

## New group forms to build Palo Alto gym

Friends group looks to raise more than \$30M for a new wellness center

By Gennady Sheyner

A new coalition that includes former mayors, philanthropists, athletes and civic volunteers is spearheading a \$33-million campaign to revive a popular project: building Palo Alto's first city-owned gym.

The project has been on the city's radar since early 2022, when developer John Arrillaga proposed funding and building a new gym, a project that city officials had identified as a high priority when it comes to recreation

needs. Arrillaga, who is known for constructing athletic facilities at Stanford University and in Menlo Park, was also planning to design, construct and spend about \$30 million on the project.

But Arrillaga died shortly after making the proposal and Palo Alto's gym project has been in limbo since, with plenty of community support but no financial backing or real plans to advance it.

Now, things may be turning around. At a Jan. 17 community meeting, city staff and volunteers with the new group Friends of Palo Alto Recreation & Wellness Center offered some uplifting news for local gym advocates. The city and the Friends group have already identified two potential locations for a gym: Greer Park and Cubberley Community Center. The fundraising drive is now

kicking off. And the city's negotiations with the Palo Alto Unified School District, which owns much of Cubberley, are now speeding up after years of disagreements about the center's redevelopment.

The demand for a new gym has not diminished since Arrillaga's offer, according to Kristen O'Kane, director of the Community

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A new development proposed by Acclaim Companies calls for a seven-story building with 198 apartments.

Rendering courtesy Studio T Square/city of Palo Alto

### HOUSING

## Nearly 200 apartments proposed for San Antonio

Proposal from Acclaim Companies and Globe Investments calls for seven story building at 762 San Antonio Road

By Gennady Sheyner

Acclaim Companies, the Menlo Park-based builder whose seven-story apartment complex at the site of The Fish Market represents Palo Alto's most ambitious "builder's remedy" application, is now pitching a project with nearly 200 apartments near the city's border with Mountain View.

Much like its 380-apartment plan for The Fish Market site at 3150 El Camino Real, the new proposal for the property 762

San Antonio Road is invoking the builder's remedy provision, a legally murky measure that developers are now relying on to overcome zoning rules in cities that have not adopted a compliant housing plan, so long as developers earmark at least 20% of new units for lower-income residents.

Palo Alto is one such city. Even though the City Council had approved its Housing Element last May, the state Department of Housing and

Community Development subsequently rejected the city's submission. Palo Alto is now making additional revisions to the document, which lays out the city's plan to add 6,086 residences by 2031.

A major component of the city's plan is to loosen zoning standards in commercial corridors, with a special focus on San Antonio Road and El Camino Real. And even builder's remedy projects are often a source

of tension between builders and cities (Palo Alto is one of several cities that maintains that the builder's remedy does not apply to them), both Acclaim projects generally hew to the city's strategy of upzoning these two south Palo Alto corridors.

The Acclaim proposal for San Antonio Road would bring 198 residences to the site, according to a proposal that Acclaim and Globe Investments I.I.C submitted this week. This includes 112 one-bedroom apartments, 66 two-bedroom apartments and 20 studios. Forty apartments would be designated as below-market-rate units, the plans note.

The seven-story building would include two levels of parking under five levels of apartments. The building would replace three existing commercial buildings, according to the

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### TECHNOLOGY

## Real or fake?

Becker bill would force tech companies to 'watermark' AI-generated content

By Gennady Sheyner

Pope Francis decked out in a white puffer jacket. Mahatma Gandhi beaming in a selfie.

"The Mona Lisa" zoomed out, its bemused subject staged against a backdrop of wispy clouds and jagged rocks.

These viral images, all fake, have inspired awe, amusement and mockery over the past year as the field of generative artificial intelligence continued to surge in popularity. The rise of AI-generated images has also sparked debates among policymakers about the best way to protect people from fraud and deception.

U.S. President Joe Biden highlighted the challenges posed by AI in late October, when he signed an executive order that, among other things, required developers of powerful AI models to share information with the government; established an AI-focused cybersecurity program; and directed the Department of Commerce to develop guidance for watermarking so that AI-generated content is clearly labeled.

Biden also held meetings in the summer with seven leading AI companies — Amazon, Anthropic, Google, Inflection, Meta, Microsoft, and OpenAI — and secured their voluntary commitment to developing watermarking systems, mechanisms that add an invisible (but detectable) mark to photos or videos to identify them as AI-generated.

Now, state Sen. Josh Becker,

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# Gym

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Services Department. By all accounts, Cubberley remains in shoddy shape. Some of its gym spaces have been unusable for more than year because of water damage caused by leaking pipes. And even if they were functional, that part of Cubberley is the property of the school district, which owns 27 acres of the 35-acre center on Middlefield Road.

"We do rent gyms from the school district at Cubberley but we do not own any," O'Kane said. "And the need for gym space is increasing for youth sports, for adults, seniors and therapeutic recreation, which produces programming for people with disabilities."

The new Friends group is hoping to expand gym capacity by following the model that has been used in other local projects that leaned heavily on private donations, including the recently renovated Palo Alto Junior Museum and Zoo and the soon-to-be-completed Palo Alto Museum on Homer Avenue.

Former mayors Bern Beecham, who worked on the Junior Museum and Zoo project and Tom DuBois, who strongly advocated for the history museum, are both members of the new Friends group. The team also includes former Mayor Judy Kleinberg as well as Parks and Recreation Commission members Anne Cribbs (a past Olympian), Jeff

LaMere and Nellis Freeman. Other members include retired banker Roger Smith, former Deputy City Manager Steve Emslie, Tim Stitt, Yudy Dong, and Marc Guillett.

Cribbs said a key goal is to get a gym built sooner rather than later.

"We'd like to see shovels in the ground as soon as we raise the money to build the gym and get permits," Cribbs said. "We're not really excited to wait until 10 years from now for another master plan."

For that reason, Greer Park is now emerging as the top choice for some group members. Unlike Cubberley, which has been subject to numerous master plans and false starts over the past two decades, the park is owned by the city. It also has the benefits of being centrally located and of being large enough to accommodate a new gym.

According to O'Kane, the city has already analyzed four possible Greer Park locations for the new gym. Two are on the north side of the park, near the intersection of Amarillo Avenue and West Bayshore Road. Though they have the advantage of being close to utilities, they were removed from consideration because they are also near existing sports fields and would effectively result in one recreational facility replacing a portion of another.

Also discarded was a site on the south side of the park, near West Bayshore. Staff noted that this site is far from both utilities and the parking lot, which made it a



This diagram shows the proposed location of a Greer Park gym.

weaker candidate.

The most suitable Greer Park location for a new gym, according to the city, is along the western edge of the park, near baseball fields and immediately adjacent to the parking lot, which would be expanded under this alternative. Known as Site C, this option is now the preferred option for some members of the fundraising group.

Beecham said he believes Greer Park is the best place for a new gym. The Cubberley plans, he noted, are proceeding on their own timeline, subject to negotiations between the city and a broader debate about redevelopment of the community center. Given the

larger scale of a Cubberley redevelopment, it would also likely entail a bond measure, he said.

"It won't be with private money there because you won't have someone in the private sector to contribute something on a scale of that nature," Beecham said.

By contrast, if the city wants to build a gym with private funds, Greer Park is "the only place it'll go," Beecham said at the meeting.

Others, however, see a new Cubberley gym as exactly the type of project that could jumpstart the long delayed and endlessly debated redevelopment of the community center. Just about everyone at the meeting agreed that Cubberley, a

bustling hub that includes nonprofit spaces, classrooms, art studios and other uses, desperately needs to be fixed up.

"We have such smart people in Palo Alto and great designers and planners," Cribbs said. "And I believe we could use the gym to kickstart and be the catalyst for the whole project and design around it or do what you have to do and get it started."

To date, planning for a Cubberley redevelopment has been an arduous slog for everyone involved. In 2019, the city and the school district partnered on a master plan for the community center that envisioned a jointly developed campus with new athletic facilities, performing centers, park spaces and other amenities. That vision, however, was quickly scuttled after the school district indicated that it has no desire to tear down existing facilities and it cannot help fund construction of any project that does not directly relate to education. The district also indicated that it wants to preserve land for a future school, should a need arise.

While that position effectively killed the master plan, the city and the school district are now once again discussing a property sale. And things are now moving forward very rapidly, said Council member Pat Burt, who serves on a subcommittee charged with negotiating with the district over a

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