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## S.F. Sees Riches on Treasure Island

### 1939's 'Magic City' spins development fantasies onshore

By Carl Nolte  
Chronicle Staff Writer

To another generation, Treasure Island was "The Magic City," a world's fair that sparkled for a few months like a multicolored jewel in the middle of San Francisco Bay, and then turned into a Navy base, painted gray and closed to public.

Now the world has turned full circle, and San Francisco is about to get the place back. It is an island municipal dream made of.

"It is an incredible opportunity for the city," said Gloria Root, a professional planner and the chairwoman of a citizen's committee that is planning Treasure Island's future. "It could be something fantastic."

Treasure Island is 403 acres of artificial island that the Navy is leaving next year. It is now a self-contained small town, with a population of about 2,000 and facilities that range from a small boat marina to 903 apartment units to a jail.

It has a colorful history as the site of the 1939 and '40 Golden Gate International exposition, a \$50 million extravaganza calling itself "The Pageant of the Pacific" that drew 10 million visitors on the eve of World War II.

It also comes with most of adjoining Yerba Buena Island, a woody sort of place that is smack in the middle of the Bay Bridge.

If the Navy and the Department of Housing and Urban Development approve of the city's plans for them, both islands will be

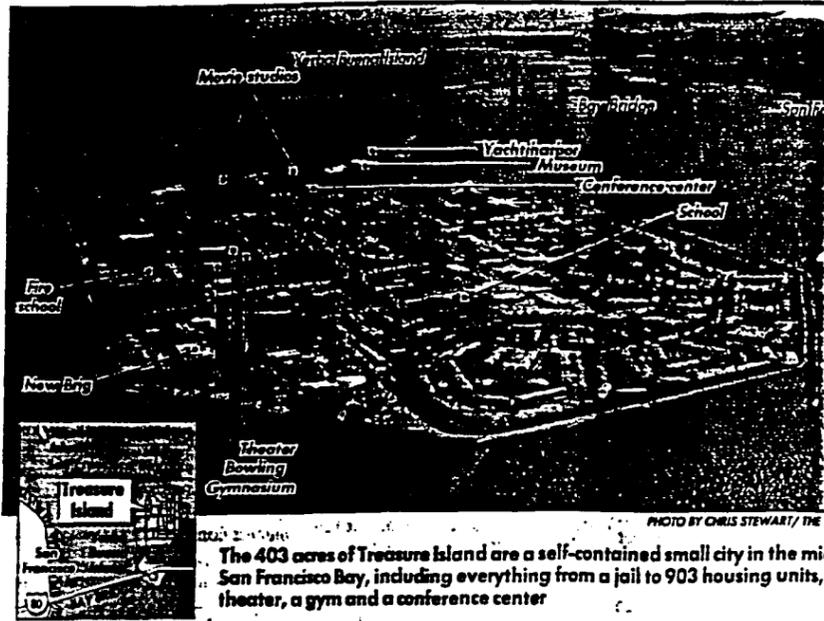


PHOTO BY CHRIS STEWART/THE CHRONICLE GRAPHICS  
The 403 acres of Treasure Island are a self-contained small city in the middle of San Francisco Bay, including everything from a jail to 903 housing units, theater, a gym and a conference center

A worker moved a statue dating from the 1939 Treasure Island world's fair into new storage. The building at rear once housed China Clipper seaplanes and is now a movie sound stage



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turned over to San Francisco piecemeal, starting perhaps in the fall of next year. Root's Citizens Reuse Committee is working on the plan, sifting through ideas like children in a candy store. Some proposals under discussion:

■ A theme park, with entertainment centers that could draw 5 million visitors a year.

■ A golf course.

■ Restaurants, shops and hotels.

■ A school for firefighters.

■ A conference center.

■ A ceremonial mayor's mansion on Yerba Buena Island.

■ A women's prison.

■ A major film set turning out Hollywood pictures and making money for the city.

■ Facilities for the homeless, including schools, training and perhaps housing.

■ Another world's fair, only bigger and better.

■ Fleets of fast ferry boats between Treasure Island and cities around the bay.

■ All of the above.

The ideas for Treasure Island and Yerba Buena, "could be a lot of fun," said Larry Florin, director of projects for the city's Redevelopment Agency, a body not usually given to talk about fun.

### Super Redevelopment Project

The Citizen's Reuse Committee is drawing up a plan for the two islands that it intends to submit to Mayor Willie Brown and the Board of Supervisors by July. If they approve, the plan goes to HUD and then to the Navy. If both sign off, the city gets Treasure Island redeveloped as a sort of super redevelopment project, designed to be developed by the private sector and pay taxes to the city.

It would be the city's biggest such project in years and probably its most ambitious. The Navy must clean up pollution on the island; it is not allowed to leave contaminated property behind. Captain Lyne Hanel, commanding officer

of Naval Station Treasure Island, is projecting a cleanup by the year 2001. In the meantime, the Navy would like to turn over buildings as soon as they are vacant, offering the base piecemeal.

The city already has two buildings it is leasing for the Navy, both

for movies.

CBS has built an apartment where the cop character lives, apparently on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown. There is a backdrop of the view from the apartment that matches the city's skyline exactly, one by day and one by

night. CBS has built an apartment where the cop character lives, apparently on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown. There is a backdrop of the view from the apartment that matches the city's skyline exactly, one by day and one by

creation" to providers of services for the homeless. A group of homeless care providers, called the Treasure Island Homeless Development Initiative — Tie-Die for short — is part of the citizen's committee. "They are legally part of the process," said Florin. "They are onboard."

### Down Side to Development

Despite the euphoria, there is a down side to Treasure Island. Built from fill dredged up from the bay bottom starting in 1937, the island has a seismic problem.

It is surrounded by a seawall, but consultants have told the committee that the seawall could be breached in a major earthquake, opening the island to the water in a process called lateral spread. In addition, certain parts of the island, mostly on the north end, are subject to liquefaction, which means soil turns to mud in a big quake.

The causeway that connects Yerba Buena and Treasure islands also needs work to bring it up to current seismic standards.

This work, consultants say, can be done for about \$18 million — a relatively small price for an island like this. "Eighteen million," said Root expansively, "is nothing."

The other problem is access to the islands. Yerba Buena is in the center of one of the world's busiest bridges. The number of vehicles through the tunnel every working day now stands at 250,000, which puts Yerba Buena in the record books as the island with the largest transient population in the world.

But there is only one on-ramp in each direction, each with tight turns, leading into traffic barreling along at freeway speed. It is a prospect not for the faint of heart.

The planners hope to solve this the way another generation solved it — with a fleet of ferryboats.

**'It is an incredible opportunity for the city. It could be something fantastic'**

— GLORIA ROOT, URBAN PLANNER

to film companies. Building 2, once the Hall of Transportation at the 1939-40 fair, is leased to CBS, which uses it as a sound stage for the television series "Nash Bridges," starring Don Johnson as a San Francisco cop. The show goes on the air later this month.

Building 2 also was used as a sound stage for the 1995 film "Copycat" about a serial killer. The building is unusual — for one thing, it has an 80-foot ceiling because it was designed as an airplane hangar for the famous China Clipper seaplanes. Now it's ideal

Nearby Building 180 has been rented to a production company making the Eddie Murphy film, "Metro." Both of these projects bring in money: \$30,000 a month for Building 2, \$15,000 for Building 180.

The Navy is the landlord, but the city acts as agent, so in a sense, the city already has a working arrangement at Treasure Island.

Under the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, the reuse plan must give "due consid-

"It's a great place, with a sense of community here I really like," said Captain Hanel.

Civilian visitors are allowed at the Treasure Island museum, open every day starting at 10 a.m., but civilians are not encouraged to roam either island. Both are technically "restricted areas."

The weekend before last, Mayor Willie Brown got an escorted tour from Captain Hanel, and apparently liked what he saw, especially the classic 1900 Nimitz House, on Yerba Buena, now the official residence of the Bay Area's commanding Navy Admiral. Brown is interested in the 8,000-square-foot mansion as a ceremonial official residence for the mayor, where visiting VIPs would be housed and entertained.

The Nimitz House is part of the Navy's past — an important part of the region's history. Navy personnel from the frigate Portsmouth were the first to raise the Stars and Stripes over San Francisco 150 years ago this July.

Now that Navy presence is coming to an end. The two islands are just a part of the Navy's withdrawal from the Bay Area. Alameda Naval Air Station, Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland and Mare Island in Vallejo, one of the country's oldest Navy bases, are all closing.

"There is a certain sadness at leaving," Captain Hanel said. "But time marches on."

### A Vanishing Tranquillity

In the meantime, the two is-