



FAQs May 8 2013

www.SaveTheDome.org

Why are you trying to save the Pleasant Hill Dome?

As it approaches its half-century mark, the iconic Dome movie theater is ready to elevate itself into a vibrant, happening cultural destination dedicated to celebrating and presenting great cinema and other arts and to encouraging appreciation for the historical era when Pleasant Hill and surrounding communities came into their own.

The Dome is an architectural landmark of the East Bay landscape. This region boomed following World War II. Young families moved here seeking a new vision of the American dream. That dream included ownership of a home and yard in the safe, quiet suburban neighborhoods emerging east of the Caldecott Tunnel. The Dome became *the* entertainment destination for these new suburbanites, a movie palace graced with a unique, mid-century, Apollo Space Age aesthetic, a nearly 900-seat stadium theater and state-of-the-art visual arts technology.

The Dome is one of the most recognizable structures in both Pleasant Hill and along the Interstate 680 corridor. The theater remains in good physical condition and is still a great place to see movies-- everything from new epic blockbusters to classics to independent, art-house hits. With a makeover, the theater could become a showcase of the City of Pleasant Hill's aspirations for its residents and its own identity. As outlined in the General Plan, Pleasant Hill wants to be a city that promotes the arts, a dynamic economy, diversity, services for seniors and gateways that tell people they have arrived.

Who owns the property?

SyWest Development owns the property.

So do you want to save the building, or just save the opportunities for showing independent, art-house films in Pleasant Hill?

We want to save the Dome, and we want to save it as a venue for showcasing great cinema and other related arts and for cultural, historical and educational purposes.

The City Council on May 6 denied your appeal of the Planning Commission's March 26 approval of the Dick's project—and gave the go-ahead to SyWest Development to replace it with a Dick's sporting goods store.

Isn't that the final word?

No, it's not, and it shouldn't be. A tremendous number of people came to that council meeting to speak on behalf of Saving the Dome. They were Pleasant Hill residents and people living in surrounding communities who represented a real cross-section of the community. There was the 18-year-old teenager who said tearing down the Dome would be like ripping out a piece of his heart to residents who again and again spoke about the Dome as the icon of Pleasant Hill, the one structure in town that represents the community's identity and pride. People shared memories of seeing movies there, and they believe in its potential to become a cultural arts center, dedicated to movies and to other related performing, visual and technical arts.

Meanwhile, we've had more than 4,000 people sign our petitions, and in the space of one weekend, we raised more than \$5,000 to pay for a retainer to hire an attorney to kickstart our legal fight.

It's very clear that this council vote does not reflect the will of the people. The people want to save the Dome as a movie theater showing independent, art-house movies. And they want it to become a cultural arts center, a centerpiece in Pleasant Hill's efforts to provide its residents with such cultural amenities and to raise their quality of life.

All that said, the next step is to go to court, through such steps as a temporary restraining order and an injunction.

On what grounds would you fight?

We believe the city failed to adequately consider the Dome's historical and cultural value.

In addition to that, another very important legal argument for a TRO and injunction has to do with new evidence related to the public's health and safety. Our attorney has uncovered the fact that the city failed to do a proper analysis of a potentially dangerous level of toxic air contaminants that would be produced by the co-occurring demolition of the Dome, construction of Dick's sporting goods and the widening of Buskirk Avenue. These contaminants could have adverse effects on people and school children in the nearby Fair Oaks neighborhood. Our attorney contends that this potential health and safety risk to our Fair Oaks neighbors was never properly studied in any environmental reports the city produced, and believes the city should have to circulate a new environmental analysis on this issue.

So what's involved in going to court?

The big thing is that going the legal route costs money, a lot of money—into the thousands. Working with the lawyer on preparing the appeal, and hiring an expert to do the air quality analysis, cost around \$10,000. Going for the TRO and injunction would cost at least another \$10,000.

So, we need to raise money, and we need to raise it fast. We're hoping that people who have spoken out so eloquently in favor of saving the Dome will contribute what they can. If we had as few as 1000 of our supporters each giving \$50, we would have more than enough to cover our legal expenses.

Keep in mind that our attorney, Mark Wolfe, is offering us discounted rates. And no general interest attorney, offering pro bono services, could handle this sort of case. Mark Wolfe is an expert in land-use, environmental laws and historical preservation. We absolutely need that kind of expertise in any potential legal battle. He also has tremendous passion for our cause.

But SyWest has said they have no intention of ever repurposing the Dome or turning it back into a movie theater. SyWest also said in devising the project they were following city guidelines for developing that project.

To some extent we understand SyWest's position, that they feel they were just following the city's 2006 Specific Plan documents for how to proceed with designing new retail for the center. But history and experience has shown us that "just following orders" is not always the wisest or most moral choice to take.

Some very courageous and forward-looking city leaders are not buying SyWest's "just following orders" argument.

They have expressed disappointment and dismay with SyWest's proposal and accordingly voted against it. There were involved in the early planning for the Contra Costa Shopping Center and know the city envisioned something better for itself.

Their votes might be in the minority of elected officials at this point, but we believe their views and votes reflect the will of the people.

Planning Commissioner Jim Bonato, City Council member Ken Carlson and Mayor Michael Harris all pointed out that SyWest went against the intent of those Specific Plan documents by failing to include a specialty theater and restaurants in that area of the shopping center.

They also expressed overall disappointment with the design and concept for Dick's sporting goods project. Jim Bonato stated at the March 26, 2013 Planning Commission meeting "Pleasant Hill deserves better."

City Councilman Carlson, on May 6, said "I am not fully convinced we are getting the best can at this point," while Mayor Michael Harris said the project fails to meet the letter and spirit of the specific plan.

"I don't see the quality in this project I had expected when I worked on [the earlier planning] process," he said. "I remember this grandiose proposal with a movie theater with magnificent architecture, anchor shops, other shops. That has all disappeared." He questioned about much SyWest cares about the city and it's quality of life.

So does anyone want Dick's to come to Pleasant Hill?

Aside from SyWest and its employees? Not that we can tell, which makes us wonder if this gives us a chance to get SyWest to meet with us to look for a better solution that would be a win-win-win for SyWest, the city, and the public.

SyWest has to know that their project is unpopular. None of the people coming out to speak at any of the public meetings held on this project since December 2012, when SyWest first submitted its Dick's sporting goods plans, has spoken in favor of Dick's or SyWest's vision for that area (called SubArea II) of the shopping center. A major complaint among Pleasant Hill residents is that Pleasant Hill simply doesn't need another sporting goods store in town.

So, we know the people of Pleasant Hill and surrounding communities oppose the loss of the Dome and the arrival of Dick's. We know many in city hall oppose the project. We wonder whether Dick's corporate knows that a store isn't wanted in Pleasant Hill, at least at that location.

We hope that if we can delay this process legally, Dick's would become wary of moving into that location. We can also all write to Dick's corporate and express our concerns.

The more pressure we put on SyWest through legal and political means, the more they might come to realize that it would be better business for them to meet with us and work with us on coming up with a solution that would be workable for everyone involved – and maybe, just maybe, that solution would involve preserving the Dome.

What about other political strategies, such as mounting campaigns to oppose council members who voted against the Dome or a ballot referendum to save the building?

Those are all interesting ideas and we're looking at all possible strategies. Some would take more research and also take some time to set into motion.

What about pursuing historic status for the Dome?

We are indeed working on that process right now, gathering the necessary information and evidence of its historical and cultural value and talking to various people at the local and state levels about the process involved. Again, that process takes several months, but we are definitely working on it.

At this stage, do you really believe you have a chance to save the Dome?

We won't sugarcoat this. We are facing an uphill battle. But we also know we couldn't live with ourselves if we didn't fight the hardest we could to save a landmark that means so much to so many people in this region. We also wouldn't do this if we didn't believe we were acting on behalf of the people of Pleasant Hill and the surrounding communities. Of course, the next few days and weeks will tell us whether the people want to continue the fight – in terms of whether we are able to raise the money to pay for legal expenses.

SyWest has said they don't want to be in the movie business. If some miracle occurs and you are able to save the building, who would run the theater? Is it even financially feasible?

We have been in talks with other nonprofit and for-profit groups around the country that have saved historic movie theaters and operate them as first-run, or art-house cinemas. They are sharing the challenges and successes on the business side of theater management.

We are also reaching out to organizations and individuals—White Knights—who have strong track records and passion for rescuing and refurbishing historic movie theaters. We'll keep you posted!

If you have any ideas for White Knights, let us know!

**Save the Pleasant Hill Dome
1630 N Main #425
Walnut Creek CA 94596**

silverscreen@savethedome.org

Save the Pleasant Hill Dome is a California Nonprofit Corporation currently in pursuit of its tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status. We anticipate securing that status before April 15, 2014. At that time we will send out letters confirming that status to all donors for their tax records.

**Another Historic California
Theater is facing demolition.
Help Pleasant Hill preserve this
architectural gem.**

The citizens of Pleasant Hill have a vision that their classic 60's-era Dome Theater could bring tremendous, long-term value to the area as a cultural resource, arts and education facility, and/or performing arts venue.

But the owners of the property, looking for more short-term gains, want to demolish the Dome and replace it with a two-story Dick's Sporting Goods store.

**With all the legal appeals we can muster we
are fighting back!**

There are still options available to save the Dome. Continuing the fight means we can buy more time for perhaps another theater operator to come in. We are actively reaching out to the community and beyond to find that "White Knight" solution. Please reach out to your contacts as well. Time is of the essence.

We are a dedicated group of volunteers and we **will** continue to fight if we are financially able. But even with an excellent attorney working well below market rate, this process costs many thousands of dollars. Ultimately our ability to keep fighting, delaying and reaching out for alternative operators for this space will depend on the will of the people to support us.

If you share our vision to preserve this icon that defines the profile of our town, supporting art and culture over suburban sprawl, please donate as generously as you are able:

**Payments can be made
online via PayPal at:
www.SaveTheDome.org**

**Or, send a check made out to "Save the Pleasant Hill Dome"
1630 N Main #425
Walnut Creek CA 94596**