

## **History in the Making...Again**

Governor Schwarzenegger released the revised version of his budget on May 13<sup>th</sup>. In it, he backtracks on many of the troublesome transportation and health and human services proposals that he rolled out in January. While some programs might be spared the budget ax for now, there are many more that were not given adequate funding they have sorely needed for years. Amongst the under funded programs are education, economic development and job creation activities. Despite the State budget leaving much to be desired in these departments, I want to focus this article on an example right here in West Oakland that has the potential to combine the best of all three.

Many of us are familiar with the old Southern Pacific train station at 16th and Wood streets in West Oakland. The imperial Beaux Arts-landmark was closed in 1989, after the Loma Prieta earthquake, and has been unused since. Neighbors complain that it has become a virtual wasteland and is now used to park cars and collect trash. Until now.

BUILD West Oakland, Holiday Development Inc. and HFH Limited are private developers who have spent the past 11 years collaborating on a plan to develop the 29+ acres of land surrounding the station into approximately 1,500 units of housing. This plan was approved by the City of Oakland on May 19<sup>th</sup> and calls for 15% of the units to be designated as affordable housing. Four hundred and fifty of these units will be rental apartments (94 reserved for very low income rentals) the rest will be comprised of townhouses, condominiums and lofts. Of the homes for sale, 131 of these units will be held for people who earn no more than the Bay Area's median income for a family of four (approximately \$80,000 annually). These new homeowners will all be eligible for up to \$25,000 of down payment assistance provided BUILD West Oakland.

I believe this is a project that is an illustration of good public policy. Many West Oaklanders, formed what is now known as the 16<sup>th</sup> & Wood Train Station Coalition. This coalition successfully advocated for more affordable housing options within the new development and that the plan should include a commitment to supporting apprenticeship construction programs to provide West Oaklanders with prevailing wage jobs relating to the project. A project of this size will, of course, generate jobs. The current City of Oakland policy is that 50% of the work hours must be performed by Oakland workers and 50% of new hires must be Oakland residents. Managed by the Oakland Private Industry Council, the Cypress Mandela/WIST Training Center in West Oakland offers a 16-week pre-apprenticeship program for Bay Area men and women over 18 years old. Training is both hands on and in the classroom and prepares students for skilled trades jobs relevant to today's construction industry. This project offers the perfect confluence of opportunity.

Many agree, and I am among them, that this project should include recognition of the historical significance of the train station and its connection to the African

American community. Many of us involved in the project envision a living museum for the Pullman Porters (a job where many African Americans earned a livable wage at the time) and how they were Oakland's contribution to the nation's first organized black labor union. By offering the community control of a living museum that commemorates the Pullman Porters and the West Oakland of today, we support their vision for a strong, multicultural, working-class community whose residents have control over their resources. Honoring our Black history demands the preservation of African Americans' proudest legacies, like the historic train station, and the recognition that communities of color must benefit--not be displaced or disregarded by development projects in their midst.

This project can help fulfill a vision that even Governor Schwarzenegger can learn from. We can have a responsible housing development, education, job training, revitalization rolled into our backyard right here in our community.