

BEST PUBLIC OR CULTURAL PROJECT

Mint Plaza

Martin Building overcame string of objections to project

BY ILANA FRIED

San Francisco Business Times

Mint Plaza was no overnight success story. Martin Building Co. struggled to secure neighborhood support, enduring over 20 public hearings and a complex approval process, and scrambled to find proper funding.

After two years of construction, and with only \$3.55 million spent, Mint Plaza opened in April 2007.

Six restaurants are planned to front the Plaza, dotted with outdoor seating. A local Farmer's Market will run once a week while, on the weekends, Martin Building plans live music and occasional art exhibitions. The Mezzanine night club stands across the street.

The success of Mint Plaza can be attributed to careful planning. Martin Building filed the project as part of a Mello-Roos district, a special designation which allows it to collect limited property taxes during construction and enables community fundraising.

The company then turned to the neighboring businesses to be part of the district. Property owners for five adjacent buildings joined the tax district, which helped finance the plaza.

And other neighbors came around to the project after fears of traffic congestion were calmed. "They are all in favor of the project now. I think everyone is an ally," said Patrick McNerney, Martin's owner and president.

The plaza also pleased the neighborhood with a cutting-edge storm retention system. After a downpour, storm water is collected and channeled into the ground. This water feeds the Plaza's plants while maintaining standards of low water consumption.

Why Mint Plaza? McNerney explained that, when Martin Building first bought the space in 1997, it was a prime development opportunity. The sunny area featured wide streets with low traffic levels and neighboring buildings offered relative wind protection. Martin Building instantly saw the potential for a plaza or park. After proposing the project to the Willie Brown administration in 2000, the area was donated to the city and construction went under way.

"Our office is adjacent to it," McNerney said of the Plaza. "We're happy that we can enjoy what we created and that everyone else can enjoy it, too."

