TOWER TALK
AROUND SAN FRANCISCO TOWERS

Sugar Caen

Special Edition

The February 24 General Meeting left many longing for greater closure.

Hence, in hopes of facilitating even better understanding between SFT residents and Episcopal Senior Community (ESC) management, Sugar offers this TT Special Edition.

SFT's culture is complicated and nuanced. There is much institutional history Sugar has yet to learn.[1] Thus, corrections of are welcome.

Many residents entered San Francisco Towers comforted by a sense that the institution operated under the ethical imprimatur of the Episcopal Church. The ever-more evident piercing of this precious shield, and the reality of ESC increasingly operating as a profit-seeking firm, provokes anxiety.

Questions arise regarding (1) the nature and institutional direction of ESC (2) ESC budgeting processes, (3) the trajectory of likely future fee increases and (4) the financial security of our collective future. Enhanced two-way communication can mitigate this situation.

[1] Sugar is indebted to Bobbie Barton, Barbara Bentley, John Darby, Mel Flyer, Jerry and Marilyn Jacobsen, Fritz Little, Dan Porat, and Ralph Romberg for SFT background tutorials. Opinions remain those of Sugar alone.

Back to the General Meeting

There was much positive about the meeting. Attendance was high and a large number of residents came prepared with probing questions attesting to interest in the issues.

ESC management delivered a carefully choreographed set of presentations, all of which were undertaken to a high standard.

SFT Director Mitchell again proved herself articulate, unusually well informed regarding budget matters and possessed of a delightful sense of humor (e.g., boiler replacements).

Long-term residents proclaimed that the level of financial detail and candor of communication were enhanced over past practices.

However, not all issues were addressed. From audience questions, for which there was allowable time, the following concerns remain:

Can ESC budgeting processes be rendered more transparent?

To what degree should surplus assets be deployed for additional ESC missions, versus minimizing resident fees?

What is being done to mitigate fee increases of 3.45% and higher?

What steps are in place regarding underperforming ESC sites?

Is it possible that conflict with the Episcopal Bishop and efforts to expand ESC's portfolio are spreading resources too thin, imperiling existing operation?

The meeting was halted at 12:00. Had others in waiting had a chance to speak, additional questions might have emerged.

Two immediate suggestions.

Schedule adequate time for future meetings; begin at 9:30 AM or 2:00 PM.

More accurate exchanges of fact and opinion can take place in smaller groups. More meetings will occupy ESC management time. However, payoff in mutual understanding will justify effort.

Modulating Long Run Labor Costs

In the "March Madness" issue of Tower Talk, Sugar strove to explain that the luxury level of SFT services necessitates a labor-intensive delivery system.

This condition is unlikely to change, as there is little automation that can substitute for the personal contributions of our employees.

In a nutshell, we do not want our evening dinner delivered by a table-hopping drone controlled from a remote overseas location by an unknown nerd pilot.

Princeton economist William Baumol famously explained why costs in labor-intensive fields inevitably rise faster than overall inflation.

For example, there are no easy routes by which a string quartet can more efficiently play a piece by Vivaldi. Musicians may learn to play music at a higher artistic standard, but playing at a faster pace would poison the point.

At the February 24 Semi Annual General meeting, ESC officials acknowledged the upward labor cost problem, but their posture seemed to be that labor expense increases are inevitable, and that residents should swallow hard and go with the flow on "fee adjustments."

Sugar earlier stated that the challenge to ESC management was to maintain the current high quality of service while modulating upward pressures on future labor cost. This is a particularly difficult in a superheated economy such as the San Francisco Bay Area is now.

Sugar does not assert the following measures will be a cost free. Stabilizing labor costs is a situation in which institutions have to expend money now to moderate expenses later. Below are illustrative ideas.

Provide long-term employment incentives, such as subsidizing education expenses and paying children's college tuition, for those employed more than five years.

Encourage husband and wife teams, or other family alliances, to work at SFT by obtaining or constructing subsidized employee housing at the end of various Bart lines, thereby addressing both housing and transport needs.

Enable superannuated employees to remain in SFT-provided employee housing after retirement.

Pay Transportation costs for trips back to countries of origin, such as the Philippines, Turkistan, or Taiwan for employees once every five years or on some other schedule.

Make clear an upward trajectory career path so that ambitious individuals may see themselves as ascending into management ranks if they stay at SFT.

Provide long-term bonus multipliers at various employment plateau levels. For example, each five years of continuous effective employment generates an additional 2% multiplier on the appropriate salary schedule.

Pay attention to psychic benefits such as now being facilitated by pursuit of "Best Place to Work" awards.

Construct a cafeteria plan for employee benefits so as to meet differing preferences of employees at various stages of life.

Place new employees on defined contribution retirement plans.

Convene a panel of SFT retired executives who are experienced and who could serve as a management consulting team capable of addressing not only HR, but also other ESC operating issues.

Tit for Tat

In the interest of full disclosure, readers should know that Sugar received the following report card from an anonymous evaluator. (Doncha despise those pesky anonymous writers!!!!:)

It probably was inevitable. Once Sugar rated Rothman, (See prior TT issue) someone felt compelled to rate Sugar. It is not clear what is meant in each comment instance, but here it is unexpurgated.

Report card for James Guthrie, Executive Editor, Head Reporter, Featured Columnist, Free Wheeling Commentator, also midnight distributor and principal financial-backer. Anon

Subject	Grade	Comment
Elementary and Advanced Arithmetic	A	Simplified and sad
Problem Solving	B	Good at identifying: "solving" yet to be seen
Humor	B	Not enough to keep us laughing
Deportment	B	A speck of ego in this vanity twittering
Costumes	A	No coincidence that TT chief chose Donald Trump as Halloween mask
Final "Verdict"	A-	Successful in attention getting. Room for improvement

Above use of "Verdict" a bit worrisome. Sugar's just sayin.

You are so San Francisco if"

There are some real San Franciscans residing in the Towers. Sugar received 13 contest submissions. Cynthia Baron, Ken Berry, John Darby, and Joe Ehrman were close. Here are correct answers:

Earthquake survivors met annually at Lotta's Foundation.

Clay Theater was not in the Richmond District. All others were.

Sugar does not know after whom Doyle drive is named. (Quite possibly a military hero. It is in the Presidio.)

John Rothman graduated from the elite Washington HS (as did Sugar).

Hetch Hetchy aqueduct terminus, Water Temple overlooks Spring Lakes Reservoir off Highway280.

San Francisco's fireboat: Phoenix.

All four restaurants were on or near Union Square. Campton Place remains.

Court Case of Interest Regarding Binding Arbitration[2]

As a condition of entry, San Francisco Towers' residents sign a contract compelling arbitration in the event of disputes. An east coast plaintiff has gained legal standing to question such contract provisions. There are widespread implications. Here are a few details.

In a most unfortunate circumstance, a 97-year old resident of a Dartmouth, Massachusetts nursing home, in an apparently unprovoked act, intentionally suffocated her 100-year old roommate. Both victim and perpetrator were reported to have been long-time close friends.

The mentally incapacitated murderer was committed to a state hospital.

That is not the news, however.

The victim's son sued the nursing home claiming officials previously knew of the murderer's unstable condition, and his mother's wrongful death was a consequence of institutional negligence.

The nursing home responded that the victim's son had no grounds for legal action but instead was obligated to submit the matter to arbitration.

A state level judge disagreed and granted the son standing to sue the nursing home. The trial will take place this summer.

The judge ruled that arbitration imperils plaintiff rights by privatizing justice and possibly violating due process guarantees.

Stay tuned.

Sugar Shoutout

Adrienne Jonas' complications from surgery are worrisome for many reasons among which is the risk of imperiling her long-standing advocacy for SFT pets, both cats and dogs. Sugar and all other pets wish her a speedy recovery

James Guthrie produces Tower Talk (TT) under the nom de plum of Sugar Caen. This is a collection of vignettes, anecdotes, efforts at humor, and informational items regarding residents, employees, events, and conditions in and around San Francisco Towers. This publication is published privately and does NOT carry approval of NOR rely upon resources from Towers management. It has no commercial content and is not intended to replace regular Towers' publications. Those wishing to comment or stop receipt may contact Sugarcaen00@gmail

[2] SFT resident, accomplished artist, and consummate Warrior fan, Carol Freedenberg, brought this case to Sugar's attention.