

Central Market CBD: Expansion survey gets new deadline

By TOM CARTER

VOLUNTEERS from the Central Market CBD will be traipsing around SoMa hyping the virtues of the district's benefits to property owners, trying to persuade them it's a good idea to expand the district more than just one block south to Howard Street.

The results of a 22-question survey finally mailed to 300 owners in the current district and 1,000 more in the proposed expansion area in late July will likely determine whether the notion that bigger is better will be a hard sell. The survey was to go out in June and be returned by July 6. But after a CBD contingent met with two SoMa advisory committees, the survey was postponed, questions were added and the proposed southern boundary slightly enlarged along Eighth Street.

The new survey deadline is Aug. 17.

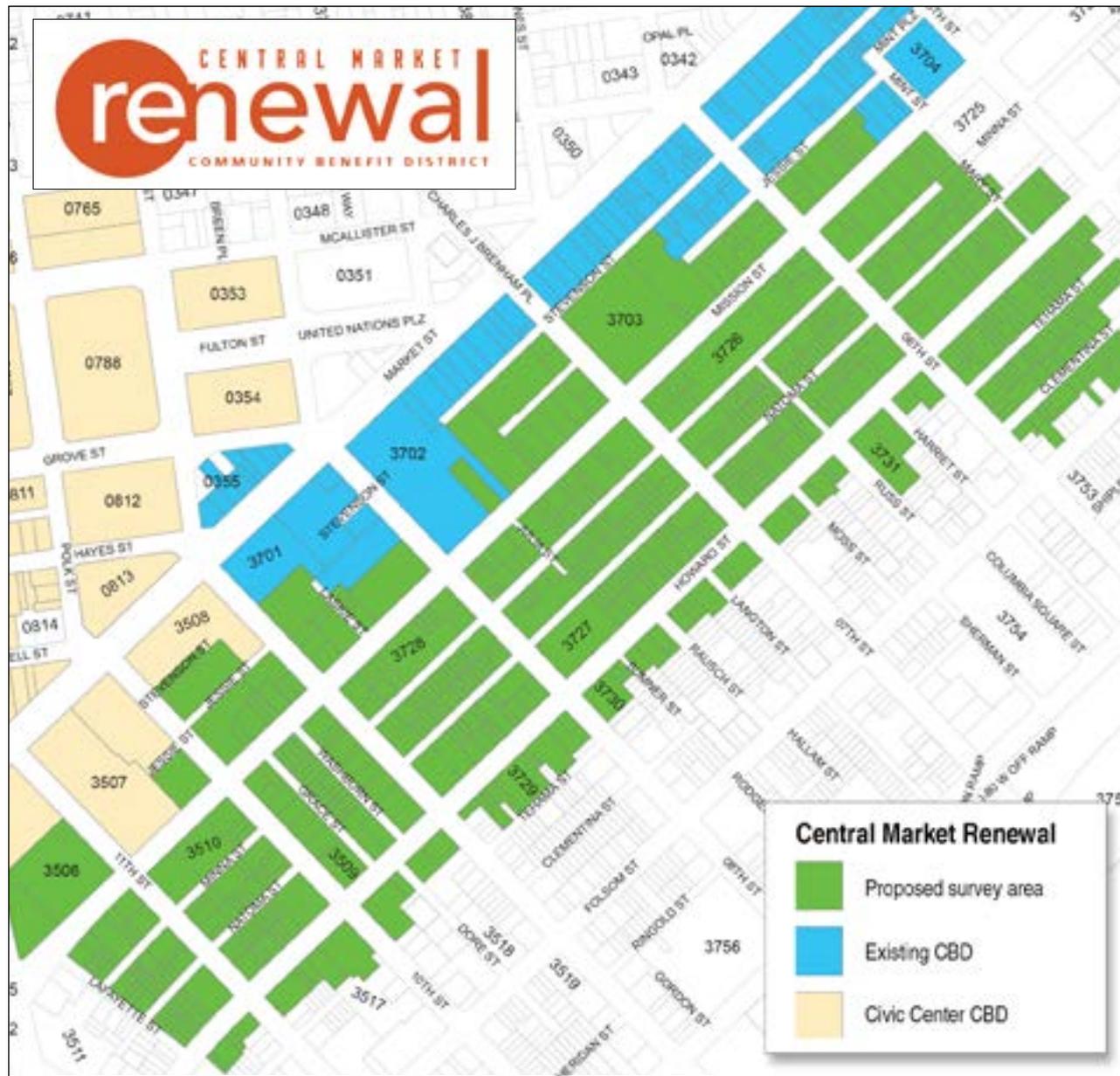
The outreach volunteers are promoting a "cleaner and safer" neighborhood, said Rob Edwards, from the MJM Management Group the CBD hired to smooth the renewal. They're pushing sidewalk cleanliness, neighborhood security and a better business climate based on the achievements of the current district. The CBD's patrolling community guides get some credit for improving business conditions.

If it expands, Central Market CBD would become the largest of the central city's triumvirate of CBDs. The Civic Center CBD, a little more than a year old, covers 35 whole or partial blocks and includes prominent city buildings and Civic Center Plaza, running west to Gough Street. Its budget last year was \$744,000. The Tenderloin CBD, approved seven years ago, has a \$1.15 million budget and takes in 29 blocks. Central Market's budget would jump to more than \$2 million with new boundaries encompassing more than four dozen blocks.

The CBD now runs on a formulated \$535,000 budget from property owner assessments, but this year grants, late payments and Redevelopment funds that paid for community guides jumped it to \$791,000. Public space beautification and safety get 65% of that.

"It's not a tax," Edwards cautioned at the CBD board meeting in July, "but an assessment." The charge nonetheless shows up on an owner's property tax bill and, when paid, the city treasurer sends the money to the CBD.

The 6-year-old CBD runs from Fifth to Ninth on Market Street and includes parts of Stevenson and Jessie streets, with Mission Street its occasional southernmost border. It has until next May 31 to reinvent itself with the city and can



SOURCE: CENTRAL MARKET CBD

alter its boundaries with permission from the property owners, plus Board of Supervisors approval. The CBD proposes to grow from 218 parcels to 1,336, an actual lot area increase of almost five times the current 930,979 square feet.

Edwards assigned board volunteers and nonboard members to certain buildings from a list of the current district's top 25 assessed building owners. Some are new owners.

The highest Central Market CBD assessment is 1231 Market St. (the former State Compensation Insurance building) at \$38,408. Lowest is \$113 for a Mint Collection condo at Mint Plaza.

"We can adjust parameters and, as surveys come back, we'll plot them," Edwards said. "Nothing is set in stone."

To expand, the district needs at

least 30% of the area's property owners to agree to be assessed. Then the supes have to approve a ballot for all owners to vote on the final version. Passage requires 50% plus one voting yes.

If 100 owners vote, for example, Edwards said, 51 yeses would carry it, and all 1,300 property owners in the district would pay the CBD assessment.

The law says 50% plus one carries the day, but MJM's David Chappell, who ran the discussion at the CBD's June meeting, said the supes won't approve unless the result represents a cross section of owners. "The supervisors wouldn't like no small condo owners and all big property owners," Chappell said.

In deciding which property owners to contact, Ross Portugeis, a commercial realtor in the area who volunteered to

help with outreach, asked: "Can you neglect going to an owner who has never spent a nickel on anything?"

"Yes," said Edwards, who has worked on CBD expansions in Los Angeles and two in Washington, D.C. "And a whole load of people won't vote at all."

Someone else wanted to know if an owner can pass-through the CBD assessment to tenants. Yes, Edwards said. He said he handled the creation of a CBD in Ventura that was spearheaded by tenants who knew they'd have to pay the assessment. The pass-through, he said, should be promoted to owners.

The CBD planned to meet with homeowner associations this month. It will show them the current district's range of assessments from condos to large properties. ■

City attorney wins \$20 to \$1,800 paybacks for Money Mart borrowers

By JONATHAN NEWMAN

IF YOU got a short-term loan from Money Mart from 2005 through 2007, or an oversized payday loan in 2007, City Attorney Dennis Herrera says you might be owed some money.

There is \$7.5 million sitting in a restitution fund the nationwide payday lender/check casher agreed to in the recent settlement of a lawsuit Herrera filed in '07.

Money Mart didn't admit to charging usurious interest rates or engaging in unlawful business practices — it just coughed up the millions to end the legal proceedings.

Herrera and Treasurer Jose Cisneros stood in front of the plywood-covered windows of the Money Mart at Market and Seventh streets July 26 to announce news of the settlement. Paybacks will vary — from \$20 for some to \$1,800 for those who swallowed Money Mart's offer to loan at interest rates up to 400%.

Half of any unclaimed restitution funds will go the city and half to a nonprofit ded-

icated to educating consumers against financial ripoffs. Either way the city already gets \$875,000 as part of the settlement.

Money Mart has 10 outlets in San Francisco, behind only Seattle in urban payday lenders/check cashing services density. Better to use regulated lenders and financial institutions, Cisneros said, citing the city's outreach efforts to educate consumers through its Bank on San Francisco, Payday Plus SF and CurrenC SF programs, which alert wage earners to the leniency of federally regulated banks, offer fair interest rates and payback schedules for payday loans and tout the safety of direct deposit accounts.

Individual claim forms are available at cityattorney.org or call the city attorney's settlement hotline at (866) 497-5497. The deadline for filing is Oct. 1.

Next up? Herrera says he will soon announce a restitution settlement against another payday lender, Check 'n Go, a nationwide chain with three outlets in San Francisco. ■



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