

Cost: Unknown

Timeline: The complex project will require another year of planning, and perhaps a decade more before it



tops off.

Significance: Pie in the sky? Perhaps. But the publicity-shy Wang, who has completed two other projects in Oakland, seems determined—he's been at it for more than two years already.

SCOPE

Project:

The Oakland Army Base

Developers: Thirteen groups, from multinational developers to a small local cooperative, submitted rough plans to build on all or part of the 108 acres up for grabs. City officials are working off a short list to choose a master developer by early 2009.

Description: Some of the world's largest builders envision office parks, big-box retail, hotels and maritime-related businesses at the eastern foot of the Bay Bridge. The city plans to relocate some of Broadway Auto Row's dealers to a freeway auto mall on the northern edge of the property. Another chunk is reserved for truck parking, and a narrow 17 acres on the western spit will become a park.

Cost: The sky's the limit. Environmental cleanup alone is estimated in the tens of millions; then there are the new roads and utilities, not to mention that some of the land is under water at high tide.

Timeline: The auto mall will go up by late 2010, and the optimistic estimate is that most of the site will be built out in the next five years. Caltrans has claimed the westernmost portion for Bay Bridge staging until 2015.

Significance: Whatever gets built will be highly visible, and the verdict is out on whether it will buff Oakland's image or merely blend in. The city spent more than a year in exclusive negotiations with Hollywood's Wayans brothers, who wanted to build a movie studio and shopping mall but complained that the port's plans to stack containers 15 high would block priceless bay views. A cooperative of small local film-related businesses is still trying to build a movie production center on 22 acres and is negotiating with the larger developers. One proposal calls for a personal rapid transit system of individual podcars on raised monorails that would zip around the site and eventually over—or rather, under—the Bay Bridge.



SCOPE

Project:

Oak to Ninth

Developer: Oakland Harbor Partners, a joint effort between Signature Properties and Reynolds and Brown

Description: OHP wants to build 3,100 condos, apartments, lofts and townhouses on 64 acres of waterfront east of Jack London Square. About 60 to 70 percent of the units, spread through 13 buildings, will be for sale, and about 465 units will be below market. Plans also call for 200,000 square feet of retail, renovation of the Clinton Basin and Fifth Avenue marinas. About 50 percent of the project will be open space, with 32 acres of new parks and some wetlands restoration. A small portion of the old Ninth Avenue Terminal building will be preserved as a maritime museum while the rest will be demolished.

Cost: Signature paid the port \$18 million for the land, and cleanup costs are estimated at more than that. Project cost projections unavailable.

Timeline: Projected groundbreaking in 2010, with construction in five phases over 15 years.

Significance: This mother-of-all-infill-projects—the most dramatic example of the transformation of Oakland’s industrial waterfront—has been controversial from the start. Developers say they are restoring public access to the waterfront, but a group of environmentalists and preservationists say it’s not enough. Their referendum campaign was sunk on bureaucratic technicalities, but they won a partial court victory to force OHP to redo some portions of its environmental impact report. Signature’s Mike Ghielmetti says they’ll bring a revised EIR to the city council before the end the year.



SCOPE

Project:

Oak Knoll

Developer: Master developer SunCal Cos. of Irvine will prepare the site and sell chunks to other developers.

Description: This wooded hillside, a former golf course and then a naval hospital, is slated to become a new community with about 3,000 residents in up to 960 units of housing, from apartments and townhouses to

multimillion-dollar estate homes with killer views along the ridgeline. Seniors will have dibs on 160 units, and 72 will be affordable. A retail center along Mountain Boulevard will be anchored by a grocery store—a boon for East Hills residents hungry for a local market—while 50 acres of open space and two miles of trails will be open to the public. The developers will also restore Rifle Range Creek and preserve the historic Club Knoll. SunCal spent \$6 million to move and upgrade the Seneca Center, a school for troubled youth.

Cost: SunCal paid \$100.5 million for the 167 acres through a public auction in 2006, and plans to spend another \$100 million or so on environmental cleanup and infrastructure. Project cost projections unavailable.

Timeline: Demolition and environmental remediation is underway; grading will begin early in 2009. The first phase, including the retail center, is scheduled for early 2010, with build-out in four phases over about five years.

Significance: A piece of land like this in an urban area doesn’t come along often, and it fell into private hands after the city played chicken with the Navy, which ultimately rebuffed its lowball bid. SunCal worked closely with the neighborhood group Oak Knoll Coalition, incorporating neighbors’ desires to preserve Club Knoll and restore the creek, but there is still disagreement over plans to build mini-mansions on the ridgeline.