

Yoshi's S.F. permit stuck in bureaucracy



(Cindy Chew/The Examiner)
Yoshi's Jazz Club, a key piece of the Fillmore Redevelopment Project, is still under construction and will open later than expected.

Bonnie Eslinger, The Examiner
Apr 18, 2007 3:00 AM (11 hrs ago)

SAN FRANCISCO -

The City's slow-moving building permit process temporarily derailed construction on a new Yoshi's Jazz Club in the Fillmore, but intervention by the Mayor's Office appears to have put the project back on track.

Yoshi's San Francisco is considered the anchor tenant of the Fillmore Jazz Heritage Center, a \$68-million, mixed-use project at Fillmore and Eddy streets that includes 80 condominiums, 12 of which are priced at below-market rate.

"The Western Addition, this is the heart and soul of jazz in the United States," Newsom said last week after learning that the restaurant was having permit problems. "Finally, we're on the precipice of seeing jazz again to celebrate that proud past, and Yoshi's is a big part of that."

Although the 420-seat club-restaurant was scheduled for an early September opening, the permit problems resulted in construction being held up on part of the site for more than three weeks, said Yoshi's owner Kaz Kajimura, who also owns the Yoshi's in Oakland's Jack London Square.

"It's definitely delaying our schedule for opening," Kajimura last week said. "Maybe if we're lucky, if we get the permit out, we can resume construction and shoot for opening early October."

Yoshi's developer, Michael Johnson, was hesitant to criticize the Department of Building Inspection, noting that it was a "complicated project" and there was "good cooperation" with the city agency. The permit has been on hold, he said, while the DBI was reviewing fire safety and disability access, he said.

"Anyone doing a construction project in San Francisco knows there's a certain amount of lead time for all the departments to sign off and coordinate until your permits are issued," Johnson said. "In our case, it's dragged on a little more than you'd like."

The permit delay for Yoshi's was brought to the mayor's attention last week during a meeting with his Office of Economic and Workforce Development. After the meeting, Newsom said the project was of particular importance because it's the anchor tenant in the revitalization of the Fillmore Jazz Preservation District.

"The idea is all these other businesses will grow from that and there will be more traffic and interest down there," Newsom said.

DBI Director Isam Hasenin, who joined the agency in February, said some of the delays were due to other city agencies and their review process as well as tardy responses to corrections building inspectors requested in the architectural plans.

Hasenin also said the DBI needed to do a “much better job in moving a permit application through our system more efficiently.

“The bottom line is that we’ll complete this project early next week,” Hasenin said last Friday in an e-mail. “And make immediate changes in our process to improve our turnaround time and prevent such delays in the future.”

Club owner asks city to invest in Lower Fillmore

A booming jazz district needs more than music clubs, said Ogonifer Shiferaw, owner of Russelas Jazz Club on Fillmore, about a block north of where a new Yoshi’s Jazz Club is set to open in October.

“It should be a destination area,” said Shiferaw, who has run his club on Fillmore for six years. “There should be more upscale and diverse kinds of entertainment and culinary representations in The City, as well as different businesses.”

Lower Fillmore, south of Geary Boulevard, has been shortchanged by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, which should be doing more to promote the area as a positive, safe destination, Shiferaw said.

“They’ve spent millions of dollars in this public-private investment,” he said. “If nothing else, you’d think The City would be interested in protecting their own investment.”

beslinger@examiner.com

Examiner