

Commercial Real Estate

# Art vs. housing: Oakland neighbors fight downtown tower that would block mural

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Detail of a mural at 14th and Alice streets that would be covered up by a new 126-unit tower at 250 14th St.  
OAKLAND WIKI

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Oakland community groups are calling for more concessions from the developer of a 126-unit residential tower approved last week that would block views of an \$80,000 mural painted on adjacent buildings.

Opponents of the project, which would replace a parking lot at 250 14th St., said it doesn't provide enough benefits to the community during [last week's Planning Commission hearing](#). They are calling for developer Bay Development to finance or fundraise for a replacement [for the mural](#), which was previously subsidized by a \$40,000 city grant. They also want the developer to dedicate parking in the new project for staff and visitors to the nearby Malonga Arts Center at 1428 Alice St. They also want at least 15 percent of the units to be affordable to tenants making less than \$64,000, with rents of no more than \$1,600. The tower is currently approved to only have market-rate units.

While the opponents have a long list of demands, the developer is stressing the economic benefits of the projects, which include building needed market-rate housing and providing a huge influx of taxes to the city. The parking lot on the site currently pays only \$7,350 in annual taxes, while the new building would pay \$1 million in property taxes, said [Maria Poncell](#), principal of Bay Development, at the hearing.

Groups including the Community Rejuvenation Project, Chinatown residents and artists from the nearby arts center are planning to file an appeal on Thursday after the city's Planning Commission approved the project last week. The groups have organized an [online fundraising campaign](#) that has raised \$1,876 as of press time to pay for the appeal, and over 200 people [have signed a petition](#) against the project. If filed, an appeal would require the project to go to the City Council for a final vote.

Opponents believe that the project doesn't follow the city's [Lake Merritt Specific Area plan](#), which has a goal of having at least 15 percent affordable housing throughout the zone, but no requirements for individual projects. Instead, the city is considering development impact fees to pay for affordable housing, but a timetable hasn't been finalized. Opponents are call for the project to offer more because it will be dense and requires a conditional use permit for increased height. Such projects "should include givebacks to the community for the detrimental impacts of their developments," said Lailan Huen, a member of the community coalition that is organizing the appeal. The group also plans on calling for more concessions from [Wood Partners' nearby proposal at 226 13th St.](#), which calls for 248 units.

Opposition to the project reflects rising tension amid Oakland's soaring rents, as resident seek more commitments from new projects to provide concessions and housing for lower-income tenants. Another controversy has been swirling over the past year at [a public site at East 12th Street near Lake Merritt](#), where activists called for a higher affordable housing commitment. Tension at 250 14th St. also centers around parking availability, as local merchants and visitors to the arts center said they have trouble finding spaces at night.

"Hundreds of public parking spots in multiple sites in this area are slated for development, and privatizing all of them will make it very difficult for the local businesses and organizations to survive. There are 355 seats in Malonga's theater, and in the evening parking is already very difficult for the existing residents," said Huen, who notes that visitors come from all over the Bay Area and don't all have BART access.

In response to feedback, Poncell of Bay Development said she was planning to meet with officials from Laney College to find a public site where a new mural could be located. She has also committed to helping kick-start the costs for a new mural, but opponents said there are no definitive plans for a new site and there's no guarantee that one can be found.

The project received a reduction in its parking requirement to 81 parking spaces and an additional 10 tandem spaces, which Poncell believes is appropriate because the site is blocks away from the nearest BART station. The current lot has 77 spaces.

She said the project would also pay \$2.9 million in fees and create 225 construction jobs, with the general contractor hiring locally, and 10 permanent jobs in the project's ground-floor retail space.

The project doesn't have financing or a final construction budget. "Our focus was on community engagement and getting the project approved," said Poncell. As a highrise tower, each unit would likely cost over \$500,000 to build. IBI Group is the architect.

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