

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

No so fast, Obama

Editor:

I was sitting in a coffee shop in Santa Monica the day before Super Tuesday. Standing next to my table were two men. They looked to be in their '50s, affluent and educated. They were talking about the upcoming vote. One was supporting Hillary Clinton the other Barack Obama. The Obama man was trying to convince his friend to vote for Obama. The dialog went something like this:

"What's wrong with Clinton?"

"Nothing, but there's something about Obama. I have not felt this way since Bobby Kennedy."

This phenomena is not new, but it seems to be affecting an unusual percentage of the voting population this election year. I am referring to the Obama campaign. This is not so much about Obama but more about his supporters. I will admit that I never thought Obama had much chance of getting elected. But he has proven to be an amazingly skillful orator and campaigner.

Obama is being compared to John and Bobby Kennedy. Even more so with the endorsement of some very prominent members of the Kennedy family. I was and am a great admirer of JFK. His Inaugural Speech was one of the greatest. It was full of that vision thing. I went back and read it again. Here's a line from it. "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty. This much we pledge - and more."

Heavy stuff, here is another: " And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country."

Still gives me a shiver after all these years. His words inspired, not only for their moral clarity and idealism, but also because of the tasks they compelled us to.

Obama also has the ability to fill that need for a vision. But when you get beyond all the great speeches about change and bringing people together, what are the goals?

In a nut shell, entitlements for everyone. Now that will inspire you to glory! But he is able to evoke feelings in people. After his victory on Super Tuesday, I was watching his victory speech on TV. There was a blonde middle aged woman just over his left shoulder. She had her hands clasped adoringly, hanging on to his every word and frequently jumping for joy. She reminded me a teenage girl in the early '60s at a Beatles concert. And then there's Robert De Niro speaking at an Obama rally. This is a quote: "I'm here because finally one person has inspired me, one person has given me hope, one person has made me believe that we can make a change - that person is Barack Obama."

Take it easy, Bob!

Boy, if Obama should ever disappoint him, I would worry about him. He might turn into that uncontrollable emotional character he played in "Analyze This."

Voting for a president based on feelings is risky business. Ask yourself one question before you vote for Obama. Besides getting elected, what major thing has he accomplished? Make a list, and see what you come up with.

I am visualizing President Elect Barack Obama's inaugural speech. It could go something like this: " Ask not what you can do for your country - ask what your country can do for you. We will not pay any price, will not bear any burden, not meet any hardship and not oppose any foe in the support of liberty."

Sends a shiver up your spine. Doesn't it?

John McColgan
Santa Monica



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Old and new collide in SM developments

I'D BEEN HEARING RUMORS THAT the Albertsons/Big 5 Sporting Goods property in the 3100 block of Wilshire Boulevard had been sold. This large property between Berkeley and Franklin streets on the eastern edge of the city is at the "Gateway to Santa Monica."

I've shopped at Albertson's for well over 30 years - even when it was a Lucky Market. I was curious to find out who the buyer was and their plans for the property. Then I'd heard Macerich Company who also owns Santa Monica Place had bought the property.

I called Robyn Young, who is Macerich's senior manager of development relations in Phoenix. She confirmed Macerich had indeed recently purchased the property. As far as the fate of Albertson's and Big 5, she said nothing will change for a while. "We are focused on our remodel of Santa Monica Place, which is very important to the company, at the moment," She told me. "We're not planning any changes at that property at this time."

Emphasizing that any redevelopment of the property would involve extensive input from the community Young said, "Before we were to come out with any design or plan for the property, we would be reaching out to the community and doing so very early on."

At a Neighborhood Council meeting two months ago, city planning director, Eileen Fogarty discussed the "hypothetical" redevelopment of a commercial parcel such as the Albertson's/Big 5 property, explaining the kind of developmental elements the city favors.

Fogarty told the group retail developments such as Albertson's with a blank wall to the street (with the store entrance from the parking lot in the back of the property) are undesirable. Fogarty described an ideal redevelopment as one being open, harmonious with the neighborhood and pedestrian friendly to the street, having inner courtyards, landscaping and a variety of stores, restaurants and community serving businesses. Parking would be below grade with housing - either condominiums or apartments above. Of course, the whole project would be environmentally state-of-the-art.

I asked Young about Fogarty's "hypothetical" and she replied that Fogarty's comments could apply to any larger commercial property and that her "wish list" were all elements the city favors in new developments. "Nothing has been designed and we haven't even started preliminary planning," I was reminded.

What's to become of Albertson's and Big 5? Noting that both retailers have leases, Young said, "Nothing for now and probably not for a few years until we can devote our full attention to it."

Albertsons is now owned by Minnesota based Supervalu, Inc., and was purchased for \$17.4 billion in cash, stock, and debt in a deal completed in June, 2006. Past speculation concerned converting some Albertson's into higher end, Bristol Farms Markets and other rumors whispered

that some Albertson's may become discount super markets.

Needless to say Albertson's and Big 5 aren't going anywhere for now. But it will be interesting to see if they will "fade away" or be included in any new Macerich development.

UNKIND TO HISTORY

Last Tuesday, the Santa Monica City Council deadlocked, thus letting stand a Landmarks Commission "OK" to demolish a "turn of the century" style house and allow the construction of a "modern" single-family residence in the heart of the Ocean Park Third Street Historic District.

On Dec. 10, 2007, The Landmarks Commission approved demolition of a small "period style" 1953-era duplex with garage and construction of a new, 2,365 square foot, International style/modern, single-family home at 2642 Second St. Neighbors concerned that another non-period structure would forever alter the "turn-of-the-century" feel of their historic district, appealed the commission's decision to City Council.

With council person, Pam O'Connor absent, Mayor, Herb Katz, and Council persons, Bob Holbrook and Richard Bloom voted to deny the appeal and against remanding the project back to Landmarks Commission for review, proving that they aren't any more sensitive to the concept of a historic district than, apparently, the Landmark's Commission is.

The appeal boiled down to whether the proposed "modern" house would be compatible with district character or consistent with district design guidelines for new construction. The dominant character of the contributing structures in the district can be best described as early California Beach, California craftsman/bungalow, Queen Anne or Victorian, although not all of the buildings in the neighborhood are "period." And, the Ocean Park Neighborhood Development Guide specifies that new construction in the district must be designed in historical style which includes International style/modern.

I don't think International/modern architecture is compatible with "turn-of-the-century," no matter how much one tweaks massing, setbacks, heights and architectural details. Maybe it's time to amend the zoning codes to outlaw "modern" or "International style" in historic neighborhoods where we're trying to preserve the quaint feel of Santa Monica's early days as a beach town.

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