



NEWS 'n NOTES

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Historical Chinatowns

In the past 9 months the API community, the city, Thomas Enterprises, and city commissioners have vetted the issue of the Chinese heritage at the Railyards and the grounds of the early API pioneers of Yee Fow. The API community was successful in establishing their important cultural heritage within the Railyards. The Mayor and City Council also agreed that the Chinese history must be addressed. All APIs must be commended for standing up for their history and engaging in the American process.

In recent weeks many API groups had become concerned with changes in the Railyards Specific Plan and the Railyards Design Guidelines that referenced to a Chinese garden in the largest infill redevelopment site in America, Sacramento's Railyards.

Tuesday, Dec. 11, Sacramento City officials received a flood of emails in support of our efforts to commemorate the region's rich Chinese heritage with a Chinese Garden and a Yee Fow History, Cultural and Trade Center. The Mayor's office was gracious enough to request to meet in efforts to come to a mutual understanding. We are most appreciative that the Mayor took the time in her busy schedule to address this issue.

During that evening's City Council meeting, leaders from over 20 Asian community organizations joined in unity and spoke in support of the efforts of the Friends of the Yee Fow Museum. With up to 40 API supporters in the audience, and many more watching from home, the Mayor and Council were firmly convinced that our project is community driven and widely supported.

City officials acknowledged the importance of the project and gave their assurances to work with the community to make it a reality.

Though the following day, Dec. 12, the Sacramento Bee newspaper article <http://www.sacbee.com/101/story/561313.html> diminished our accomplishments stating:

“Before the vote, a parade of interest groups continued to take cracks at the development, a pattern that's persisted as the development proposal moved through myriad public meetings in recent months. Advocates for a Chinese center and garden pressed unsuccessfully for a pledge that it be built near the train depot where Chinatown once stood.”

The negative press directed towards the Chinese resulted in another outcry from the community such as:

Ms Vellinga, Sacramento Bee,

“My comment concerns this passage from your article in today's (Dec.12, 2007) paper.

Before the vote, a parade of interest groups continued to take cracks at the development, a pattern that's persisted as the development proposal moved through myriad public meetings in recent months.

Advocates for a Chinese center and garden pressed unsuccessfully for a pledge that it be built near the train depot where Chinatown once stood.”

I am not Asian, but I have strong sympathies for their cause. I was at the Council meeting last night and heard the speakers from the local Chinese community. Chinese people have been badly treated by Sacramentans for over a hundred and fifty years. Many of their ancestors are buried in poorly documented cemeteries on the UP site. What you negatively cast as a “pattern that's persisted,” I call laudable participation in the public process.

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The Railyards Project

“At the meeting, these speakers were referring to a negotiated agreement to place the garden in a particular area. For unknown reasons, the Mayor penciled out the reference to the location of the garden at the last minute (outside the public process). That was why the Asian community was concerned. Rightfully so. To refer to this kind of community participation as “cracks” is both racially intensive and anti-democratic. Your tone and obvious racial bias are unacceptable and deserving of repudiation.”

Respectfully,
John Oback
Elk Grove

Thursday's Bee editorial, Dec. 13, “When civic life works, Railyards brings community to the table* presents a more accurate account and can be viewed at: <http://www.sacbee.com/110/story/566570.html>.

Many question if we still are being taken seriously. You can help to take it one step further by posting a comment at the end the editorial. Your comments will go a long way in our efforts to win the Bee's support and help persuade them to continue reporting on this exciting community project. Additionally, your comments will be remembered when Friends of the Yee Fow Center meet with the Sacramento Bee Editorial Board in January.

As this project moves forward and critical public meetings are scheduled, you will be notified in advance. With your continued participation and our collective community efforts, Sacramento will someday soon be able to proudly point to its Chinese Garden and Yee Fow Center as a link between its past and yet to be told Asian and Pacific Islander history.

Thank you again for affirming your interest and support in this project.

Steve Yee

Chair, Friends of the Yee Fow Museum

The Railyards Project is a 240-acre transformation of downtown Sacramento, California. It is a master-planned, mixed-use development located on one of the nation's most historically rich sites – the western terminus of the 1869 Transcontinental Railroad. Hotel, office, residential, entertainment, plazas, historic renovations and cultural attractions will complement specialty shops, dining and other retailing in this historic revitalization project. Opening is expected in Spring 2009.

For more information on the Sacramento Railyard Project, please go to www.sacramentorailyards.com

Partners Involved

- Thomas Enterprises—www.thomasent.com/properties/ca6-1.asp (**Railyards Project Developer**)
- City of Sacramento — www.cityofsacramento.org
- Architectural Resources Group — www.argsf.com
- Bay Area Economics — www.bae1.com
- Design, Community & Environment — www.dceplanning.com
- Diepenbrock Harrison — www.diepenbrock.com
- EDAW, Inc. — www.edaw.com
- Fleishman-Hillard — www.fleishman.com
- The Jerde Partnership — www.jerde.com (**Master Architect of Railyards Project**)
- Kimley-Horn and Associated — www.kimley-horn.com
- Nolte Associates — www.nolte.com
- The Partnership, Inc. — www.thepartnership.com
- Public Financial Management — www.pfm.com
- RSM Design — www.rsmdesign.net/home.html