

Vacant lots could be put to use

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With construction idle, vacant land could temporarily host gardens and parks. (Cindy Chew/The Examiner)

SAN FRANCISCO — A temporary forest may sprout in SoMa under a proposed program that could see empty lots filled citywide with community projects until widespread construction activity resumes. Lots were left vacant across The City after the 2008 economic meltdown stalled planned projects. The vacant lots create indefinite neighborhood blight, but developers and property owners fear that turning the lots over for interim community uses — such as gardens, parks and sports amenities — could lead neighbors to oppose the eventual reissuance of construction permits for their stalled projects. Under a widely supported proposal from Mayor Gavin Newsom's economic development office, construction permits would be extended for up to eight years if a property owner agrees to fill a lot with a temporary community use.

"Any previously entitled project would be able to apply for this program," Newsom development adviser Michael Yarne said.

An empty lot at 399 Fremont St., where a high-rise residential building is planned at the corner of Howard Street, could serve as a pilot project if the proposed program is approved, according to Yarne.

Preliminary plans for the lot would see fast-growing poplar trees or grass planted at the site to help suck up airborne carbon and potentially create biofuel, Yarne said.

Associations representing property owners, park users and Rincon Hill neighbors said they support the proposals, which have been dubbed green development agreements.

"It's a great idea," said Sheila Kolenc, San Francisco Beautiful interim executive director. "It's a way of greeting people in a more interesting way than cyclone fences and barbed wire."

The San Francisco Planning Commission today is scheduled to discuss the proposal, which will then head to the Board of Supervisors for debate and potential approval in late April.

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Read more at the San Francisco Examiner: <http://www.sfxaminer.com/local/Vacant-lots-could-be-put-to-use-85298522.html#ixzz164HISam9>