

Can't we in a fair  
light in the public  
eye.

Phil (408) 920-5476  
Chris - Heres a  
little something for  
your records.  
Timothy Bourne 920-5541  
Embroidered in  
controversy again!  
ROB OVER  
Don't take this too  
seriously. Peter  
just wants to blame  
someone for the  
difficulties he's  
having - actually,  
it's good because  
the city doesn't want  
this negative publicity  
about the homeless  
& you'll reach your  
financial settlement  
sooner - Alvie

# Not-so-soothing surroundings at unfinished inn

**A**S an example of innovative architecture, the Julian Street Inn has received nothing but rave notices.

Two years ago, a Mercury News reviewer called the project "the best and most important piece of architecture in the entire multimillion dollar domain of the San Jose Redevelopment Agency."

With its entry courtyard, and with columns and colorful Mexican tiles dominating its facade, the facility looks more like

## Philipp Harper

a private hotel than a public institution. Nearly everyone who has had a hand in the design and development of the 70-bed shelter for the mentally ill homeless agrees that the facility is unique in its conception and could change the way the homeless are sheltered in the future.

Unfortunately, design is only part of the story. From the standpoint of execution, the Julian Street Inn has been a disaster.

The shelter, at Julian and Montgomery streets in downtown San Jose, was begun early in 1988, with completion scheduled for later that year. Now, 14 months behind schedule, it's still unfinished.

The project was supposed to cost \$1.4 million. That budget will be exceeded by at least \$300,000, or more than 20 percent.

San Jose Urban Ministry, which began operating the unfinished structure more than a year ago, was unable to cook a meal in the shelter's kitchen until a few days ago; previously, meals had to be brought in.

The dining hall, three upstairs bathrooms and the women's bathroom downstairs are without heat. The kitchen was constructed 30 inches below the dining room, making service difficult. A storage wing is unfinished.

Two interior courtyards remain bare patches of ground, with no place to sit and nothing to look at. There are no laundry facilities because a gas line was not provided. Other oversights or flaws make the shelter difficult to maintain and run safely, say the people who operate it.

The homeless are being sheltered and served, but the shelter and service aren't of the promised quality.

What city officials, who financed construction of the shelter on city-owned land, need to determine is what went wrong with Julian Street and how those mistakes can be avoided in the future. Resources are too scarce, and the problem of homelessness too pressing, for time and money to be wasted.

Mayor Tom McEnery promises a thorough review. "If some of the things that occurred here are as ill-conceived as they appear to be, I'll make sure they become very public," says McEnery, who recently



Housing for Independent People

The Julian Street Inn looks more like a private hotel than a public institution

became personally involved in seeing the project through to completion.

The city manager and redevelopment director will report to the mayor on what went wrong and why. "There's enough time to go in and shoot the wounded once we've completed the shelter," McEnery says, adding that the city manager's office will closely control future projects.

Ironically, though the city's principal role in the project has been as lender, it may be as much to blame for the delays and cost overruns as the developer or contractor. Because of the project's location at a "gateway" to the downtown redevelopment area, the redevelopment agency insisted that the non-profit developer, San Jose-based Housing for Independent People, work with either of two architects. The one who was selected, Christopher Alexander, an internationally renowned designer who teaches at the University of California at Berkeley, has been a focal point of the controversy.

In trying to affix responsibility, the mayor and his men have much to sort through. Every party to the project tells a different story.

Alexander contends that the developer's refusal to pay for more than \$150,000 in completed work and the general contractor's failure to follow the agreed-upon construction strategy have hamstrung the job, and brought Alexander's design and construction firm, the Berkeley-based Center for Environmental Structure, to the brink of bankruptcy.

"The administration of this thing has been lamentable," he says.

Miron-Conk blames problems on trying to run a shelter amid construction, and on the architect refusing to listen to the people who run the facility.

Al DiLudovico, executive director of Housing for Independent People, attributes the delays and cost overruns to Alexander's failure to provide architectural drawings to the general contractor in a timely fashion, and to the contractor's failure to alert the developer to the problem.

"The problem here is we had a time line, and (Alexander) is not an architect for a time line," DiLudovico says.

A lawyer representing the general contractor, Oliver and Co. of Berkeley, says the project was delayed initially because the drawings provided his client by Alexander were "completely inadequate in many respects," and subsequently because Alexander was never on site to approve needed changes.

Because of the delays, the contractor has submitted a considerable claim for what amounts to overtime, a claim the developer disputes.

Alex Sanchez, director of San Jose's housing department, which took over ad-

ministration of "the project's financing from the redevelopment agency in 1988, says the "full responsibility for completion" of the project has been put on Housing for Independent People. He concedes, though, that "the architect has been a major part of the construction delay."

If need be, Sanchez says, the city will use its position as construction lender to apply pressure to the developer.

The various claims and counterclaims may end up in court. In the meantime, if anyone has been left holding the bag, it's the employees of San Jose Urban Ministry, which operates the shelter under a contract with the county.

"Most of our problems have been as a result of things that were never done properly in the first place," says Peter Miron-Conk, San Jose Urban Ministry's executive director. He adds, "The staff's doing additional jobs, or their jobs are made more difficult, because of stuff that's not complete or doesn't work."

Part of the problem stems from trying to run a shelter in the midst of ongoing construction. But it also is the result, Miron-Conk says, of the architect refusing to listen to the people who were going to run the facility.

Miron-Conk, who says he met with Alexander infrequently during the design of the building and hasn't seen him since the summer of 1987, acknowledges that Alexander talked with homeless people as background for his design. However, he maintains, the homeless people interviewed weren't as impaired mentally as many of Julian Street Inn's clients.

Five percent of the homeless sheltered at Julian Street are "real violent," Miron-Conk says, while 30 percent to 40 percent are substance abusers. He says poorly conceived lines of sight, as well as the placement of certain bathrooms, make security difficult. Maintenance costs are high because of damage to the building by residents, who have knocked toilets from their moorings, ripped sinks from bathroom walls and punched holes in shower stalls. The facility could have been designed to better reflect its clientele, Miron-Conk says.

Alexander disagrees. He says the violence being done to the structure is due partly to "a repressiveness" in San Jose Urban Ministry's operation of the building, and partly to the unfinished surroundings. He asks: "What do you expect when you've got people living in an unfinished shell?"

What Alexander says he had in mind as a model for the shelter was "a country inn, a place anyone would like to stay. . . . The whole essence of it is this air of pleasantness that gives dignity to the people who stay there." The idea is to have the peacefulness of the surroundings soothe the troubled minds of the people who stay there.

That's a tall order, but, then, the Julian Street Inn is unlike any other homeless shelter.

The feeling of intimacy created by the building's exterior — particularly the courtyard on Montgomery Street — is continued inside. A first-floor arcade and second-floor balcony run the length of the Julian Street wing, overlooking what soon will be two landscaped courtyards. Alexander also has provided airy sleeping rooms that vary in size to meet the needs and desires of residents, common day areas and lockers and laundry facilities.

Many motels aren't as nice, a fact that hasn't been lost on either DiLudovico or Miron-Conk despite all the problems that have accompanied construction.

"The building is special," Miron-Conk says, "and the people who live there know it's special. The building looks nice to people and creates for the residents a good feeling. That's great."

"But," he adds, "the other side of it is that the building all along has been a problem."

The trick for the city will be to avoid similar problems on future projects while retaining the sort of innovations that make the Julian Street Inn special. It makes no sense for the people who design, develop, build or operate shelters to be at odds with one another. The sheer magnitude of the homelessness problem, and the political controversies that often accompany proposed solutions, are obstacles enough.

Philipp Harper is a Mercury News editorial writer.

## A currency affair

U.S. economy is flying high or low on world currency mar-



## Politicizing ethnicity but

It was true when Michael Dukakis and Art Agnos tapped the Greek-American communities to advance their political careers.

It was true when Georr