

I am posting this here because Pacifica City Council Member Mike O'Neill wrote in the Pacifica Tribune (March 7) about development of 3.1 acres of city-owned oceanfront property at 2212 Beach Boulevard (City Council Chambers and the old Wastewater Treatment Plant).

He was not in full knowledge of what the Pacifica Ocean Discovery Center (PODC) group was requesting. It was not hotel vs. PODC on the site as he presented it. We were not asking for the entire site, only a set-aside of 20%.

In fact, we are in favor of a hotel. We are requesting that the city section off the same amount of space that was previously set aside for the library on this site (30,000 square feet), and give us a year to raise the money to purchase the site (roughly \$2.5 million to \$3 million).

For this last developer to make space on the site for the library, he had to eliminate 20 hotel rooms, from 140 down to 120. The trade-off of 20 hotel rooms to build an oceanfront aquarium seems like a no-brainer.

Plus, having PODC as a tourist attraction would bring visitors into the city to stay in the hotels, shop, and eat at local restaurants. This oceanfront aquarium would help fill the rooms in the large hotel on this site, as well as rooms in the other hotels in town.

Twenty years ago, PODC raised \$13,000 in grant money to prepare our proposal. We hired professionals to do architecture, engineering, seawater intake engineering, and financial analysis. We had support letters from numerous environmental groups, schools, and colleges. We even had a support letter from Dr. Sylvia Earle, one of the most-renowned marine biologists on the planet. Our proposal was thick as a phone book.

Back then it was large 140-room hotel vs. PODC. Despite overwhelming public support for PODC, the city chose the hotel. That hotel developer backed out a year and a half later. The city has been trying to get a hotel on the site for 20 years.

After the decision, PODC stayed together for a few years, but since we could not get an option on the property or support from the city, it

became impossible to fundraise for this vision. The group and the hope faded away.

When the vote failed last year for the library to be built on this site, we realized that this section of the property could possibly become available. A couple of the founding members had a table at last year's Pacifica Earth Day event and discussed this possibility with the public. There was overwhelming support. Since then a new board of directors has been partially assembled, and we are having our nonprofit status reinstated.

Do we have any funding at this point? No. About two years ago, a member of a philanthropy team approached one of the founding members after hearing about the PODC proposal from years ago. There was this opportunity for \$10 million for this type of marine-related project, but because the city had just entered into negotiations with this last developer and set aside land for the library, it was not possible to go for this opportunity.

Now that the developer and library have exited from the site, we believe that if the city put wording in the RFP/RFQ supporting the PODC concept and showing the land space we would like to set aside, that there might be a possibility to go for this type of funding in the future.

Funding for such a venture is challenging, but we are in a different situation than 20 years ago. There was almost no internet then. Today because of the internet, there has been an explosion of wealth in Silicon Valley, San Mateo County, and the Bay Area. YouTube is in San Bruno. We could not care less if it were called Zuckerberg Aquarium, but that type of money is out there. It would require funding from several sources, and would require contracting with a capital acquisition professional.

How much would it cost? We base our proposed PODC almost identical to the two aquariums in Santa Cruz: The Seymour Discovery Center and the fairly new Sanctuary Exploration Center that was built six years ago. The City of Santa Cruz donated the property and NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation provided funds to build the 12,000-square-foot,

\$15.9 million Sanctuary Exploration Center. The proposed PODC would be roughly 15,000 square feet on the first floor.

Both of the aquariums cited above rent out their facilities to help cover operational costs. In our proposal, we would do the same. Mike O'Neill was seeking a 200-room conference center as a preferred part of the development in the RFP/RFQ. In our proposal, we include a 15,000-square-foot second floor as a 200-plus-room conference center multipurpose room for the hotel, additional use for City Council Chambers meetings, library presentations, music performances, and other uses such as wedding receptions.

Last, it is all about the pipe to the ocean and the pump house, which is required to stay on the property. The only reason the pier was built was to carry a pipe that came out of the pump house and under the pier so we could send our secondary wastewater into the ocean. Thankfully, we no longer do this. The pier infrastructure and pipe are valuable assets that no other city has. We can use this pipe infrastructure for seawater intake/outflow for the aquarium exhibits. It is why after all these years PODC has wanted to use this asset along with a section of the property. Also, using this asset would allow the city to apply for grant money to save the pier.

Please visit: <https://montereybay.noaa.gov/vc/sec/welcome.html>

Please visit our website
at: <https://pacificoceandiscoveryandresearchcenter.org/>

This is our one and only chance at this! If you support the concept of the Pacifica Ocean Discovery Center, please come to the City Council meeting, Monday, March 12 at 7 p.m. Wear blue and fill out a yellow card if you would like to speak in favor. Thanks.

Mitch Reid
Pacifica Ocean Discovery Center