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A Density Hustle in Bankers Hill?

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By Kate Callen

A development project in Bankers Hill using San Diego's Complete Communities would demolish a historic building to build a six-story medical complex on the rim of iconic Maple Canyon — yet the building isn't really historic and the medical complex may end up being residential, and the canyon rim is not actually a steep slope.

The canyon rim property at 2660 1st Avenue property was bought by the San Diego American Indian Health Center (SDAIHC) for \$6 million in 2017. Earlier this year, SDAIHC applied for a permit to build a bigger medical complex. The proposal was submitted as part of Complete Communities because housing might be included.

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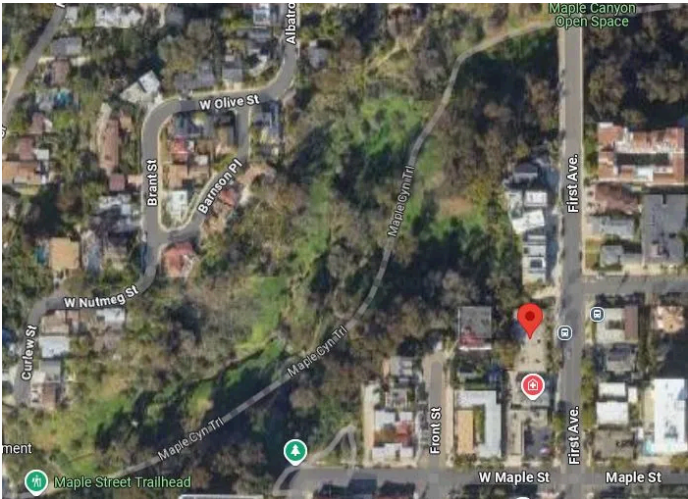
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artment (DSD) is ready to grant ministerial approval for the project. But SDAIHC just listed the property for sale at \$20 million, more than triple the 2017 price. The project is branded “1st and Maple.” Global real estate giant Jones Lang LaSalle is shepherding it.

Why the abrupt shift from redeveloping the site to selling it? Maybe because a group of Bankers Hill residents called Maple Canyon SD has hired the Chatten-Brown Law Group to challenge the clinic’s proposal.

Chatten-Brown represented Friends of Bay Ho over the monstrous canyon rim project that “won” the OB Rag’s “worst ADU in San Diego” contest. The firm also now represents opponents of the notorious 23-story “pencil tower” proposed in Pacific Beach, called the Vela.



Kate Callen
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Mar 13, 12:42



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Current building at red drop, on rim of east wall of Maple Canyon. Google maps

The Bankers Hill lawsuit raises troubling issues. On the environmental front, the project poses a clear threat of degradation of the iconic Maple Canyon, as it would carve a huge chunk out of its slope. Yet, right now Maple Canyon is undergoing a major restoration with \$15 million from the City of San Diego.

Let's see if we have this right: The same city government that's paying to restore the canyon might allow development that would deface it.



Beautiful Maple Canyon. Photo by Kate Callen

As with the Bay Ho property, DSD made a U-turn on site topography. First, the canyon rim property was protected by the City's Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESL) regulations. Then, suddenly, it wasn't.



Patrick on Todd Gloria's Alternative Facts: "Please Excuse my ignorance. But why on earth would a mayor of any American city be in another country having..."

Mar 13, 11:43



chris schultz on Todd Gloria's Alternative Facts: "LOL"

Mar 13, 11:01



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“We have not seen any evidence to support the City’s conclusion that the ESL regulations do not apply,” Chatten-Brown stated in a letter to DSD. “In fact, the City already determined the adjacent sites feature ESL in the form of steep hillsides.”

The planned medical complex would carve out enough of the hillside to fit four underground parking levels. The six above-ground floors might be the site of a new medical complex. Then again, they might not.



SDAIHC is seeking an expedited review through the Affordable Housing Density Bonus program. How would a health care provider qualify for residential permitting shortcuts? By promising that someday, one of the two parcels on the site might be set aside for housing – in fact, for senior affordable housing.



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Banner displays 6-story building carved into side of Maple Canyon.

That's a worthy intention. But it isn't a binding commitment. If the bait-and-switch gambit succeeds, the City will set an audacious precedent.

On the historic front, the existing low-slung building was the work of architects Lloyd Ruocco and Homer Delawie — two giants of San Diego Modernism.

Ruocco's public projects included the San Diego Zoo and the Civic Theater. The City has designated nine of his works as historic resources. He was a leader in urban conservation and founder of the Citizens' Coordinate for Century 3, a group promoting architectural and environmental integrity.

Ruocco's advocacy "underscored that the City's aesthetics are a intangible asset that bears a direct influence on the City's economy," Chatten-Brown wrote. "[His] desire to protect San Diego's urban canyons, including Maple Canyon, is reflected in the current structure on the site."

If this goes forward, advocates for density-at-all-costs can celebrate a trifecta. They will tear up a beloved canyon. They will give housing credit to a project that won't include housing. And they will



John Shaw on Bernie Sanders: Musk Wants to Cut Social Security and Privatize It: "Golly Pats, "I've raised my kids to not believe everything they hear, and the only way they can judge people..."

Mar 13, 09:48



Pats on Bernie Sanders: Musk Wants to Cut Social Security and Privatize It: "Haha. OK guys. Frank, yes, I totally agree Biden was elected as our Prez. Did you ever hear me slam..."

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destroy a historic structure whose architect fought for urban preservation.

You’re reading this because Bankers Hill residents, like residents in Bay Ho and Pacific Beach, dug deep and hired lawyers to challenge an excessive development.

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18 thoughts on “A Density Hustle in Bankers Hill?”



Frank Gormlie says:
December 2, 2024 at 12:25 pm

Editordude: one of the left-over glitches is the color of the caption — currently illegible. We apologize and add it to the tech desk’s issue pile.

Reply



Edward Olsen says:
December 2, 2024 at 2:31 pm

Confusing post. Begins with antiphrasis that none of the buildings are



Pats on Todd Gloria’s Alternative Facts: “OUTSTANDING Kate. AND, spoiler on too.”
Mar 12, 18:35



Gerald Holmstrom on The Ocean Beach Connections in the Case of the Exiled Wall Street Fraudster: “do you have any updated information on Steven Schwartzbard (aka Vladislav Steven Zubkis.is he still in Rosarita Beach, Mexico under...”
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Ojos Azul on Todd Gloria’s Alternative Facts: “Ever vigilant our Todd. LOL”
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